



A DARK  
MAFIA  
ROMANCE

BLEEDING

HEARTS

SHATTERED  
DIAMONDS

BOOK THREE

*INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLING AUTHOR*

MICHELLE B.

# SHATTERED DIAMONDS

BLEEDING HEARTS

BOOK THREE

MICHELLE B.



SHATTERED DIAMONDS  
Bleeding Hearts Series  
Book #3  
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# BLURB

## *Haven*

Demetri Carbone is a top caporegime under one of the most feared Don's in New York City.

He is powerful.

He is fearless.

He is vicious.

He is ruthless.

A savage.

A possessive beast of a man.

He is also my unrequited lover, the captor of my innocence, and my savior.

## *Demetri*

Groomed by the streets as a kid, I became a lethal man in a suit, slinging diamonds for a gentleman that became the closest thing I have to a father. So, when the boss asked me to court the daughter of an Irish mobster, I said yes. I wasn't prepared for the wholesome, fresh-faced, full figured knockout that Haven is. The bond between us is set in stone by the flow of a pen. I signed a contract of protection for a girl who fits me perfectly. A submissive that flawlessly compliments my structured need to dominate.

When the secrets and lies are suddenly revealed to her, and her love drunk heart shatters into tiny pieces, I am determined to protect her like the precious diamond she is.

# SHATTERED DIAMONDS

Bleeding Hearts Series

Book #3

Demetri & Haven

# A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Shattered Diamonds is a dark age gap arranged marriage mafia romance. Haven and Demetri's story contains verbal language and physical violence in a dark dubious world that one may find disturbing. This book also contains content and language some may find offensive. If you have any concerns with any of these elements please do not read.

CHAPTER  
**ONE**

**D** EMETRI

FAMIGLIA.

It's a simple word. The process of life regenerating the same genes, although slightly altered to become a unique individual. The matching blood that courses through each family member's vein is their own insignia. A connection, one they don't get to choose. It's a biologically genetic anchor that ties you to someone else for life whether you want to be or not.

Most times it's a blessing.

Other times, a curse.

The same blood that courses through my veins roars with the utmost amount of brutal disloyalty.

Standing in the shadows with an astute interest, I watch the partygoers for any sign of a threat. The women, dressed in their sexiest best, are carefree and laughing freely among their endless chatter. All of them clueless to the danger lurking.

No event at the Don's estate should be held at face value.

My orders were given to me one week ago.

All who were gifted the invitation to attend are privileged guests, and

therefore, here for a specific reason.

Every man standing on my boss's land understands that.

Every female companion—whether wife or goomah—sees it as a social gathering.

I scan the area once again, noticing Giovanni, our top caporegime—and my unrelated brother—as he dances with his wife Isabelle. She is hard to miss with her regal beauty and flaming red hair. Giovanni's piercing, wise eyes are scanning the scene around them as well. His protective arms rest around Isabelle's back with a splayed hand of armor covering her small frame.

I see my target across the yard. I watch their every move. Studying mannerisms is my specialty. Breaking skulls for information, that's just for entertainment.

I'm a ruthless man and I make no excuses for it.

"Demetri," my boss—the Godfather to us all—calls from across the makeshift dance floor with a slow, commanding curl of his hand.

I nod, acknowledging his order. Because that is exactly what it is: an order. I make my way across the space, weaving my way through the crowd of beautiful people celebrating the Don's birthday. The outdoor speakers beat to a slow tune. I make eye contact with Giovanni as I move towards Mr. Heart.

Antonio, Mr. Heart's firstborn, and the underboss of this family, stands once I reach his table.

"Sir," I respectfully greet him once I flank his side.

He stands, placing his hand on my shoulder. The Edison lights hanging above give off a warm sense of romantic security. A blanket of artificial safety. The perfect setting to distract unsuspected targets.

Powerful men, the heads of the five families, sit in thousand-dollar suits around the circular table Mr. Heart and Antonio just exited. Smoke lingers in the air from the cherry tips of thick illegal cigars most middle-class workers

wish they could indulge in. A luxury we are allotted due to our illegal dealings. The extravagances we get to obtain for the dangerous life we chose to lead aren't fulfilling but satisfying.

The bosses stand from their seats, greeting one of our newer business associates.

An ally we once thought to be an enemy.

Cillian McKittrick, a Northern Ireland native, worked his way up to be the head of the Irish since his father had fallen ill. Both organizations have executed rewarding business ventures together. The union has been lucrative. Initially, we thought he was an enemy feeding us bad intel, but ultimately his information saved lives, most importantly, Isabelle's. From there we quickly learned he was neither friend nor foe. He was a businessman looking to expand on this side of the pond. He came with a wealth of information, and a proposition was made in exchange for that report. He became an even richer man because of it.

Each boss exchanges the customary handshake, and a respectable greeting is spoken. When the social pleasantries are finished and the men retake their seats, Mr. Heart excuses himself and takes a few steps away with a silent order for Cillian and me to follow.

I'm quick to observe that Cillian's interest is anywhere but on our conversation. A disrespect to the boss while he discusses business. A moment later, I recognize why. He calls out, demanding the attention of the stunning strawberry blonde with exquisite spiral curls exiting the pool house. Her full-figured five-foot-seven frame is wrapped in a blush pink, body-hugging, knee-length dress as she swaggers towards us in four-inch heels. I study her as she heads in our direction. Her steps aren't measured, they're natural. She's used to wearing heels. Her strides are as smooth as her skin. Though, her smile is too bright. It's one of an unsure, virtuous girl as she approaches Cillian. She is young, but of age. Her gaze embraces her innocence, but her body screams obscenities.

A delectable sight if I ever saw one.

As a matter of fact, I've never witnessed a female more achingly stunning.

"Haven," Cillian addresses her with a warm, outstretched hand. "Please greet Mr. Heart and his capo, Demetri Carbone. Gentlemen, my sister, Haven."

"Hello." She raises her hand gracefully in greeting. "It's nice to meet you, Mr. Heart." Her demure voice flows freely with a heavy Irish accent as she embraces his open hand.

"You as well, Haven. Welcome to my home," Mr. Heart says, turning towards me. "One of my top caporegimes, Demetri Carbone." He places his hand on my shoulder and gives it a strong squeeze.

Her gaze shyly glides from him to me. Her stance shifts from one foot to the other. Her pupils expand, becoming a deadbolt locked with mine. A crimson flush creeps across her fair cheeks. She transforms into a bashful sculpture of innocent beauty.

"It's... a pleasure to meet you." Her breathy reception is slow and methodical before breaking our connection and lowering her head, unable to keep my intense eye contact.

"The pleasure is all mine, Haven." I reach out a tattooed hand and wait for her soft skin to receive my touch.

She becomes trapped in her timid innocence.

The muscle in my upper lip twitches into a salacious, satisfied grin. I glance over at Cillian in question. He clears his throat as he lays his hand on her back, giving her a voiceless nudge, ordering her to acknowledge me because her actions convey disrespect. She snaps from her bashful spell. Her full pink lips pull into a smile as she raises her chin. She places her hand in mine and with a timid shake she greets me with a brilliant beam.

My dick unexpectedly jerks.

Her touch is warm and inviting, pure and clean of any retribution blood.



Her eyes are such a pale green, that they are almost transparent. White little shards of reflective glass blend through the watered-down earth tone of her irises. They're reminiscent of some of the rarest and most expensive diamonds I have had the privilege to analyze in the palms of my brutal, bloody hands.

Though, standing here, being charmed by her gaze, is priceless.

Simply unique. Simply stunning. Absolutely. Fucking. Breakable.

“Yes, it is, Demetri.” She gives my hand a strong squeeze while holding that striking cocky beam that just had the nerve to flourish to the surface.

An astonished choked cough interrupts my expanding cock. The humor dancing behind her virtuous flirting comes to a halt at her brother's strangled breath. My upper lip twitches neither in humor nor anger but in curiosity. She doesn't even realize she just insulted me by addressing me by my first name. She's inexperienced, yet she is also seasoned by the way she holds herself. She has been educated but mindlessly dismissed it.

Was it just me that made her veer from her training or was this a rebellious act?

I take a small step towards her. Ignoring her brother's sudden tenseness as he stands to her left. “You may call me Mr. Carbone or sir. Nothing more, nothing less.” I reach for a wayward curl, playing with the softness until the moment becomes too heavy. “That is, until you have been given permission.”

Her stance on her four-inch heels weakens. I reach out and grasp her elbow with strength while I stare down my Roman nose into her now apologetic gaze.

“My apologies.” Her throat bobs with her regretful swallow. “Your”—she stumbles, glancing at her brother before turning back to me—“intensity has made me nervous and thoughtless, and maybe stupidly cocky.”

The burst of air I release at her honesty is refreshing. “Do you know what I do with cockiness, Ms. McKittrick?” My heated glare is focused on her beautiful features.

“No, sir.” She swallows with trepidation once again.

Fuck me. If only she were on her knees when she addressed me in that manner.

I lean in next to her ear and harshly whisper, “A warning. I thoroughly revel in breaking the owner who thought their arrogant behavior is acceptable in my presence. This is your one free pass, giovane cucciolo. There won’t be another.”

CHAPTER  
TWO

D EMETRI

MY ORDERS ARE to simply take him out. When you have been given the opportunity to rectify your mistake and you chose to disrespect it, the consequences you were promised are of your own doing.

He may have only been slinging dime bags in our territory, but the fact of the matter is, he works for a competitor. Once notified of his misdoing, he chose to listen to his boss's orders instead of mine. Said boss just cut his soldier's life short. In the grand scheme of things, he carried no value for the man he takes orders from. Just a young man looking to make a buck under weak leadership. The sad part is, to work the streets you must have street smarts, or you will wind up an example just like he did.

The kill was a justified one, acceptable in our world. Sad but true. Our threat has now been validated. His boss, if he is smart, will take his business elsewhere.

While washing my hands of the blood I just purged, my phone vibrates from inside my pocket.

Giovanni: We meeting for lunch?

Me: Just cleaning up now. I can be there in thirty. Pub or the deli?

Giovanni: Deli.

It's the way of life. It hasn't even been two minutes since washing my hands of the guy's DNA and I'm setting up a meet for lunch.

I bleach down the sink and make sure everything is sterilized the way Giovanni has taught us all. If there is one attribute about him, that I can attest to, he is a meticulous motherfucker about mistakes that could land us all in prison. I've done a bullet of time as a young man. I have no plans on making a repeat visit. However, this time around would be for an extended amount of time.

Prison is where I became acquainted with the Heart organization. I met a man there who changed the course of my life. He was much older; seasoned. Doing twenty to life for murder. I was young. He took me under his wing. I didn't understand why at first, and rightfully so. I didn't trust him. Uncle Benny is what we all call him. He's still doing his time while working for the organization from the inside. It was about a week into my stint when I was invited into Uncle Benny's sanctuary and informed of a vow made while we ate from a generous spread of imported Italian prosciutto, provolone, fresh bread, olives, and the richest red wine. All a part of in-house luxury when your name is attached to the Heart organization. All uncharacteristic of my lifestyle up until that point in time.

The story he disclosed was about my mother and my, now boss, Mr. Heart. Their paths crossed at some point in life. The full story was never revealed to me, but the outcome nonetheless is the same. The Don of the Heart organization helped my mother out of a situation she couldn't see her

way out of without certain death. She did some work for him, and in return, all she asked Mr. Heart for was for him to look out for her boy. Why? That I don't really know, but I believe she knew she wouldn't live a long prosperous life. Not many whores do. I may be the son of a paid woman, but I know exactly who my father is. How? Because she told me. She became his mistress. Her sole client at his insistence. Living through the day-to-day with the hopes and dreams of him setting her free from the life she was handed. A young girl on the streets with no direction. A futile dream she dreamt with the wishes of him making her an honorable woman. Some time into their relationship, she became pregnant. My father gave her a choice. He didn't want her or her exhausted body anymore. All my father wanted was his first-born son to carry on his legacy. She made the self-sacrificing choice. She ran knowing death was certain to knock, fleeing to this city I now reside in. We lived day-to-day in unknown fear while my mother resumed laying on her back to feed her child.

The information Uncle Benny gave me, and my initial meeting with the Don himself through the plexiglass divider separating us, was the defining moment in my life. I was a street kid with partial Italian roots who swapped his tattered clothes for an orange jumpsuit to now wearing a suit and working under the orders of a powerful man.

"Give me a Reuben, extra dressing, and make sure the rye is fresh." The familiar blue-eyed girl behind the counter smiles at me for a second too long. "Thanks, sweetheart." I throw that in just to make her day before turning away to go grab a drink. Giovanni shakes his head. "What?" I ask as I pull open the refrigerator door.

"That's cold."

"That was one night. Hell, it wasn't even a night. It was a few hours at most." I look back at her from over my shoulder. "Beautiful girl. Too timid."

"For the average guy? Or for you?"

"Even for you."

“Or maybe you’re too harsh.”

“Harsh is not a recognizable word in my vocabulary. I like what I like.” I shrug, uncapping my water.

“Not my business.” Giovanni steps up to pay for our sandwiches. “We set for tonight?” He glances over his shoulder at me.

“Done. The basement should be a full house by midnight. You going to see Izzy after this?” I use her nickname to piss him off.

“Isabelle,” he corrects. “And yes.” We slide into a booth at the back of the deli. “You take care of that thing?”

“Done.”

“Speaking of timid...” He segues right into another question like he didn’t just ask me for the second time in an hour if I properly cleaned up the area we refer to as purgatory. The Heart organization’s chamber of certain death. It’s in the basement of the warehouse where we conduct fatal, fact-finding blows of business. A well-known space. If you are brought down those steps, it is a guarantee you won’t be coming back up.

I glance up at him as I bite into my sandwich. “What about it?” I ask, not sure what he’s referring to. Even though Giovanni is only a handful of years older than me, I respect him and his point of view. That doesn’t mean I listen to all his advice. We view things in our personal life differently. We appreciate the same proclivities when it comes to our partners. However, mine are much stronger in the dominance sense. When it comes to business, that’s a whole different situation. We have each other’s back. We’ve both been dealt a shitty hand in life in our early days, but we have one thing in common: Mr. Heart.

“I saw your introduction to Cillian’s sister,” he continues, observing me.

“She’s young,” I grumble, taking another bite of my sandwich. *And beautiful.*

“Doe-eyed.” He nods, agreeing, before taking a sip of his water. “Doesn’t really look like she would be into the slap and tickle.”

“I don’t tickle, lover boy.” I give him a wink, pacifying the situation with a joke.

“That’s an understatement. You all but cut the girl off at her knees when she addressed you by your first name.”

“I don’t let anyone address me by my first name. At least those who don’t earn my permission.” I sit back, lean against the booth, and reflect on our introduction.

“This was different.”

“Very.” I grab for my water, glancing out the picture window then over to the girl behind the counter.

“In a good way or bad?”

“Undecided.”

CHAPTER  
**THREE**

**H**AVEN

I MET THE DEVIL.

One week ago, I met the devil. He was camouflaged in a three-piece, all black suit. But I saw it—the danger. I sensed it. It stood directly in front of me with wicked potency. It was embodied in his leer. His cutting tongue reprimanded me with a lashing at my mistake of calling him by his first name. It was as if he reached out and whipped me, blazing my skin with a singeing fire.

And I am so intrigued.

I cannot for the life of me stop thinking about him and his probing glare.

“You ready?” The vehicle comes to a stop.

“Ciarán?” I glance around. “Why are you taking me here? What is this place?”

“You need to experience life, cuz. Your brother has kept you hidden for too long. You need to branch out, open your eyes to new things before your life really begins.”

“This kind of life? This seems dangerous with all these people. Cillian



has always told me places like this are sins within the walls. No place for a good girl like me.”

“That’s because he was protecting you. You’re twenty-one now, cuz. It’s my job to show you the life you should have experienced back at home.”

“I don’t know about this, Ciarán. Cousin or not, Cillian will murder you if he finds out.” I wrap my arm around his when he holds it out.

“Aye,” he agrees. “You let me worry about him. Come on, innocent girl. It will be fine. I promise.” He pats my arm as he leads me into a building with thunderous music.

The atmosphere is raging with energy. Fire shoots, colorful smoke plumes, billowing through the space as it floats over moving bodies. It’s mysterious, sexy, and so very tempting to my unnerved soul.

From the corner of my eye, I see a flicker of flames. I twist to my right and watch the neon blue lit bar morphing into a deep blood red. The subtle hum of excited patrons turns to overwhelming chants of praise. My stomach twists in knots when yellow sparks of a freshly ignited flame roars to life. A trail of fire races in a line over the length of the bar top, turning blue as it blazes to its highest peak.

I’m in awe.

Stuck in my spot.

And the music blaring with a thunderous heartbeat has my insides thumping with anxiety fed adrenaline.

The bartender throws a bottle in the air, then catches it with a flagrant gust while the other bottle is spinning on the skin of the opposite palm. The flames on the bar extinguish. A woman dramatically throws her head back and lays her upper body over the edge of the bar top. The bartender halts the movement of the two bottles and begins pouring the liquid into the woman’s open mouth.

The crowd cheers, chanting for more.

Fisted hands bang against the bar, encouraging her on.

The bartender drops something small into her mouth then aggressively throws his hand over her parted lips and with vigorous strength, he starts shaking her head as if to mix up the liquid inside the hollow of her cheeks.

I am awe struck, paralyzed in the moment.

My virgin eyes are wide, taking it all in.

The bartender releases the woman's face. She throws her hands in the air and jumps up onto the bar. Her dress is so short I can see the red patch covering her most intimate parts. I'm embarrassed for her but thrilled at all the excitement. She celebrates along with every other patron witnessing this brutal show of taking a shot.

The song still beats with intensity.

"Breathe, Haven."

"It's the song. I think. Maybe it's from watching the show. I don't know." My free hand flies to my chest. "But my heart is pounding," I yell over the music.

"The song is called *Horizon*. It's by ARTBAT."

"I've never heard it before." I push up against him, getting closer as he moves us through the people, my voice starting to strain from yelling. "Where are we going?"

"To get you a drink to loosen you up."

"I'm not doing that!" I stop in my tracks, watching my cousin through the widest eyes. "She's a feekin eejit." My Irish roots spurt with my astonishment.

"No, cuz. I think that is a little much for your innocence."

"I'm not that innocent." I pout.

"You are. It's a good thing. No man wants a woman who has had many lovers."

"Says who?"

"Me. You're perfect. The man claiming you will be a very lucky man. Now come." He tugs my arm. "Let's have some fun."

The music continues to blare. My personal space is at a bare minimum. Ciarán hands me another drink. The first one went down slowly, but this one goes down much smoother. I set my now half empty drink down on the table we are currently occupying. I can feel my cousin watching me as I take it all in. I feel more relaxed, less nervous. The teenage girl I never got to be starts to loosen her hips and sway to the music. The energy racing through my body is addicting. I feel good. Great, actually.

I glance over at my cousin with a big smile. “I think I love this place.”

“I knew you would. Finish your drink and I’ll take you to the dance floor.”

Nervous energy swirls in my stomach. My thigh muscles are eager to stretch and move. I have been trained in classical ballet since I was three, but behind closed doors, my feet move to music a little more upbeat. Not *this* upbeat though. The energy this song makes me feel, I want to open my constrained gait and move with unrestrained free will, disregarding every formal instruction I have ever been trained in.

I take a sip of my drink and glance at the deck above us. People crowd against the railing, waving their drink laced hands in the air. The opulence and mystery of this club are sexy. I scan all the way around until I come to a wall of windows. You can’t see inside, and I can’t help but wonder what or who is behind the glass, watching.

“You ready?” Ciarán holds his hand out.

“As I’ll ever be.” I place my hand in his with a nervous smile.

“You got this. If people bump into you, it’s okay. I got you. You’re not in danger here.”

“Aye,” I answer. Still drawn to the windows above, I point and ask, “What do you think is behind there?”

“A very wealthy, powerful man. With dangerous employees.” He pulls me through a throng of people.

His comment baffles me. How would he know that or is he just guessing?

I have no time to ask because he is pulling me out onto the dance floor. The music changes to a heavy beat. The bass is hard. The bodies around me start jumping up and down. Flames start shooting out from cannons high above our heads. My classical roots shift to free-flowing movements. My arms swing. My feet move. My hips sway with ease. My head rolls. The alcohol in my belly swishes. I am having the time of my life.

Slight pressure on my hips become a forceful grip. I twist in my spot to reprimand my assailant, but I catch a glimpse of Ciarán before fully turning. He has a smile on his face, but his guard is up. With a nod telling me it's okay, I dance with the strange man. My nerves take over my movements. I'm stiff. Not the girl who moves so fluently that she has been compared to the embodiment of flowing water.

I glance back at Ciarán once again. He nods, mouthing, "I've got you."

I let go. My body takes over my unconfident mind. A detonation of my soul blasting open, releasing the only thing I know. The only thing that has saved my sanity from the cage I have been kept.

Dancing.

The man grabs hold of me once again. His hips move with mine, and soon enough, my youthful, groomed foundation takes over. He can dance but I'll show him how to really dance. The sweat pours off me. I feel the trickles of exertion flow between my breasts and down my back. I run my hand through my sweaty curls and lift my hair off my neck. I turn my back to my dance partner to check on Ciarán. He's dancing with an attractive female, but his attention is on me. He gives me a quick wink. My reassurance. I'm still okay. If my brother, Cillian, or my bodyguard, Finn, knew Ciarán brought me here tonight, he would pay dearly for his actions. I don't know how he managed to get us out of the mansion without being detected by the guards, but I will take this night to my grave. Ciarán, although my cousin, is also my best friend, my alter ego I wish to live through. He knows everything about me as I do him. Well, almost everything. He lives the life I wish I had a

chance to experience. But I can't. Not with who my brother and father are. I never want Ciarán to be the victim of Cillian's deadly wrath because of me. It would break my heart.

I turn from my dance partner and motion to my cousin that I have to use the restroom. I thank the tall blond man and excuse myself. Ciarán is right on my heels, the attractive woman left behind without a second thought. We're laughing and enjoying our time as we make our way to the back corner of the club. A huge sign hangs above on the far wall. *Temptations*, the club's name glows in neon lights. Ciarán enters the men's restroom with instructions that he will meet me right where we are parting when I'm finished. As well as a warning not to take too long or he will come looking for me in the women's bathroom.

I walk down the long, dark hallway. My thoughts are a buzz. I'm high on life. My feet feel like they're floating with each step I take. Maybe it's the alcohol or maybe it's just the freedom Ciarán has given me tonight.

I feel like I'm on top of the world.

That is, until I walk directly into *him*.

The man who made my insides turn to jelly stands before me.

The devil himself, who catches me with one powerful hand before I fall.

He steals my breath with one swoop of his forceful arm.

"Watch yourself, giovane cucciolo."

I'm breathless in his hold, held prisoner in his gaze, and locked in solitary with his firm clutch. I linger in a hazy daze, utterly captured by him. A yearning to reach up and touch his stubbled face has me lifting my hand. An unfamiliar ache to run my fingers through his coarse dark hair, enhancing his masculine square jaw burns at the tips. My observation drops lower, caught by intimidating beauty. I itch to trace the black and grey shaded outlined ink decorating the arch of his powerful neck. The exclusive hints of red bled into his skin at the base just above the hollow of his throat is what catches my attention.

A strong sense of awareness advises me not to touch him without permission. As if I did, I would be reprimanded in some vital way. My shaking hand hangs midair. His black left brow lifts, almost as if daring me to be so confident. Would I be so bold? Could I? To touch a man I don't know, let alone one that rattles my insides with nerves. I'm frightened to my core, but also intrigued, locked in the green glittering flecks of his one eye while the other dominates with a saturated royal blue so deep, it absorbs the sparse light the hallway offers and denies a reflection in return.

I'm drawn to them, pulled in, awe struck, and flirting in an unknown world. I'm being absorbed by a man who has many years on me. Instead of my hand dropping to my side, I reach forward and brush the tips of my trembling fingers over his ticking jaw. My eyes lift, nervously becoming locked on his, seeking permission as I already commit to the urge. I revel in the feel of his obsidian beard. It's thick and lush and... manly. The air between us becomes heavy. I feel as if I am suffocating by his sheer domineering presence. My fingers drop to the muted colors on his neck, trickling my way down to the red. A lotus flower spans the depth of his muscles. When I drop my gaze to the soft skin that has been manipulated by a needle, my eyes become blurred, and my mouth becomes slack, seeking air.

In my smoky tone—and what I think is a lustful gaze—I breathe, “You are beautiful.”

He snatches my hand away with force, glaring at me, holding my hand hostage.

“Did you have my permission to touch me?” His gruff voice demands an answer.

I'm stunned at his harsh question but worship the deep baritone that it was delivered in. I knew I was right in my assumption, but I am enthralled by the reserved power of this man who's at least a decade my senior.

“No, sir,” I automatically reply with an apologetic tone to my unsteady, husky voice. “My apologies. I don't know what came over me.”

His intensity is jarring as it rests between us. He leans in and breathes, “One day you will be given permission. Today is not that day. You have not earned it, giovane cucciolo.”

My feet plummet to the ground with his release of my waist. Although harsh in nature, he still had control over the way my body landed. And I, mesmerized by his aura, never realized my heels dangled carelessly in the air.

Before I know it, he is gone, vanishing in a swam of anger. It’s as if I imagined the whole interaction between us. But I know I didn’t. I lift my hand and run the tips of my fingers over my mouth. Because I can still feel the heat of his breath on the soft skin of my lips.

CHAPTER  
**FOUR**

**H**AVEN

“PAISLEY, I swear, the place was amazing. The lights, the people, the energy. It was so cool.” My voice rises with each description.

“What about the boys?” Her eyes grow big as she throws herself back against her pillow and twirls her finger around her chestnut hair.

“No boys. Stop moving the phone around so much.”

Her mouth flaps open like a half-dead fish. “Do not tell me there were no boys at this club. In America, you must be of age, which I believe is twenty-one. Especially if they serve alcohol. It sounds like the club Ciarán took you to is an exclusive one, which means there were no boys there but men. Did you dance with any? Oh my God, did you kiss one? How did you get in by the way?” She twists, setting her phone down on the stationary stand so I don’t get motion sickness. These FaceTime calls with my female bestie back home can get animated. She has been given the gift of being high on life. Whereas I am the opposite and even-toned. We complement each other well. I bring her down and she brings me up. She gets crazy and I rein her in. She finds trouble and I steer us both clear of it.



“Yes, they were men. Not boys. And no, I did not kiss anyone. I am not going to just kiss some random guy.”

*Although, I did want to.*

“You’re going to get your first kiss in America. I just know it. The boys around here are just gross.”

“Paisley, you cannot say that. Just because your first kiss was sloppy and unbecoming, it doesn’t mean they will all be like that.” She gets super quiet. My best friend radar tells me something is wrong. “What are you not telling me?”

“Nothing.”

“Paisley!” I shake my phone with effort, wishing it was her. She is hiding something from me. “Tell me!”

“I did it.” She turns on her side and grabs her phone, so she is closer to the screen like she is telling me a secret. Which, I guess she is.

“Did what?” I nonchalantly ask, already knowing but not fully grasping her confession or wanting to believe it. Then it hits me full force. “You what?!” I shoot up in bed, my hair flying in my face. After I clear it away, I see she is unhappy. “With who? When? Where?” I slide down into my covers and pull my white comforter to my chin. “Why?” My shocked excitement now diminishing as I wait for her answer. “Why?” I quietly ask again.

A long time ago, she and I made a pact that our first time would be with someone we loved. It didn’t matter what age it would happen, but we had to be in love. Foolish as it may seem, we were kids when we made the promise. The decision was made after we saw both our brothers with different girls all the time. They would come and go, often. When I left Ireland to come to America with Cillian and his army of men, she wasn’t dating anyone. We’ve only been here a short time. She wasn’t in love then and love doesn’t happen that fast. I wait in silence for her to explain.

“We made a silly agreement a long time ago.” She lets out a heavy breath, shifting to get comfortable.

“It wasn’t that long,” I correct her. “We were sixteen and it was right after Cillian’s so-called girlfriend caught him plowing into another girl. Do you remember how hurt she was? If he loved her, he would not have cheated on her.”

“I do. This wasn’t... I went into this with my eyes wide open.”

“You just gave it away?”

“I gave what I owned and wanted to get rid of.”

“Your virginity.”

“It’s done. I am no longer considered pure.”

“You’re not happy. I can tell. Who?”

“I’m... fine. It wasn’t what I thought it would be.”

“Because you didn’t love him.” It doesn’t go unnoticed that she didn’t say who it was.

“That’s all a silly notion, Haven. Love wouldn’t have made it better.”

“I disagree.”

We’re quiet for a few moments before she sighs. “I miss you. When are you coming back?”

“I don’t know. Cillian has business here.”

“How is he? Any new women gracing his doorstep?”

“Not that I have seen. But then again, I am kept in the dark here just as much as I was at home. That’s why I am so shocked he didn’t find out about last night. I thought with him bringing me here he was going to let me live a little, but his thumb is still pressed.” I watch her as she gazes at the screen, her thoughts somewhere off in the distance. “Patches?” I grab her attention with the nickname I gave her when we were kids.

“Yeah?” Her focus now back on me.

“Did it hurt?”

“Not at all.” Her displeasure and disappointment clear.

“No wonder why you didn’t enjoy it. He had a small pickle.”

She strangles her laugh. “And it lasted all of two minutes.”

“Eff off. Seriously? All is not lost. I still consider you a virgin then.” I laugh. “You know I’m flagging you, right?”

She laughs but it’s a sad one. “I know you’re only teasing me. I still love you.”

“Love you too, babe.”

“Chat tomorrow?” She yawns, burrowing down into her pillow.

“Aye.”



I SHUT off my blow dryer and finger fluff my unruly curls. After a quick glance at my phone, and a swipe of my lip gloss across my lips, I make my way downstairs for breakfast. Cillian is already at the dining table eating, newspaper in hand, two cell phones next to his plate. One burner. One personal. I may be the sister of an overprotective and restrictive brother, but I do know what Cillian does to make money. He followed in my da’s footsteps. I guess he had no choice. My da is a stubborn man. All I know is that Cillian runs our family now and my da and him butt heads most of the time. I haven’t seen him in a day. He looks stressed and his face shows his lack of sleep.

“Mornin’,” he greets before taking a sip of his coffee.

“You’re up early.” I pull the chair out to his left and grab the freshly squeezed orange juice.

“Meeting.”

“How long are we going to stay here?” I blurt.

“As long as it takes.”

I stare at him. His clipped tone is unusual. It bothers me. “What’s wrong with you? Did something happen to Da?” His whole demeanor changes when he sees my face. “Did he get sicker?”

“No. Sorry. He’s fine. Ma would call if there were any changes.”

“Cillian? Why did we come here? Why did you bring me here with you?”

“You know why I came here. And you need to broaden your horizons.”

“Ireland has some of the most beautiful horizons. This place is all buildings and people and they are always in a hurry.”

“Aye. Feckin right about that.” He grabs his coffee and then takes a bite of his eggs before vaguely explaining. “I have my reasons, Haven. You may not understand, but everything I do is for a reason.”

“I would like to know them.”

“Soon. What did you and Ciarán get into last night?” He effectively ends my line of questioning.

“She cringed watching a UFC fight. Too much blood for her.” Ciarán walks into the room. “Mornin’, cousins.”

“Finn said two nights ago, he couldn’t find you. Did you leave the estate?”

Ciarán quickly covers with a joke when I stumble. “You know your sister. She is a wild one. I took her to a rave. She got trashed. I carried her in at the crack of dawn.” He grabs an orange from the picture-perfect bowl of fruit in the center of the table as he conspiratorially smiles and winks at me.

“You’re late. We leave in fifteen minutes.” Cillian pushes his chair back and stands. “Hurry up and eat. The car will be waiting out front.”

“Shit,” I whisper with anxiety when my brother walks away. “He knows.

He totally knows!” I whisper-yell.

“He doesn’t know anything, cuz.”

“Then why did he ask what I did last night? And the night before too? Where is Finn now? Why is he so clipped with his answers this morning? I’m telling you, he knows.”

“A deal went sideways last night. Finn is working out some issues. We’re on our way to meet with the suppliers. Relax, I’ve got you.”

“You sure?”

“More than.” He pops a slice of orange in his mouth. “Want to get in trouble tonight?”

“No!” I look in the direction my brother just walked out of.

“You do. You know you do. Be ready by ten. See you later, cuz.”

He walks out, whistling. Not a care in his lighthearted steps. Leaving me to wonder what my cousin is getting me into.

Can’t say he didn’t show me a good time the other night, though.

CHAPTER  
**FIVE**

**H**AVEN

MY LUNGS CONSTRICT from the amount of smoke lingering through the atmosphere. Swirls of breath-gripping plumbs rob me of my oxygen. Less than a step behind my cousin, I follow him through a long, narrow, damp, and dark concrete tunnel. It's ominous and thrilling in its path of the unknown. My two fingers are hooked in the loop of Ciarán's designer dark wash jeans. Men and women crowd the space, making us weave our way through.

"Ciarán? What is this place?" I ask from my quick steps behind him.

"It's blood, sweat, and vengeful tears, cuz. Also, the place where I am going to win some cash flow."

"What? You're making no sense." That is until we reach the end of the hallway, and the opening mouth to the main room broadens my horizons. I gasp and step even closer to my cousin. "Why are we here?" I instantly become his second skin.

"You liked the UFC fight that we watched the other night, right?"

"I mean..." I waver. "Not sure all that blood was something I enjoyed,

but...”

“You did,” he yells as the base of the song drums even louder. “I saw it in your eyes.”

I look up toward the ceiling, searching for a speaker like it will lessen the deafening beat if I find it.

“*Choices (Yup)* by E-40. Good song, right?”

“I’m not getting it.” I cup my hands around my mouth to yell over the music. “He says *yup* a lot.”

“It’s all about choices, Haven. We all have to make them.”

“I don’t,” I argue, but he either doesn’t acknowledge, doesn’t hear me, or just doesn’t care. He knows all the decisions are made for me and are fed to me like they are my choices, but in hindsight and growth of maturity, I have come to recognize they’re not. Like when it was time for me to go to secondary school. I was tutored at home from a very young age. I started at four years old, if I remember correctly. I couldn’t wait and wanted to go to primary school, but that wasn’t until I became older and realized I was being held back from being educated alongside my peers. Then it came time for me to go to secondary school. I misleadingly had my hopes up that when it came time, I would be allowed to attend the local facility. That wasn’t the outcome. I was fed the glitz and glamour of a private school. A school I later found out my brother generously donated large funds to. That didn’t bother me so much until the day I realized I had guards watching my every move. It’s when I put two and two together that the funds Cillian donated were a bribe, green blinders to my security detail being stationed throughout campus. I wondered where Finn was at times. He seemed to show his presence at the most opportune moments. It wasn’t until I saw him slip into the room across from mine that really made me angry. I had no space. No time to grow on my own. It was then that I moved out of the dorm and demanded an off-campus apartment.

I had only just finished my courses when I was told I was going on a

vacation to America as a congratulations for achieving the highest ranks in grades trip. I knew as soon as it was revealed over dinner that it was a lie. It's why I questioned Cillian this morning at breakfast.

Ciarán continues to pull me through the crowded space. It's packed with bodies, men, and scantily dressed women at every step. Money is exchanged and wagers are heard from all directions.

My surveying gaze goes to the roped off area. A ring with high walls as if it is a cage. Not as sophisticated as the fighting ring I watched on TV, but this place doesn't call for that amount of attention. This place... it drips in ruthless, menacing entertainment. The undertone screams destruction and death.

In my next breath, I realize something. How did my cousin know about this place?

"Ciarán?" I tug at his shirt, my only form of getting his attention because the music has now changed to a song I know. My brother's guards played the song all the time while they sat by the bonfire behind their quarters. *Soldier* by Eminem plays throughout the concrete building as Ciarán weaves us through the space, getting us closer to the shabby ring. When we reach the front row of standing-room-only gamblers, Ciarán pulls me in front of him. I turn back and finally ask my question. "How did you know about this place?"

"I've been here before."

"When?" I question, shocked.

"A few times," he pacifies, vaguely answering my question. "The two guys in front of us are lightweights. Chumps that are just brought in before a main fight. You want to bet on the next one?" He leans in, shouting next to my ear.

So out of my element, I hesitate to answer. I glance around the room. Ciarán's quiet while waiting for my answer. My fingers tremble alongside my thighs. "How many fights are there tonight?"

"A few. You okay?"



“Aye.” I jerk my chin with a short nod. “Just rattled.”

“Don’t be nervous. I’ve got you. I’ve always got you, cuz.” He rubs my shoulders to reassure me.

We stand in silence, watching blow for blow being connected against the two opponents facing off. Shouts, screams of encouragement, and disheartened curses fill the air. There’s a feeling of savageness, a merciless heaviness that spreads throughout the atmosphere as the night progresses.

Midway through the night, I get the ill sense that I’m being watched. Without alerting Ciarán, I survey the area around us. When I don’t see anything unusual, I go about my business, enjoying the fights. I have come to realize I love the bloodthirsty sport, but the nagging feeling that caused my hair to stand at attention won’t leave me. It feels like electricity is buzzing close to my body.

“Who runs this place?” I turn to my cousin and ask as he shouts out obscenities to the fighter who just got knocked out.

“An associate.”

“Are we safe here?”

His full attention immediately comes to me. “Trust me, you are well protected here. Besides, you are always safe with me.”

I leave it at that because I know my cousin will never let anything happen to me. Standing here, though, in this rough, bloodthirsty crowd, I don’t think I am one hundred percent safe.

I blow it off and yell, “I want to bet,” over the cheering of the crowd, pushing away the uneasiness I feel. “I want to make a bet,” I repeat. As I stand there and wait for Ciarán, there is a sudden sensitivity, a feeling that comes over me, a heightened sense emerging that I don’t recognize. My insides curl with danger, but it’s almost as if it’s a wanted threat. “I have to pee too.”

“Tell me who you want, and I’ll place the bet after I walk you to a bathroom.”

“Are there bathrooms down here?” I glance around the dark area. “I don’t think there is.” I survey the massive space. “I’ll hold it.” I speak up too soon. I see a handful of tunnels on the other side through the throng of people. “Is that pot? I smell pot. I’m going to get a contact high.” I laugh.

“Lucky you,” he chirps, smiling. “There’s a first time for everything, cuz.”

“I’ll have you know; I took a hit off a joint while I was attending secondary.”

“And that’s also when the joint giver lost a finger.”

I gasp, twisting in my spot, shocked, knowing I heard him correctly but wishing I didn’t. I think back and reflect on that time. “Oh my God! Ciarán, you didn’t!”

He shakes his head slowly but proudly confirming who did. “Finn.”

“Are you feckin serious?” I turn in his arms. “Jacob said he lost his finger in an unfortunate accident.”

“It was an unfortunate accident for him now, wasn’t it?”

“I can’t... I’m... Ciarán, seriously? Tell me what the difference is between then and me standing here now?”

“You’re with me. Now, tell me who you want for your bet, and let’s see if we can find a bathroom.”

He pushes his way through the mass of people. I follow close behind.

“Luca! Luca! I’ll take a grand on Rock! I’ll take Ghost for five!” Shouts are yelled at the guy taking bets.

The guy standing next to who I assume is Luca is younger. He’s holding a pen and paper marking all the bets. Money soars through the air, thrown in their direction as if it has no value. It’s sickening, but I also get the thrill and excitement of underground fighting because here I am, stepping up to these two men to make a bet.

“How much and who?” Luca demands, not looking up, his attention on the wad of cash in his hand.

I shrug, unsure, looking up into his deep, hard eyes when he finally glances up. Shrugging once again I turn back and silently ask my cousin for help with the decision. “I only have fifty bucks,” I tell him.

“Who do you want?” He turns to Luca and hands him a wad of cash.

“Ghost,” I tell him. “Ghost will knock Rock out in the first round.”

Two sets of eyes shoot in my direction. Unease ripples down my spine. I glance at my cousin nervously, waiting for an answer as to why the air surrounding us just became so intense. I look to the younger guy who is now watching Luca take my cousin’s money with a disapproving glare. His eyes slide over, connecting with mine. Then he looks back at Ciarán. The moment becomes tense, uncomfortable. I become anxious. Luca lifts his gaze over Ciarán’s shoulder. With a sharp jerk of his chin, he hands the cash over to the young guy as if he had to wait and get permission to take the bet. “If she wins, she has to collect the cash herself. Alone.”

My heart sinks. Boulders take action, freefalling to my lower belly. I want to reach out and grab my cousin’s money and run, but the young guy, whom I now know as Joseph, already has it stuffed away.

“Ciarán.” I grab hold of his forearm.

“It’s fine.” With his hand on my elbow, he starts to lead me away, but then he stops and turns back when he hears the guy Luca call him.

“Ciarán,” he thunders, his deep voice demanding. “He’s not happy about this.”

I’m stunned in my spot, standing in unfamiliar territory. The tension is high. Words are silently spoken between the two.

“I can take my bet back.” I step out of my cousin’s clutch and towards Luca. “If I didn’t bet properly, I can take it back.” I glance over my shoulder at my cousin and then give my attention back to Luca and wait for his decision.

“Your bet will be dealt with.”

“What does that mean?” I pierce him with a fierce glare before glancing

back at Ciarán because I can't hold my counterfeit bravado much longer.

“Enjoy the fight.” Luca nods, turning away and taking another bet from someone else, effectively dismissing us.

“Thank you,” I utter, stepping away, not knowing what else to say. I watch him from the corner of my eye, protecting myself.

“Ciarán,” Luca's deep voice calls for his attention. “Take her to the third tunnel. There is a bathroom down on the left. It's private.”

I stop in my tracks. Shocked that he overheard me say I had to use the restroom.

With his hand on my lower back, Ciarán confidently maneuvers me through the crowd. Two men stand guard at the rope blocking the tunnel we were told to go down. The behemoth of a man on the left has his hand against his earpiece, intently listening. His examining regard connects with mine. He opens the rope, nods at me, and holds his hand up for Ciarán to stop. I stop short and retake the steps back to my cousin.

“Go on. It's okay. I'll wait right here for you.”

“No, that's okay,” I nervously tell him. “I can wait.”

“Haven, go use the restroom. You will be fine. I'll be right here when you come back.”

I want to question him but there is a tone to his voice that urges me to go on. With each step down the dimly lit tunnel, the roaring of cheers becomes less and less earsplitting but still loud. When I approach a corner and realize I must turn to find the bathroom, my nervousness makes me glance back and check to make sure Ciarán is still waiting. He's in a full-blown conversation with a man I have never seen before.

I see the opening to what I believe is the bathroom. There is no sign posted, just a curved opening in the rough cement wall. Light flickers inside a glass case next to it. It almost looks as if it is a real fire burning. I trudge along, making my way to the entrance, relieved to see a door with a toilet behind it. It's nothing extravagant, a toilet and sink, but to my relief, it is

clean. I do my business and wash my hands as quickly as I can. With the last swipe of my hands under the water, the air suddenly changes, becoming thicker. I finish rinsing and reach to turn off the water. A creepy feeling that someone is behind me makes my gaze shoot up to look in the nonexistent mirror. I take a deep breath, knowing my nerves are playing a part in my uneasiness. It's damp and the lights are dim which makes it scary. My stomach flutters. Gooseflesh robs my skin of its smoothness. Short, shallow breaths take up residence in my diaphragm. I turn from the pedestaled sink to see if someone else has entered the drab space. I shake my head, talking myself off the ledge, then flick my hands free of the remaining water since there are no hand towels to dry them. My internal senses tell me I need to get back to my cousin. I know when I am at his side, I am safe. With quick steps, I rush out the door. Nervous energy makes my feet move faster than they should in the heels I'm wearing. My rational thoughts become overshadowed by a pulsating fear.

Two steps are all I make it outside the opening to the bathroom.

Two faltered steps out the door and I come face to face with the reason why the air has become so thick.

The man I have laid in bed under the secretive blanket of the dark night and thought about is in front of me.

The sight of his composed, confident, commanding stature absorbs my breath, it's sucked straight out of my lungs.

I gasp from the unexpected shock at seeing someone, let alone *him*. My rational thoughts are obliterated. I stare, with what I am sure are doe eyes at the shock of him standing before me. His broad, lean length rests against the rough concrete wall. His thick arms are crossed over his black suited barrel of a chest and his legs are crossed at the ankles.

*Devastatingly handsome*, is all I can think.

His head is tilted slightly to the side and there is a look on his face I can't quite decipher. He is a silhouette of self-control. An image of relaxed power.

His eyes hold me prisoner, a kaleidoscope of blues swirling with green flecks that threaten with the promise of devious intentions. It's unnerving. And enticing. The way he observes me is disturbing, piercing, an intrusion, yet a part of me pulsates for the heaviness he creates and captures my attention with.

He drops his arms and lifts his body from the wall with athletic strength. With the stealth grace of a predator, he takes the measured steps needed to reach my stationary figure.

My chest feels like it's being incinerated by the held breath I have yet to release.

He lifts his hand and with the tip of his finger, he wraps it around one of the ringlets hanging by my cheek. His attention is solely on the strand of hair he holds captive, almost mesmerized by the streaking array of strawberry blonde, but I am not so naive that I don't know he is aware of every sound that filters down this small tunnel from the commotion of the crowd shouting. His undecipherable gaze comes to mine and locks. "We meet again, giovane cucciolo."

His voice is so deep, the bass so low. It's filled with a darkness, a syrupy layer of threatening promise. I can only imagine it to be like the deepest, unexplorable part of the ocean. The mysterious part. The portion so deep, that it consumes those who dare explore it and never return.

This man is intense. Too intense.

"Breathe, giovane cucciolo." He tugs on the curl he still holds prisoner. "Breathe," he coaxes in a low masculine whisper.

My gaze slowly drops, almost as if I'm stuck in a hazy daze, to watch the movement of his lips as he speaks. They're full, lush, suckable. My body relaxes. I'm stuck in an alternate space where I want to step deeper into him but also flee in fear of my impending death.

"Demetri..." I whisper his name with heated heaviness.

The muscle above his brow flexes, lifting the onyx hair, a silent

reprimand.

“Sir,” I breathe, fixed to my spot in some kind of enamored spell.

The corner of his lip twitches with satisfaction. “Good girl.” His eyes glow with heated approval.

I sink into his strong form at the sound of his voice praising me. He steps into me and leans down, his nose a hair’s breadth away from the tip of mine. His breath beats against my lips, mixing with my own. I’m lost in this moment with a dangerous man. The most intimate I have ever been with any man.

My skin tingles.

I suck in a sharp deep breath, wanting to swallow more of him, but what the newfound oxygen does is give me a burst of reality to my numb brain. Clarity and self-preservation take hold. I force a step back. His hand falls slowly from my manipulated curl. He eyes me with curiosity.

“What does that mean?” I mutter with a heady breath. He twists his head, watching me. “What you keep calling me. It isn’t English. What does it mean?”

He smirks a grin that makes me want to slap him. It’s a salacious knowing reflex of cockiness. “Giovane cucciolo?” he repeats, asking as if he didn’t know.

“Yes, that.” A thrill runs through my body at the way his tongue rolls with the words.

“One day.” He steps into me.

“One day?” I ask in confusion. “That doesn’t make any sense.”

His chest lifts and falls just as quickly, a contained huff of a chuckle. I amuse him. I watch him with speculation, feeling uncomfortable in my own skin. The thought of him mocking me because I don’t know, irritates the hell out of me. Is he making fun of my intelligence? He may be much older, I’m guessing in his mid-thirties, but that is here nor there, age does not matter when he’s speaking a foreign language. I do not speak the language he has

chosen to use; therefore, it is unbecoming for him to laugh.

“What language is it?” I snap. For all I know he could be calling me a dirty bitch. “Italian?” I question, guessing, with a tone, I can see he does not appreciate.

He straightens to his full height. “You should not be here.”

I’m taken aback. Where did that come from? It was said in a reprimanding tone. Why shouldn’t I be here? Why won’t he tell me what he keeps calling me? “I can go wherever I want.”

“Spoken like a disgruntled teenager.” He takes a step back from me as if I just disgusted him.

“I am not a teenager. I am a woman, Mr. Carbone.” I take a step back, getting farther away from him. “You will treat me as one. And with respect,” I add to my stance. “Not like it matters since I probably will never see you again.”

Uncharacteristically, he snorts an amused laugh like he knows something I don’t. “Or what?” He smirks again with a snicker of amusement as he crosses his arms.

“Taunting me? So very manly coming from a guy who could simply break me in half. Do you feel good about yourself, Demetri?” I ask, using his first name out of childish disrespect.

His pupils flare. “I could absolutely, and very easily, break you.”

The smirk he’s sporting is infuriating. I step back, turning away. I’ve had enough. My feet slam against the hard surface in heated anger as I rush to escape. “Egotistical asshole,” I mutter, only getting four steps in before a firm, rough hand grabs my upper arm. I’m swung around carelessly and plastered against a wall of expanding muscle. I stumble back from the force of the contact then hauled back against his body once again. His large hand grips my elbow as his other hand seizes my waist. I’m thrust up against his firm body. Heat rolls off him. My gaze is transfixed directly into a black abyss of luxurious material covering his tan skin. Electric currents rush up



my spine and the nerves that were rattling before have now decided to become thunderbolts tormenting my body. The scent of cedar hits my senses and swarms its way through my loins. It's warm and inviting and hazardous, but there is a hint of something else. Alcohol. It's not strong. It's clean and almost nonexistent, but the sting of it is there with a hint of vanilla as I absorb it and soak it in.

I take in his magnetizing scent. The cedar quickly becomes a warm addiction. I close my eyes. With one of my six senses shut down and another on overload from his unique aroma, another one kicks in. Touch.

Ever so slowly, my heavy lids rise to meet his leering gaze. His penetrating gaze is knifelike, sharp, and questioning. My cheeks burn with a flush. He's bristling with energy. My heart rate speeds up at the thought. "Are you erect?" I try to pull back to no avail because he has walked me back and pressed me against the concrete wall.

He stands there, his face stone. "Are you unaware of what an erection feels like?"

"I—I..."

"Tell me, giovane cucciolo. Have you ever felt an erection before? Placed your hand on one, curled your fingers around its girth, and slid your palm up and down the velvet skin, squeezing until your partner sucks in a breath before he shoots his cum over your pretty lips?"

I gasp. Not sure whether it's because I should be appalled at the way he is speaking to me or because I need air since it has evacuated my body with his filthy words. It's only then I notice something about myself. I shift my hips while I stand in my seized spot. It simply makes matters worse. A low grunt is forced from his throat and his erection becomes more prominent.

"Are your panties wet for me, giovane cucciolo?"

My lips wordlessly part at what feels like an intrusion into my inner sanctum.

"That's what I thought."

How does he know?

“If I slip my hand into your panties right now, will I be met with the silky arousal of your innocence for me?”

“Not—No. Not for you.” I try and act tough like he isn’t the one who has made me all squishy inside, but my bravado comes out like a three-year-old who doesn’t know how to speak properly, and the fact that it is only him and I standing here makes me look stupid.

He huffs at my inept language and leans in, getting close to my ear. “Are you a virgin, *giovane cucciolo*? Have you never been touched by a man?”

“It’s none of your business,” I breathlessly chastise with a snap.

“Oh, but it is.” His deep voice rumbles. “I need to know how to handle you.”

“There will be no handling of any kind, Mr. Carbone.”

His gruff chuckle is insulting. He steps back, releasing me. With one last lingering leer, he promises, “I’ll see you soon, *giovane cucciolo*.” He takes a few steps away from me before turning back, looking over his shoulder, and suggesting, “You may want to revisit the bathroom, clean your arousal from that untouched pussy. It may become uncomfortable for you while you watch the fight next to my side.” Then he disappears around the corner.

Gone.

Vanishing like he was never there.

## CHAPTER

# SIX

## D EMETRI

FUCK, she is innocently stunning. A man's dream. A virgin, maybe? A clean slate to map out my own guidelines, conforming her to my tastes. *Fuck*. I shift in my spot, trying to calm my erection down. She would have no rules yet, no parameters, nothing to judge from and rule out from prior experiences. She doesn't know what she likes or doesn't like. Her palate is unsoiled by eager testosterone enraged fumbling boys. Fuck, my dick is hard. Harder than it has been in a long time. She has both of our attention. That Irish accent of hers coming from her innocent mouth... Fuck me. I want to hear her call out my name while I'm balls deep inside of her.

I shift in my spot once again, finishing my conversation with one of my security guys. Every one of my men has been informed of her presence. My sight lands on Joseph across the ring. My orders to him were to never let her out of his sight. With a tap of my earpiece, I question, "Where is she?"

With a twist and nod of his head, he pinpoints directly where she is in the crowd of blood-seeking gamblers. "Left corner. Two away from the chick with the bright pink shirt. The guy standing next to her is showing some interest."

I watch her from afar. I glare at him, but he doesn't make a move. I still don't like it.

“Remove him.”

She shouldn't be in this atmosphere. She doesn't belong here. I can see why Cillian is so overprotective of her. Is it because she is so innocent or is it because he has conformed her life to be that innocent? I'm confused as to why he would release her to an underground world as vile as this one. I'm sure he would not be okay with her being here tonight. Cillian has too many enemies to give her this much freedom. This isn't like taking a quick trip to the mall with her girlfriend and bodyguard in tow. Nah, her cousin has something to do with this. “Bring her to me.”

“Yes, sir.”

I watch from my perch as Joseph makes his way to her. She glares at him then turns back to her cousin. The fight she bet on is about ready to start. I want her by my side when she watches the vicious execution of man versus man. I see her cousin talking to her. A lifeless laugh fills my chest. She is giving him a ration of shit. Joseph stands there, patiently waiting. He's the perfect protégé under Antonio, Giovanni, and I. She flicks her hand and asks him something. He turns my way and nods. Her gaze slides across the ring and connects with mine. Then she turns back and chews Joseph up, but she doesn't make any kind of stance to move in my direction.

I lift my hand to my earpiece and order, “Tell her to get her curvy ass over here. Now. She will not appreciate the consequences if I have to come to her.” I don't even know this girl. Any normal, rational thinking female would run for the fucking hills, but I know what I see in her, behind those unknowing pale, ice green eyes.

She turns her back on them, searching for me. I lift my suit covered arm and twist my hand, slowly crooking my index finger at her. I swear I can feel her breath from the forced huff of agitation she releases all the way over here on the other side of the ring. She turns from her cousin and slams her heeled

feet against the blood-stained concrete floor, heading my way with an objective. Joseph is in tow as he should be.

When she reaches me, she opens her mouth to yell, but the music changes to the song *What'cha Want* by the Beastie Boys. It's Ghost's entrance song. It's so loud, and even if she did screech, protesting, I wouldn't have heard what she said. Ghost enters the ring. A silent warrior. The crowd merges in, in blood-hungry excitement. Instinctively, I grab her and shove her in front of me. Her back is glued to my front. She is so much smaller than me, but her stature is that of an average-sized woman. I lean down, getting right next to her ear, and question, "Why did you choose Ghost to win? He's the underdog."

She twists her head and tilts it back then closes the gap between her head and shoulder. The coarse hair of my beard scrapes the soft skin of her neck and tickles her. The scent of her hair fills my nostrils. Jasmine. She smells like jasmine. It's rich and sweet and fruity and so damn sensual. The small white leaf flower mirrors what I see in her; delicate and pure.

She turns halfway, her hand resting on my forearm as she pushes herself up on her tiptoes. I lean down to meet her. "Because every dog has their day, and it doesn't have to always be a bad one." She eyes me for a moment before turning back around. My hand slides around her waist, possessively pulling her back and holding her to my chest. She stiffens at my splayed hand across her stomach, but she doesn't put up a fight, rather she surprisingly relaxes in my hold.

Luca jumps in the ring, waiting for Rock to enter so he can announce them. The tension is high. Haven shifts on her feet. I can sense the nervous energy running through her body. Whether it be from standing so close to me or the anticipation of the impending battle is hard to decipher.

"What if you lose?" I lean down and question when the music is cut.

"I won't," she's quick to reply.

"How do you know? Look at Ghost. His physique is less developed than

Rock's."

"That means nothing. It's about instinct, intelligence, and patience."

"Want to put up a wager?"

"I already placed a bet." She half turns to peer at me with squinted eyes.

"Not a monetary bet." I nod, shifting a bit so that she doesn't feel the length of my erection against her behind. "That was Ciarán's money. Care to put up a personal wager?"

She twists to fully face me. "What kind of wager?" Her gaze lingers on my beard.

I can see the curiosity and excitement swirl in her eyes at the thought of gambling.

"I win, you let me take you out. You win, you get to choose the place I take you."

"Well, now, that is cheeky, isn't it? Either way, I am consenting to letting you take me out." I stay silent, waiting for her answer. "I don't think my brother would appreciate his associate perusing his little sister."

"Do you always hide behind your big brother?"

"Never."

"I think you do. I think you are. I think you always have." I give that a minute to sink in. "Prove me wrong, *giovane cucciolo*. Are you too nervous to spend the night with me?"

"No," she's quick to answer, glaring at me. "It's not 'spending the night' with you either. It would be a date. One where you would bring me home at the end of the evening."

"Prove it." I challenge her, ignoring her statement. "Let's see if you have what it takes to stand on your own two feet?"

"Okay. Here's the deal. I'll go out with *you* if you tell me what you keep calling me."

"I'll tell *you* what." I lean back. "If Ghost knocks Rock out in the first round, I'll tell you, but you have to agree to let me take you out."

She hesitates for only a moment. “Deal.” She holds her hand out for me to solidify our wager. When I reach to shake it, she pulls her hand back. “Amendment, you have to get approval from my brother first.” I tilt my head to the right, a slight lift of amusement shows with the upturn of my lip. I’m impressed with her negotiation. She reaches forward again, mirth glitters in her gaze. I place my hand in hers. The power-driven current that runs through the both of us at our connecting touch is a stimulant to the spine-tingling arousal.

“Not a problem,” I assure her. “I see you are not willing to fully break the rules.”

“You think so.” Her mischievous smile leads me to believe she thinks she will win, and her brother will deny the night.

Little does she know.

With each bruising punch, kick, and takedown, Haven shudders with prickling excitement. Her pupils swell with the brand-new awakening in front of her. She is enjoying the fight. It surprises me. To look at her, you would think she would run from the brutal scene before us rather than jump up and down next to me. The fight doesn’t last long. Haven was almost on point with her bet. Ghost took Rock down, and knocked him out cold, but it was at the beginning of the second round and not the first.

My instincts told me it was coming. I watched the way Ghost worked Rock. He was smart. He let Rock come at him full speed and waited until he tired. When Rock’s arms lost their strength, Ghost moved in. That’s when I knew I had to walk away and meet up with Luca and Giovanni in my office to pay the debts. I had Joseph grab her cousin, bringing him to stand with her while I took care of business. She was so into the fight that she hadn’t noticed I walked away or that her cousin was now standing at her back.

I watch her from the door of my office as the line begins to form to collect their winnings. When the fight ends, she turns around with chin rubbing excitement that falls flat when she realizes I’m not standing there any

longer. She surveys the area before turning back to Ciarán. I watch on as he informs her of my location. She turns in my direction. Our eyes lock. Her mouth parts and I can think of nothing else but wanting to desecrate her lips with my own.

We hold an intense stare.

Then I turn away.



CHAPTER  
**SEVEN**

**H**AVEN

CIARÁN LOCKS the doors to his rented white on white Mercedes G Wagon after we get inside. I am buzzing inside, floating on a massive high.

“Can we do that again?” My cousin looks at me from the driver’s seat. “Go to another fight? How often do they have them?”

“A couple times a month.”

“I’m sorry I lost your money. I’ll pay you back.”

“No worries, cuz.”

“I almost won. Had I said the second round, I would have. I didn’t think Rock would get past the first one. I was so close.” I vibrate in my seat with enthusiasm.

“You were. Next time.” He turns onto a side street leading to another dark road.

“Thank you for taking me.”

“Anytime.”

“That man, Demetri. He’s sound? You know him?”

“Cillian is working with their organization. I wouldn’t say he is a cool

guy.”

“You trust him well enough to let me go to him?”

“Yeah.”

“Would Cillian?” I ask, knowing my brother is very overprotective of me. He glances my way. “Why?”

“I made a side bet with him. I lost.”

His head snaps in my direction. “What do you feckin mean you made a side bet with him?”

“It doesn’t matter anyways. I was supposed to go on a date with him if I lost. But we left, not confirming it. So, it’s void.” I smile, proud of myself that I bested him.

“Not void, Haven. Cop on!” He slams his hand into the steering wheel. Irish slang rushes out with his anger. “Were you supposed to meet up with him after the fight, Haven?”

“Cop on? I am not stupid, Ciarán. How dare you call me unintelligent.” I glance out the window, my feelings hurt, before turning back to him. “I don’t know. I suppose I was. Maybe? I told him he had to ask Cillian for permission anyway.”

“You told a caporegime, the guy just under the underboss of one of the biggest, most powerful organizations that he has to ask your brother, his new associate, for permission to take you on a date from a bet that you yourself had the balls to make?” He throws his hand up, his voice rising with each word. “Feckin eejit!” He slams his hand against the steering wheel. “That is not how things work, Haven. Have you lost your nuts?”

“I’m not a fucking idiot! I didn’t suggest the bet, Ciarán. I just agreed to it. With the condition that he ask Cillian for permission.”

“Haven,” he says, trying to control the tone of his voice. “Cillian is not always going to be there for you. You must start using your smarts. I know you have been kept to a higher standard and under the family protection, behind massive shielding feckin walls, but you must start thinking for your

feckin self. You're not a kid anymore."

"What is that supposed to mean, Ciarán?" My voice rises with my indignant very wounded feelings.

"It means no capo with his reach and influential stature is going to stand on your brother's feckin doorstep and ask for your hand like it's some feckin fairy tale. Life is not a Disney movie, Haven. The quicker you learn that life lesson, the more sound you will be. Demetri is a high-ranking capo. He and the other guy standing next to him at the end of the night when they were paying out debts, his name is Giovanni. Mr. Moretti to everyone except the boss and underboss. They are ruthless caporegimes that run groups of soldiers for the Heart organization. They are powerful, Haven. Their positions were earned through loyalty and bloodshed. Their own and the deaths of others, cuz. It's a game, a chess match of power and position. To get that high-level position in the ranks, he is one ruthless motherfucker, Haven. Are you hearing me, cuz?"

"Cillian is just as powerful!" I fight for my brother who has worked so hard under my father's firm thumb.

"Back in Ireland, yes! We're here now, Haven. Cillian is powerful, but he is playing by someone else's rules right now."

"Why? Why did we even come here?"

"Because we had to. There was only one other option, and it was not an acceptable one."

I watch him, waiting for him to elaborate, but he doesn't. After a minute of him stewing behind the wheel as he drives us back to the mansion, I mumble with exhaustion, "It doesn't matter anyway. I left. Did you forget that?"

"No, I didn't!" he explodes. "And neither will Demetri Carbone. He will pursue his winnings. And that, my dear cousin, will be you."

The rest of the car ride was filled with silent tension, me bristling in my seat while my cousin looked to be deep in thought. I didn't even say

goodnight when I charged up the steps to my bedroom. Dropping down on my bed after changing into my pajamas, I grab my phone and pull up my search engine. Italian to English translation is what I type in. Then I sound out the two words that flowed over Demetri's lips. I may not know Italian, but I am not an idiot. I've had the best education money can buy. It took me three tries, spelling it differently before two words finally pop up. *Young pup*. *Giovane cucciolo* means young pup. I stare at my phone. Anger settles in. He's referring to me as if I'm a dog, a fumbling puppy? He thinks I'm a child just as my cousin has accused me of being?

Demetri's words float over me from the party where I initially met him. "*This is your one free pass, giovane cucciolo.*" He was reprimanding me as if I was an errant child then. I breathe in so deeply with irritation, it hurts my lungs. Maybe Ciarán is right. Maybe I have been protected and sheltered so much that I don't know what real life is about. Maybe it is time I start exploring life on my own.

The real question is—how do I do that with a bodyguard and cousin that is glued to my side during most of my free time?

I roll to my side and drop my phone next to my pillow, contemplating. My eyes become heavy with exhaustion, and so do my thoughts. I'm just about to become one with dreamland when my phone chimes. With one eye open, I grab for it, thinking it will be Paisley. I squint at the number and refocus with both my eyes when I don't recognize the digits.

Unknown Number: Where I come from, when you make a bet, you see it through, cucciola. You should have come to my office so we could hash out the details. Now, you are to be reprimanded for your indiscretion.

I GASP, almost frightened that in the dead of night, this man has infiltrated my

space with only a message. I want to ask who it is and harass his massive ego. My poor decision is made without heeding my cousin's warning about who I am dealing with. He doesn't know that I know who the message is from. Let's see how he likes games. How did he think I felt tonight when I turned around and he was no longer standing at my back during the fight? Where I come from if you stand at someone's back you don't leave them open without protection without informing them. That is the one thing I did learn from my father and brother.

“Okay, Mr. Carbone,” I strongly say out loud to my empty room, feeling sassier than I should. “Let's do this.”

CHAPTER  
**EIGHT**

**D** EMETRI

“GOOD NIGHT.”

“Damn good night,” I agree with Giovanni, humming my appreciation as I strike a match to light my addiction. I tilt my head and squint my eyes, putting the orange tipped cancer stick in the corner of my mouth and inhaling the fresh smoke. Throwing the burnt-out match onto the bar in front of me, I acknowledge, “Ghost drew in a crowd tonight. I contracted him for next week. Let’s see what his numbers pull with a return and Zeus as his opponent.”

“We’re debriefing tomorrow morning. Am I picking you up before Antonio?”

“No. I have to marshal a meeting for an entitled girl’s peace of mind to make it easier on myself after we debrief with the boss.”

He lifts his chin. “Not sure I agree,” he expresses his bleak opinion.

“Not your decision.”

“No, it’s not.” He shifts his weight towards the bar. “She is beautiful,” he states.

“I’m aware,” I tell him before turning to Jake the bartender, and ordering

my drink of choice. “Stoli Vanilla. Three rocks.” I turn back to Giovanni. “Beauty is a curse and a blessing.”

“Have you figured out which one it is yet?” he inquires as we walk up to the second mezzanine.

“Which one what is?” Antonio asks when he steps inside his open private lounge next to his office with us.

“Demetri here hasn’t decided if his new acquisition is a curse or not,” Giovanni enlightens him to our conversation, slapping my back.

“How could I? I don’t even know her,” I point out as I’m walking towards the velvet lounge sectional to take a seat.

“She’s hot,” Luca mutters as he walks by, grabbing a bottle of whiskey.

“I’m fucking aware!” I instantly shout over the music to his retreating back with irritation.

“You have more than enough time to get to know her, but while you’re at it, there is no reason why you shouldn’t enjoy what God blessed her with,” he chimes in when he reaches me with his bottle of amber liquid. “Which are some serious curves attached to a solid waist that I wouldn’t mind grabbing onto from behind. Not to mention that tight—” Luca cracks open the seal to the fresh bottle and grins when I cut him off.

“Motherfucker.” I glare at him.

“Hey,” he mocks, holding up his hands, “just voicing my assessment of your chosen person of interest.”

“Enough.” I end the banter with one word, feeling myself strangely getting worked up. I swallow my drink in one go and slide my glass to the edge of the table as I wave our server over.

“Usual?” She flutters her blonde lashes at me.

I skim my eyes down her body. Long. Lean. Pretty enough. “Yeah,” I reply.

“I’ll be right back.” She winks as she turns away.

“No issues tonight?” Antonio questions dropping down next to Giovanni

across from me and Luca.

“Only issue I saw was D getting worked up because his new chick was there.” Luca continues his ribbing.

“I wasn’t worked up.”

“You were.” He carries on with his tongue-in-cheek bullshit.

“Motherfucker, I saved your ass from dying not too long ago. Cut your shit. Or next time, and we all know there will be a next time, I will let you fucking die,” I snap before glancing off to the left, watching my interest serve drinks to another private lounge. I’m silent, knowing they’re all watching me. “She doesn’t belong in a place like that.” Especially after I concluded she is as pure as the first driven snow. But I don’t voice that realization out loud.

“I saw her rooting Ghost on. She enjoyed it,” Giovanni states.

I don’t entertain what he’s saying with an agreeable answer, even if it is true. I run my fingers through my dark beard, scratching my jaw while in thought. Haven’s innocence is refreshing and irritating at the same time. Her eyes shimmer with a desire she knows nothing about while the server walking towards me with my drink in her hand is giving me confident *fuck me twenty ways from Sunday* eyes. The two couldn’t be more contrasting. I glance at my watch then at her as I inhale the stress relieving smoke.

“Two,” she mutters setting my drink down while making committed eye contact.

I turn my attention back to Antonio, answering him and ignoring her. “The bottom line was well over last week’s gross. All debts are paid out.” I glance at her retreating small ass.

He bobs his head. “Where’s Ghost from?”

“He says no one specific place. Stated that he bounces around. I hear a hint of Chicago in him though.”

“Interesting,” Antonio drones then takes a sip of his drink.

“Definitely had some training. Knew exactly how to handle Rock. Took his winnings and bounced almost immediately. He was even on the fence



about confirming next week's match."

"You sure he's going to be there? We don't need a no-show. Bad for business."

"Joseph's tailing," I inform him.

"Speaking of." Giovanni lifts his chin in the direction of the stairs as he sits up. "What's up?" he asks Joseph when he reaches us.

"He checked in at a motel off the interstate. Lights went out after thirty minutes."

"The Flame?" Antonio questions. Joseph confirms with a nod. "Tomorrow. Early. I want you in the parking lot. This guy could be a flight risk and if he bounces, we need to make sure we commission another fighter." He turns to Luca. "Call Eddie at the front desk and tell him to put one of the maids on watch. I want a call if this guy decides to split."

"Done," Joseph and Luca agree to Antonio's orders.

"Get yourself a drink," Antonio tells Joseph, releasing him from duty as he flicks his hand to summons our server over. "You four enjoy your drinks. I'm going home to enjoy my wife." He stands to leave.

"It's one-thirty. Her ass is probably sleeping," Giovanni chirps from his seated position next to him. He's the only one who jokes with Antonio about Lilah. I could, but I don't. He's a possessive bastard when it comes to her. Both Antonio and Giovanni are possessive over their woman. But they are not me. I am covetous. An avaricious motherfucker. What is mine is mine. It is the reason why I have never taken on a permanent lover.

"If she knows what is good for her, she better not be. She received strict orders earlier this evening that her ass better be up waiting for me when I get home. Literally." Giovanni chuckles and uncharacteristically rolls his eyes before sipping his drink, knowing what Antonio is saying is true to his word, but also knowing Lilah holds his balls in the palm of her hand. Antonio turns to walk around the table then stops and glances at me. "I would tell you not to shit where you eat, but I know you already tasted the buffet of many here."

He raises a dark brow and glances at our server. “She’s a good employee. Don’t make her quit, or worse, I have to fire her because she can’t handle your rejection come morning. There is only one that gives as good as she gets from you and my right-hand woman isn’t going anywhere.” He turns and walks out leaving the four of us to our drinks.

I smirk, glancing around for Talia, Temptations head manager, Antonio’s right-hand woman. She is usually hovering somewhere close in case Antonio needs her. When I don’t see her anywhere, I look to our server who is cleaning up the bar now that the crowd is starting to thin out.

I relax back in my seat, spread my legs, and begin to wind down. I’m never one hundred percent unguarded. I will always have my defenses up. I must. If I don’t, my days will be numbered, but at the end of the night like this, as we sit in our private lounge, I let go of some of the stress on my shoulders and appreciate my time with the guys I spend most of my day with. I glance at my watch. It’s fifteen minutes before two. I shake my head, declining Giovanni’s offered cigar, and grab my smokes. I bang out one of my tightly compacted sticks against my palm. I’d love nothing more than to enjoy one of his Cohibas, but my testosterone level doesn’t need to be elevated any more than it already is tonight. The three of them are talking around me. I’m listening but the agitation from earlier starts to settle back in now that the night is over.

Little Miss Haven McKittrick. She dipped out on me while my attention was elsewhere. I would say it took balls to walk out, renegeing on our bet, but the fact of the matter is, she didn’t know any better. She’s never had to suffer the consequences of retribution when a deal is agreed upon and then payment is denied. I’m sure of it. I’m certain that tonight was the first time she has ever made a wager if I go by her show of jubilation. Then to walk out, her naivety making her believe she was being sneaky has me worked up. I would never concede to anyone with low moral standards to stand by my side, male or female. Since she is so inexperienced, I will give her this one allowance. I

lean back and dig my phone out of my pocket. Her small window of gloating has come to an end.

CHAPTER  
NINE

H AVEN

Unknown Number: Where I come from, when you make a bet, you see it through, cucciola. You should have come to my office so we could hash out the details. Now, you are to be reprimanded for your indiscretion.

Me: I'm sorry. I think you may have the wrong number.

Unknown Number: Ah, I see. You want to play games. I like games. However, in this instance, there is no game to be played, giovane cucciolo. You know exactly who this is, and you know exactly why you are receiving this message. That is, unless you have another man reaching out to you this late in the evening demanding you uphold a wager you agreed upon.

Me: Go call someone else a dog, Demetri. Because this woman isn't one. She is of superb pedigree but not of the furry kind or the kind that has no self-respect. How did you get my number?

Unknown Number: Woman? A young one. I'll give you that. However, only a girl would renege on a bet she had no intention of satisfying. Especially with a man like me. Although, no woman I know would. They always satisfy their debt.

“I’M SURE THEY DO, DEMETRI,” I voice my annoyance at how quickly and accurately he came back at me. I should have never left. It shows me as weak and untrusting. I hold the phone in my palm, my fingers curling and gripping the edge as I read through his message again. It only succeeds in exasperating me more.

Unknown Number: I see you know how to search google translations. Do not be offended, cucciola. It is a term of endearment, not an insult.

Me: I see I have graduated. Now you’re just calling me pup. Sure sounds like an insult to me.

Unknown Number: Trust me, if it was, you would know. If I had a reason to insult you, then I would not give you the time of day, anyway.

Me: Is that what you are doing? Giving me the mere few minutes of your day? Am I supposed to be grateful that you are?

Unknown Number: You should be... flattered. I have a beautiful woman standing in front of me, offering herself, yet here I am messaging a naïve young woman who likes to play games. Be ready tomorrow night by eight. I will send a car to collect you.

“Collect me?” I voice with shock at the dark empty room. “Flattered?” I sputter nonsense in outrage to my pillow then shoot up like a burning corpse in my plush bed. He will collect me? Like I’m some inanimate object that can be borrowed and given back? I’m agitated. He has me ruffled and flushed with anger. “How dare he? He can piss off for all I care,” I rant to the empty room. Then I suffer from something I have never felt before. “Who’s the beautiful woman?” I sputter to myself, my stomach churning.

The phone stays silent for a few moments because my response is one that may be inappropriate. Saying feck off would make me feel so much better, but this is my brother’s new business associate. My anger gets the best

of me at times. I don't know the details, but I have overheard Cillian telling my bodyguard, Finn, that this deal is crucial for our family's future.

Me: Have you spoken to my brother?

I change the unknown number to "sir" just to be a smart ass.

Sir: Have you? See you tomorrow. And Haven? Where a dress.  
Preferably a red one.

The audacity of this man to tell me what to wear. I'm boiling inside. My sarcastic snark backfires on me once again when I message back.

Me: Yes, sir.

Sir: You just made my dick hard. Good night, giovane cucciolo.



It's a quarter to three. My phone is still in my hand. I can't sleep. I haven't been able to shut my eyes for more than a few minutes. I have tossed and turned since our sparring match through text messages. It's the last message that is sticking in my overactive brain. That and the one before it. I turned him on. Because I called him sir? I cannot believe how egotistical this man is. I'm heated but I'm not so sure it's in a bad way. Yes, he has frustrated me, but my raised body temperature is coming from thoughts of him being aroused. Then there's this nagging side emotion that is harassing me. I turned him on and there was a beautiful woman offering her body to him. I'm sure there is a plethora of suggestive women propositioning

themselves to him daily. I think my troubled sleep is being fueled by something I am not acquainted with. Could it be jealousy? No, more like interest. Thinking about him being with someone else is intriguing. I think?

I shut my makeup free eyes and curl to my side after throwing my phone onto the nightstand. Agitation is the factor that graces me with a restless sleep. One hour passed. Then two. When three a.m. ticked off, I climb out of bed knowing nothing will calm me but the tips of my toes and the exhaustion they cause in my body.

I make my way downstairs to the first floor and proceed in the dark down the long curving staircase to the basement. I flick on the overhead lights and dim the harshness to a dull glow. I don't need the light to know how my body moves or the space I claim while contorting it. I walk over and turn on the surround sound. *Traitor* by Elley Duhé comes to life throughout the sparse space. The room may not have the bars needed to stretch my limbs to their breaking point, but the space is wrapped with wall-to-wall mirrors.

I walk to where I left my pointe shoes yesterday and remove my T-shirt, leaving me in nothing but my thin strapped black sports bra that barely covers my ample chest and a pair of pale pink pajama shorts. After stretching to limber up my muscles, I cue the system to one of my favorite songs. *Quiet* by MILCK starts to play. I heave my tense body off the hardwood and begin to release the tightness I have built up inside my muscles. Nothing has ever fueled me or refreshed me like ballet has. The strength it takes to move my body, twisting it into movements that most humans can't imagine is therapeutic to my mental state. It was my outlet as I was growing up. My safe place. My dream. That is, until that dream was no longer a viable one. I was never going to be a prima ballerina, I knew that, but I wanted to go back to where ballet originated in Italy and perform in one of the shows. I wanted to be one of the chosen ones, but I wasn't. I couldn't be. My body didn't allow it. Once I hit my teenage years and puberty took over, I no longer had the svelte body of a willowy ballet dancer. My chest expanded rapidly. My hips

spread and my ass, although still very firm, developed its own zip code. My body quickly became the dancer who got paid nightly for taking her clothes off rather than the dancer who was under contract with a prestigious ballet company.

I fell into a depression, abused my body, and rebelled against the weight that came along with the change in my figure as I became a young woman. I tortured myself, mentally and physically. I spent countless hours just staring at dinner plates filled with delicious foods, moving it around the contained space to make it seem as if I ate, only to consume it from the refrigerator later that night when everyone was asleep. Or I would hide behind the closed door of my bedroom when the starvation diet I swore would give me back what I thought was a perfect body rejected the torture and strain I was putting it under. I would scarf down copious amounts of food and then feel so guilty I would run to the scale and weigh myself. It would rise a pound, or three, and I would feel sick to my stomach at my lack of control. I fought with myself, chastising myself every single time I faltered. I considered myself weak minded as I cried a river of self-loathing tears. Then I fell into the trap. I binged. And the only way to correct that binge was to get rid of what I consumed. Countless hours were spent over the rim of my private en suite toilet.

Only one person, my bodyguard Finn, noticed the change in me, in my body. To my family, I assumed they had just believed I dropped back down to my dancing weight pre-hormone range. I guess they figured it was youth at its worst and best. Ma never said a thing. In her defense, she was too wrapped up in Da's illness. His dementia had just been diagnosed. The fear of one day losing her soulmate to something other than a human became consuming and crippling. It snuck up on them and attacked without warning. They were both at a loss on how to defend themselves. Ma's disadvantage was because she couldn't fix it. Every bit of her time and focus went into my Da and his health, researching in the false hope that she could cure him. My father



accepted that one day he would retreat to that dark place and not come back, eventually leaving his beloved family behind, exposed to the dangerous world he created. It became the unknown. The waiting game. Day by day passed. One day was good. The next was bad. Those moments of seeing my real da became few and far between. The stress of it only aided to my illness. Cillian stepped in, got me help, and became the head of the family, running the business while my father slowly became a dimmer light. His days as of late are rapidly diminishing. I can see the strain on Cillian's face as each day passes. The sad part is, I think only once my father finally does pass, Cillian will become less regimented and stressed. Their relationship has become strained. More so in the beginning than now when Dad was more cognizant. When my father was first diagnosed, I had overheard some major battles between father and son behind the closed door of my father's office. It was always about business. Decisions were made on my father's part without the warranted discussion with his partner, his son. The leading emotion in the tone of their voices was more of an emotional turmoil than the rigidity of their business. I never heard the full gist of what the arguments were about, but I can tell you Cillian did not agree with the choices my father had made for the family's future in his absence. Now, Cillian must uphold those contracts, and I can tell the pressure is getting to him. I believe it is one of the reasons why we have come to the States. I have asked him, but I was not given an answer.

The beginning beats of *Wicked Game* by Daisy Jane start to strum. My legs shift into limber-controlled noodles as I lift to the tips of my toes and glide across the floor with small quick steps. I jump, launching from both toes and landing on both feet with a gust of strength. My arms move with graceful precision. Sweat rolls down my temples. I am right where my body and mind need to be. Lost in the music.

My thoughts shift from my movements to the man who has kept me awake. I expunge my body of the confused energy forcing me to stay awake

with each move I compose. Demetri Carbone is an enigma to my innocent life. He is a threat but also a promise. A hazardous temptation. One that my innocence is unreasonably attracted to. My curiosity is becoming my enabler. She's a fickle bitch, aiding in my conclusion. Demetri is trouble.

I find myself becoming more passionate with every move. My body temperature is rising beyond the typical as I exert myself thinking of him, the handsome devil that has caught my attention. It's both bothersome and strangely welcoming. I jump, lifting and turning in the air with powerful stamina. My legs are so unnaturally straight, they are as tight as a taut string under pressure. With a graceful landing, I twist and spin with gust. My head gracefully flows with my body. It's just me, the music, and the craving of my addiction that let me process my thoughts of him.

That is, until I hear, "What are you dancing away from, sunshine?"

I stumble, my pointed toes falling flat, my arms dropping from above my head with weight, and blocking my chest from the sudden unease at someone entering the room without my knowledge. My body deflates when the apprehension subsides at seeing who it is standing in my private space watching me dance. My hands drop to my hips, ready to reprimand him for scaring me. I release my held breath, trying to reenergize my body before speaking.

"Finn." I breathe a heavy breath. "What are you doing down here?" I relax as best I can, trying to recoup now that I know I am safe from an unknown intruder. "It's so late. You should be asleep," I tell him as I walk to the cooler and grab an ice-cold water.

"You're dancing," he states, watching me a mindful minute. "You looked beautiful, passionate, and poetic. I haven't seen you like that in some time." He steps to me, holding out his hand, gesturing for me to give him the bottle of water I'm struggling to open because of my sweaty palms.

"I was down here the other night too," I inform him, glancing around the open space as I hand him the bottle.

“You were,” he agrees, acknowledging that he knew. “But you were not so, should I say, fiery. There was life in your movements just now.”

I weakly nod, agreeing, knowing exactly who gave me that fire.

“It’s late, Finn. You should be in bed.” I hand him my half full bottle and grab a clean white towel to wipe the sweat from my forehead.

“As should you.” He looks at his wristwatch noting the time. “It’s four thirty a.m.”

“Couldn’t sleep,” I admit.

“Just got here,” he informs me. “I was ready to head to bed when I heard the music.”

“Sorry, didn’t realize it was that loud.”

“Not so much loud as a sense you were down here. You going to tell me?”

“I’m not dancing away from anything. Just had some pent-up energy I needed to burn.” I shrug, not wanting to tell my bodyguard that Demetri Carbone has become an unwanted intruder in my late-night thoughts.

“Hmm,” he hums, nodding while on the lookout for anything I am not saying. If there is one thing about Finn, he knows me. He has been my bodyguard since I was a kid. “This have anything to do with tonight?”

“Tonight?” I’m too quick to answer, my heart hammering, thinking he knows about the fight. About the wager. About my heated thoughts of Demetri.

The moment becomes somewhat tense. I glance away and when I look back, I notice Finn’s eyes have dropped to my overexposed chest. My body has cooled down and the temperature change has made my nipples stand at attention.

He clears his throat, looks away, and remarks with a heaviness to his voice, “Must have been that thriller of a movie Ciarán told me you guys watched this evening.”

“Yeah, must have been.” I grant the lie to wash over my lips without

looking at him. It makes me feel so terrible an ache forms in my chest.

He leans down, grabs my T-shirt off the floor, and holds it out for me to take. He clears his throat once again then takes a step back.

“It’s late.” I make the excuse so I can get out from under the heaviness I feel. “I need to shower.”

“That you do.” He smiles softly, an act I have seen him carry out only when he is in my presence.

Finn has a hard exterior. He fits the perfect description of a bodyguard. But with me, in a private setting, his interior is forgiving and gentler than his shell. He is six years my senior at twenty-seven, but life has made his maturity level that of a man in his later years. He has been around and involved in violence since he was just a small boy. He came from a family that was dirt poor and uneducated, becoming illiterate criminals born from a broken underprivileged society. There was no finesse to their illegal dealings. Years of their half-witted street schemes only carried them so far. Most of them are dead or in prison now. Finn began working for the family in his mid-teens when he sought out my father for work to help his family. It wasn’t until later that he became my bodyguard.

I found myself gravitating to him as we both grew. He was easy to be around, and I realized I was leaning on him more than I should. We generated a friendship that was beyond the typical bodyguard–client structure. I had misconstrued those crossed lines one night when I found myself so frustrated at the choices I made, that I kissed him. I had just left a frat party where young men showed their immaturity. I became the “new girl challenge” and was being hit on from every direction I turned. It was disgusting, and I voiced that once I got back in the car. After returning home and Finn checked out my private off campus apartment, making sure it was safe and secure, and was getting ready to leave, I laid one on him. He became as stiff as a board. Our lips were stagnant for a full ten seconds. My lips were just there, glued to his, with no motion. Then it turned into something else. Finn took control.

My back hit the door with an energy that he had never touched me with before. His mouth moved over mine. His experience showed. It was new and exhilarating. Only a hint of his tongue pushed through my parted lips and swiped my tongue before he pulled it back along with himself. Heated desire swirled in his eyes as he glared at me. Then he left. Just left. Walked out without a word said. I was left standing there in embarrassed wonder. The next morning, he was waiting at my door like he had done every single day before. No words were spoken. No explanations. No excuses. We just went on with our typical day.

I never told my best friend about the kiss, and I have always questioned why.

CHAPTER  
TEN

H AVEN

AM I shocked when I walk into my bedroom after my shower and see a white shiny box with an elegant black velvet bow lying on my bed? No, can't say that I am. I have already learned that my date for this evening gets what he wants. Just in case I didn't have a red dress, he made sure I did. What I can say when I stare at the box is that I am intrigued. That is until I pull the fabric bow loose and lift open the lid to see an exquisite red dress. In my size no less.

I knew exactly what was going to be inside. I just didn't know how stunning it would be. My problem is, I can't wait to put the beautiful dress on my body. It just won't be for him, tonight. It will be for me, right now.

There is no way I am bowing to his demand. Scarlet red is his choice of desire. A harlot. A vibrant show of color to take notice of. A show to every man of what he has on his arm.

What is the opposite of the racy saturated color? White. That is the color I will be wearing tonight when he finally sees me at his chosen destination. A zing of giddy defiance whips through me, a playfulness knowing it will be

too late for me to change when he finally sees me and demands it.

Goosebumps of excitement caress my skin. I pull the dress from the confines of the box. An impressive tag falls at its side. No price. Just the name of the boutique. Heart's Desire. When I remove the tag and throw it onto the bed is when I notice the name and phone number on the back with a small handwritten note attached.

*If you need help getting into this contraption,  
please don't hesitate to call. I will personally  
see you through the torture.*

*Sofia Heart*

*Owner of Hearts Desire*

THE FABRIC IS STRATEGICALLY POSITIONED. The buckles mimic a U-shape shackle. They're placed in a way that looks as if I'm trussed up. The dress is not shy of material by any means. It goes from mid-neck to mid-calf and is body hugging from top to bottom. It's a vision of seduction. An open invitation to look but not to touch with the way the brass buckles bond the thin straps of material together. It's a work of art, crafted with superb quality, and I know it cost Demetri a fortune. Too bad he won't get to see it.

I lay the dress down across my bed and strip myself of my towel. My curiosity has gotten the better of me. Even though Demetri will not see me in what he picked out tonight, I will. I don't know how but I am determined to get into this dress without the aid of anyone's help. When I lean over to grab the top half of the dress, I see something red peeking out from under the

tissue paper still in the box. I reach for it and gasp when I see the three-piece La Perla ensemble. The bra, panties, and garter are so beautifully delicate. The brass clips holding it all together match the dress.

I squeal with excitement. I have never owned anything so suggestive. I quickly put it on. Noting that it too, fits perfectly. I damn near skip to the floor length mirror to check myself out. I twist and turn, inspecting my body from all angles. Ignoring the slight twinge in my stomach when I notice some flesh protruding over the string lying on my hip. I feel giddy as I stare at myself, and dare I say... sexy. A challenge to someone who sees herself bigger than what she really is.

I rush to my closet and whip through the dresses I had sent over to the States when we made the trip. I know just the one I am looking for. It's white and what I thought was sexy, but compared to what is laying across my bed, it leaves me to find another definition for it. I'll go with classically clean and sophisticated with an edge of sexiness without being a hooch.

I blow dry my unruly hair with a diffuser to give my highlighted strawberry blonde hair corkscrew curls. I apply my makeup, giving my eyes a slight bit of smokiness but then dramatically apply my darkest red lipstick to my lips.

Demetri wanted red. I'll tease him with just a hint of it.

I smile at my reflection, feeling sassy. Excitement I'm unaccustomed to fills me.

I think it's the challenge of my defiance. The unknown of what his reaction will be. I'm messing with fire, and I know it. The burn will no doubt hurt but this feeling inside me spurs me on.



CHAPTER  
**ELEVEN**

**D** EMETRI

It's one thing to take interest in someone and have them become your lover. It is another when you have eyes on you making sure you do the honorable thing in a less than righteous position. I am a private man. Therefore, my partners are private matters. Maybe not in the sense of who they are but more of what we do. For me, I will consult no one in my dealings. Once I commit to something, I follow through until the end. That is why when the Don of the family asked me this morning at our regular weekly debrief if I have continued to pursue the exquisitely innocent Ms. Haven McKittrick, I just stared at him. It was answer enough.

Was it disrespectful of me? Yes.

Did I expect repercussions? The answer is also yes.

There was none.

Mr. Heart knows me. My word is as good as gold is lucrative.

Antonio and Giovanni met me for lunch after I made a large purchase at Heart's Desire. Sofia Heart, the daughter of our boss and sister to Antonio, the underboss, owns the very successful high-end boutique. I felt that with tonight's date looming, it was warranted. I needed the innocence behind

Haven's demure smile to be enlightened to what kind of man she will be sharing the evening with.

I had Luca retrieve her with instructions that if she was not wearing the red dress I had purchased and delivered to her that the date would be canceled and rescheduled for another evening until she could comply.

The moment she stepped into the restaurant; I knew. She was, by far, the most beautiful female I have ever had the pleasure of sharing a dinner with. It didn't go unnoticed that every man and even some women gave my innocent date a thorough inspection. She was stunning in her strapless white mid-thigh dress. Her show of defiance was a turn on, a challenge on her part, and it made my cock rock-fucking-hard.

She watched me, waiting for the shock of her insolence at not wearing my offered gift to hit my features as she sauntered across the restaurant with swaying full hips and a half-cocked smirk. It's one she is trying to conceal but doing a piss poor job of. She never received the preview. I already knew she wasn't wearing the dress. The siren demanded that Luca bring her here anyway. Her excuse was that she had a debt to pay, and the dress was not part of the deal. Little does she know that I am the one who granted her demands. Luca would have walked out without a second thought.

I was intrigued. I expected her to show up in something that was the total opposite of what I had purchased for her. I could not have been more right. She was a spitfire held back by her contained innocence.

Her grin was captivating. It made my dick twitch with each step she took towards me. My job was to quickly extinguish her burst of cockiness. There is no room for that between us. I am not cocky. I am confident. She will learn that very quickly or she will be in for a rude awakening as the days ahead come. She just tested the will of a dominant man. She would soon find out there are always repercussions for said actions.

Instead of standing and pulling out her chair like a gentleman, I open my hand and carelessly wave to her designated seat across from me. Her grin

fades when she realizes I'm not going to leave my seat or comment about her selection in wardrobe. I ask her what her drink of choice is as I wave, Lilly, our server over. I made sure Haven saw my perusal of her. She hesitated a moment then asked for a glass of wine before turning away from me and glancing around the restaurant. She hated my lack of respect with my inspection of Lilly. But she loathed the fact that she didn't get the attention she was seeking with her dismissal of my wishes. The upper hand she thinks she is holding is extinguished immediately with my next statement.

"I would like to compliment you and tell you that you look lovely. However, I can honestly say the white makes you look withdrawn and pale whereas the red dress I gifted you would have given your alabaster skin some contrasting life." I watch her show of unjustified cockiness disappear. She didn't get the rise out of me like she thought she would. "The dress was a gift," I continue explaining. "Something I wanted to see you in and thought you would enjoy. You are clearly too young to appreciate the generosity of a man."

"I don't like being told what to do or wear," she immediately sputters.

"Are you sure? Because I am positive you have lived your entire life under the thumb of your father and brother."

"And why would you think that?"

"Because your innocence is a blistering beacon of light highlighting your sheltered life. Don't try to be something you are not. You may have taken a stance with me tonight, but you have not found your footing yet. And you never will with me."

She's quiet. Silence her choice of defense against my fact filled reality check. I let the moment linger a few seconds longer, letting her sort through her thoughts. She is young. I will curb my reprimanding wrath because of that.

Lilly hands Haven a menu with a beautiful warm smile which Haven does not return. Her noiseless inner turmoil bears weight in her soft features. She

orders grilled skinless chicken and steamed vegetables before handing back her menu and placing her hands in her lap. I smile, noting what I see in the young woman sitting in front of me. She is uncomfortable and waiting for direction.

“Do I make you uneasy?” I lean forward, rest my elbows on the table, and peer at her over my cupped hands.

“No.”

“You sure about that?” I question because she answered too quickly.

“Why would I lie?”

I raise a brow and wait.

“Maybe you do,” she grants a truth I can see she didn’t want to provide. Leaning back in her chair, she snips, “Is that a crime?”

“No. On the contrary. It’s a good thing.”

“I don’t see it that way. I am here to pay my debt and that is all.”

“You sure about that?” She stays silent while glaring at me. “Tell me, have you thought about me at all?”

“You mean have I thought about the fact that you were and still are an arrogant son of a bitch? Yes. Yes, I have.”

“You should not speak of a mother you know nothing about.”

“It’s a figure of speech.” She huffs and rolls her eyes.

It’s an action I will not tolerate going forward. She is an adult, not a petulant child.

“That I clearly do not appreciate. Now, tell me, giovane cucciolo, have you thought about me in a way that makes your panties wet?”

“You see what I mean? The audacity of you to think I would waste my time thinking about you.”

“Am I wrong?” I wait and watch her squirm. “Act like an adult and tell me the truth.” When she glances away, I remark, “That’s what I thought. Nothing wrong with admitting your attraction. To clarify, I am attracted to you as well.”

“I am an adult.”

“That you are. However, you are so used to doing what you are told you are now starting to push back with immature behavior. It’s unacceptable.”

“What is the difference between you telling me what to wear or them telling me what to do?”

“Because I would open you up to a new world.”

She goes silent once again. Ruminating over my statement.

Our dinners are placed on the table before she can question my declaration. We’re silent while we fix our meals. I can see she is interested, her attention is far off while she manipulates the food on her plate. She has questions she refuses to make light of. The tension she holds in her shoulders is tangible.

I place my fork down and lift my napkin, cleaning my mouth, and giving her my undivided attention. “Haven.” I wait for her to acknowledge me. “Relax. If you do not want to be here in my company, I’ll have Luca take you home and we will call the bet even. I do not want to share a meal with someone who does not want to be in my presence.”

She places her fork down, takes a sip of her second glass of wine, and admits, “I am here to pay my debt, but I don’t want to go home either. My apologies for my behavior. You are correct it was juvenile of me. That is not my usual character.”

“Then tell me who you are. Tell me why you are so tense so that I can fix it.”

“It was the dress. It pissed me off. Like I wasn’t good enough. Men like you... I bet you buy all your women clothing,” she rebukes with a slight grimacing twist to her full lips. “It made me mad, thinking I would just be another.”

“You will be another. To clarify, I have never stepped inside Heart’s Desire before today,” I truthfully tell her.

Her satisfied half-grin leads me to believe she has won some kind of

internal battle. “I didn’t say I never purchased anything from there before.” I watch the light in her eyes extinguish when both my comment on how she will be just another and the fact that I have bought from Sofia’s boutique before.

Her huff is strong enough to rock her head back and forth. She looks off to the side and a shadow of something I don’t like seeing fills her face.

“I will always tell you the truth, Haven. No matter how harsh it is.”

“You make it sound like there will be more dates after tonight.”

“There will be.”

She twists her head in astonishment. “Cocky much?”

“Are you telling me there won’t be?” I give her a lift of my lip. “I’m quite sure after our first initial introduction you would have stayed clear. You didn’t.”

“Is it just a boutique for women?” she rushes out, asking.

I nod, watching her, waiting to read her expression.

“Want to place another bet?” Her smirk, it’s cocky, like what she is going to wager will effectively end our date.

“You’re willing to gamble again?” I goad, my face a sheet of ice. “The terms this time will be something that you might not be able to handle,” I explain, resting my hand on the table, my middle finger sliding back and forth over the serrated edge of my steak knife.

I can see the challenge in her eyes.

“What’s the wager?” she presses with suspicion.

“If *I* win, you spend the night with me. If *you* win, I will have Luca drive you home and your debt will be considered paid in full.” I wait a beat to say, “If that is what you wish.”

She looks off, staring out the window at an SUV parked along the side street catty-corner to the restaurant. I noticed it pull up. Just like I am aware of the gentleman to my right who keeps staring at my dinner date with drool on his chin. I find it irritably odd that her attention keeps floating back to the

vehicle. I pick up my phone and type out a message to Luca, instructing him to find out who it is sitting in said SUV that is stealing her interest from me.

“If I lose,” she continues, turning back. “I will finish out the night, repaying my debt to you from the lost wager with a smile, although let it be known, it will be a fictitious one, but at least my debt will be repaid, and I won’t be known as the girl who doesn’t pay up. But I will not spend the entire night with you.”

I watch her. Analyzing her. Criticizing the evening and where it went wrong. There is heavy animosity exuding from her. A bitterness I haven’t quite deciphered why it has reared its ugly head. She was sassy and gleefully sexy when she arrived. Now the air is thick with tension.

“What’s your bet?” I sit back in my seat and slowly stroke the thick black hair around my jaw.

“I bet I was the largest size you have ever purchased from that boutique.”

I don’t answer right away. I let her statement, because that is essentially what it is, settle between us. “The largest price tag, yes. If that makes you happy.”

“It doesn’t. I have money.” She looks off again after crumpling her napkin and tossing it on the table. “I could have bought it myself.”

“Yours or your allowance from your brother?” My tone reflects as if she should be ashamed of his generosity but it’s only to get her attention back on me.

“My trust, if you must know,” she snaps after she almost breaks her neck coming back to focus on me. My phone chimes. Joseph’s message comes through loud and clear.

Joseph: It’s her bodyguard.

*Interesting.*

I set my phone down and give her my attention. “I don’t really care. A man’s job is to take care of his family, and his woman. From where I’m

sitting, Cillian has done just that. The true question is, would you have bought the dress yourself?”

“No. I would not have.” She picks up her fork and pushes her food around her plate before setting her fork back down and grabbing for her glass of wine.

I take note that she has barely touched her dinner. “Was your meal not to your liking?” I nod at her plate.

“I lost my appetite.”

“Because of something I said?”

“Because of something you didn’t say.”

“No, giovane cucciolo, you are not the largest size I have bought.”

“Lie,” she mauls her glass of wine, finishing it. “You wouldn’t tell me the truth anyway. Would you? You’re a man who doesn’t like to lose.”

“You are correct. I do not. However, I do not make it a habit of losing. As well as being a man who cares about what comes out of his mouth? Do I seem to you that I would?”

“No.”

“Would you like me to sugarcoat my words to make you happy?”

“No.”

“Good. Then you need to realize that I do not lie. I just told you I will never lie to you. I will not soften my words in order for you to feel better. When stewing over a question make sure you want to know the answer before asking it.”

She stares off once again. Her hands folded in her lap. At this point, I am reprimanding myself for sitting in the public area of the restaurant when we have a standing private, windowless room in the back.

“Tell me, why do you keep looking out the window? Is there something of interest out there?”

“No.”

“Good. Then we can proceed with our evening with no distractions then.”



I lean forward, place my elbows on the table, and raise both my charcoal brows, waiting for her next move.

She picks up her fork and takes in a small mouthful of her food. It appeases me. I offer her more wine. She accepts. We eat in silence for the next few minutes.

When she places her fork down, I ask, "Tell me about yourself."

"Why do you want to know, Demetri? It's not like we will see each other after tonight. Why take interest in my day-to-day?"

"Humor me."

"Okay. I am in love."

Shocked at her confession, I watch her, but my face doesn't show even a hint of irritation. "If you were, you wouldn't be here with me."

"Oh, but I am."

I feel myself getting heated. "Then you are not who I thought you were."

"And that is?"

"A descendant of her brother's morals." I place my napkin on the table and shift my chair back, noticing the shift in her boldness. The tough veneer she thinks she needs to have with me cracks. I stand and wave the server over before plunging my hand into my suit pocket and pulling out a wad of cash. Lilly practically runs to me at my request. Haven's eyes watch our interaction. Lilly is a stunning woman. Her interest in me is noticeable. I hand her a handful of bills, telling her we are finished, and then turn to Haven and gesture for her to follow with the flip of two fingers.

"Ballet."

I turn back. "Excuse me?"

"My love interest. It's ballet." Her eyes are honest, but there is a hint of mirth behind them.

I stare down at her. Watching her. Then I retake the steps back to the table and place my fisted hands next to her place setting as I hover above her. "Playing games with me would not be in your best interest, young lady. I

love playing games, it's an artform for me, but I can assure you, my games are not the ones you have ever played before. Watch that fresh mouth of yours or you will find my cock buried in it." Her eyes widen, shocked, appalled at my candid vulgarity. She flicks her blown pupils over mine with agitation, but I also witness the curiosity that flares. Her pupils intensify when she takes in my intensity, becoming darker, arousal budding behind innocent shadows. Her mouth parts simultaneously and takes in a fruitless breath. The glistening soft tissue just inside her bottom lip makes my dick jerk. "Are you finished with your meal?" She wordlessly nods. "Then get your ass up. I won the bet. You're mine for the evening." I lift my hand and place my index finger under the point of her chin. Her lips stay parted, almost as if she is in awe, and I can't help but run the pad of my thumb over the plump ridge of her bottom lip and caress the soft tissue inside her mouth. I only allow myself a moment. Just one. The visions of her on her knees in front of me with the same doe eyed look is too much to bear. With a quick exit of my thumb, I force her mouth closed with the tip of my index finger. "Unless you would like me to finger fuck you in front of your admirer, I suggest you keep it closed." I nod to the guy who hasn't taken his eyes off her and is now watching our interaction with rapt attention.

I hold out my hand and wait. She stands from her seat still gazing up at me and places her palm in mine. Before I can take a step, her breathy voice rushes out and blurts, "Did you speak to my brother or are you just assuming he would be okay with us?"

"Us?" I turn back, smirking. "Do I look like a man who asks for permission, Haven?" I hold back my humor at her cuteness.

"No. No, you do not."

"Then stop asking questions you already know the answers to." I lean down getting so close to her ear, my lips brush the fine hairs on her pierced lobe. "You can presume I did if that would help you sleep better. But trust me, you will sleep just fine tonight."

CHAPTER  
TWELVE

H AVEN

“WHAT ARE YOU DOING?” I anxiously question as Demetri starts to swiftly move me through the restaurant. He doesn’t answer, and the energy he holds my hand with is overpowering.

He stops next to a table with two men who are enjoying their dinner. With his free hand, he leans down and places his fist next to the man’s drink, and looms over him while his other still holds a firm grip on mine. He says something to the man, but I can’t hear what is said. Judging by the deep rumble of his voice, it was not a pleasant greeting. He glances over his shoulder and smirks the most seductive simper I have ever seen on a man, but it’s the smoldering authority in his eyes that holds me captive in my place. It’s almost demonic. I shiver inside and fear for the man when Demetri turns his attention back to him. With a confidence I have never seen before, he picks up the man’s drink and swallows the amber liquid. I’m speechless, waiting for the explosion, and bewildered that both men have not said a word to Demetri about his abrupt behavior. I nervously fidget in my spot and glance around. The patrons of the restaurant have now stopped eating and are

watching the interaction. I observe with anxiety, shifting in my spot.

“Demetri,” I whisper under my broken breath, tugging on his hand, hoping to get his attention off the man and onto me.

He rises to his full intimidating height and glances over his shoulder. The smirk is now gone and replaced with a scowl.

“He was just looking. It’s no big deal.” I try to pacify what I assume is the man’s lingering stares Demetri was referring to, not really knowing if the man was staring at me but trying to defuse the situation in any way.

“Were you or were you not sitting at my table with me as my date?”

“I-I was.”

“Then tell me, was it disrespectful of him to ogle you while you were sitting with me?”

As soon as the words leave my mouth, I know I messed up. “You just eye screwed the waitress while I was sitting at your table as your date. What’s the difference?”

His shoulders expand, inflating with a tension I feel in his hand still clasped over mine. He turns back to the guy who has slid down in his seat and enlightens him. “Today is your lucky day. If I didn’t have to educate my delectable date, I would have taught you a lesson in manners instead.”

I swallow the lump in my throat, nervousness taking over because the Demetri I have had my encounters with is not this man holding my hand and chastising me with just his eyes.

He turns back to the man and knocks twice on their table with a meaty knuckle in haste before he turns away and rapidly pulls me across the restaurant and through the kitchen doors.

As Demetri pulls me away, I hear the man mutter something under his breath. I can’t help but internally chastise him for being so stupid and challenging him, but Demetri continues walking, so I assume the guy got lucky and Demetri didn’t hear him.

I am hauled through the swinging doors with my heart lodged in my

throat. I'm maneuvered to where Demetri wants me and orders me to stay. The stainless steel counter holding up my frame is cold and sterile, only adding to the foreboding thickness suffocating the air in the sweltering kitchen.

Demetri marches towards the chef with heavy, very angry, precise steps. The chef, who is chopping a huge bunch of carrots into small pieces with a meat cleaver stops, looking terrified when he sees Demetri coming his way. He shrinks back, unsure of the anger exuding from this brute of a man.

"Was your meal not to your satisfaction, sir?"

Demetri doesn't answer. He grabs the largest knife from the magnetic rail and then goes to the chopping block and snatches the poultry scissors.

I take a step away from the counter, ready to run as panic starts to seep in.

"Don't you move."

I stop dead in my tracks, frozen in my spot, my spine stiffening at his thick foreboding tone. I'm not sure if he is talking to me because he isn't looking at me, but something inside tells me he is. My heart is erratically slamming against my ribs as I take another tentative step, watching him from over my shoulder. His head jerks up and pins me in my spot as he points the tip of the knife at me.

"I didn't mean to... I-I—" I hold my hands up trying to de-escalate the situation.

"Domenico, your meal was perfection as always," he compliments the chef, but his eyes are locked on mine, the knife now settled at his side. "You can continue your preparations and overlook the next few minutes."

"Yes, sir." The chef I now know as Domenico turns back to his carrots like some crazy man is not stalking through his kitchen towards a woman half his size with a sharp knife and scissors.

Lifting my chin, I stand my ground. I meet his glare head-on but there is nothing I can do to stop my bottom lip from trembling. Inside, my ribs are being battered and bruised by the vicious thudding of my racing heart.

He steps up to me, standing directly in front of me, and looks down his perfectly once-broken nose. His chest is a solid stature of immobile strength whereas mine is rising and falling at a reckless speed.

“You are even more beautiful aroused.”

I jerk at his words, becoming a statue. The only thing I can do is swallow the saliva that has pooled at the base of my throat. Does he not understand? I am not aroused. I am scared.

“I am not turned on,” I challenge his assumption then clear my throat as if the words hurt me to say.

He leans in, the tip of his nose touching mine. He tilts his head slightly to the right like he is going to kiss me then holds steady, inspecting me. There is a moment. Just one moment where I wonder what it would be like to be devoured by a man so powerful. That moment passes almost instantly when the door to the kitchen bursts open and the man Demetri spoke to before pulling me inside the kitchen is being dragged through. His thrashing body is forcefully urged through the swinging door by Luca and another guy.

I jump at the flurry of movement. Before I can move away, Demetri’s hand jerks me back to his side. The commotion behind him doesn’t waver his locked gaze on me. His earthy blue-green eyes swirl with dangerous intent. It’s almost as if the rich saturated green color of the earth after days of rain is churning in his left eye and the royal blue of his right eye is calling me with such a force, it’s almost as if the world is compressing and consuming me between land and sky.

“You are. And it turns me the fuck on.” He frees my arm from his grip and orders, “Don’t. Move.” Then he turns his back to me and strolls over to where the guy is forcefully being held face down against the stainless steel counter.

I glance over at the chef. He’s cutting the carrots as if nothing illegal is about to transpire in his kitchen, but I know different.

“Let him up,” Demetri orders, flicking the knife up twice in gesture.

The guy pops up like he's ready to fight. Then he stills when he sees Demetri standing there with the butcher knife.

"Man, you're taking this too far," the guy shouts.

"Am I?" Demetri asks with such a calmness that it scares me.

"Yeah, man. You are." He wipes his brow, the fear streaming through his body making him sweat profusely.

"Do you have a woman?" Demetri, again, calmly asks, cupping his hands in front of him, the knife in plain sight for the guy to see.

"Yeah."

"So, not only did you disrespect me and mine, but you also disrespected yours."

"I was just checking her out. She's..."

"Go on." Demetri twists his head when the guy trails off. "Finish your sentence," he urges with a head nod.

"She's beautiful, man." He stupidly looks around Demetri's shoulder when Luca releases his hold.

Demetri half turns towards me, meeting my gaze from over his shoulder, then gives my body a once over. "That she is," he agrees, holding my gaze a moment longer.

"Look, man, I meant no disrespect."

Demetri slowly turns back to him only after lingering on me a moment longer, making the man wait, but before he turns fully around, I see the shift in his eyes. The blue becomes so dark it's almost black and the green speckles swirl with violent intent.

"Demetri, he didn't do anything wrong," I barely whisper, grabbing his elbow, trying to save the guy from any kind of brutality. I take a step into him but stop when he instructs Luca to hold the man's hand down on the counter.

The guy yells, thrashing his body, fighting for his freedom. Before I know what is happening, the tip of the man's finger is lying lifelessly next to what is left of his now bloody stub.

“He didn’t, giovane cucciolo?” Demetri turns back to me. His warning brow lifts when he’s fully facing me. His careless disregard for the man’s muffled screaming about his lost fingertip is appalling and nauseating. “You see,” he continues, “what you saw from me earlier was a planned show of disrespect. My survey of Lilly was brought on by your lack of appreciation, but more so, your gloating at the fact that you wore another dress than the offered dress I purchased for you. I do not play games, young pup.” He turns to look over his shoulder at Luca who is holding his hand over the guy’s mouth. “Release him.” The other guy who came in with Luca stands there watching as if he can’t believe what just happened. “Oh, and…” He nods at Luca and waits for whatever information he is asking for.

“Jeffrey.” Luca throws the guy’s wallet on the counter next to the lifeless tip of his finger.

“Jeffrey,” Demetri repeats with disgust. “Jeffery, if your friend has something to say, he can lose a full digit.” He glances at the speechless guy. “I suggest you have a talk with him and explain how that would not be in his best interest or yours, seeing I now know the residence where you make love to your wife.”

I watch Luca throw a hand towel at the guy then he viciously shoves him toward the swinging exit.

The next thing I know, my body is being jerked forward and the rip of material sounds through the kitchen. My mouth opens in a gasp as I realize what just happened.

“You just ripped my dress!”

“Leave,” he orders, holding the knife at the neckline of my outfit.

I stupidly think he is talking to me. I jerk away and try to take a step back to get out of his hold. I’m ready to run, run fast and far. Good looks be damned. Sex appeal forgotten. This man is a psychopath.

He pulls me back. “Not you, young pup. You are going to quickly learn that I always get what I want.”



I'm speechless. Stunned in my spot. Frightened to my core. The swoosh from the swinging door to the kitchen catches my attention. Luca and the other guy vanish, leaving me with a madman and the kitchen staff that blatantly turned a blind eye to a man's finger being severed.

Split seconds pass. My body jerking forward brings my attention back to Demetri. The neckline of my dress hangs loosely at my chest. In shock, I look up at his piercing blue-greens and stammer when I see the intense look in his eyes. "W-What the hell are you doing?"

"Showing you exactly what kind of man you are going to spend the evening with." He wrenches the knife down, shredding the white material of my dress into thin strips. I chastise myself as I stand there, spellbound. My body shudders as his fingers daftly finagle the satin material. The back of his knuckles brush the skin of my chest with each swipe, twist, and loop. All the way down my body, he rips and shreds my dress then ties it in a messy knot down the left side of my body.

It's becoming a disastrous masterpiece you would see on a couture runway.

I fight him every step of the way, but it's wasted energy.

He leaves open holes, cutouts showing small slivers of my pale skin. I shuffle on my feet with each tug, exasperated at how I'm being handled but also unexpectantly enthralled at how I am being managed. No one has or would dare touch me this way. Cillian would murder any man for this kind of mistreatment of his sister.

The fact of the matter is in this crazy moment, Demetri is stimulating something inside me that has been kept silent.

Demetri isn't just any man, and he isn't a man who would concern himself with what my brother would say or do. He said it himself. He doesn't ask for permission. Which means he will never beg for forgiveness either.

I peek over at the cooking staff, unsure of how I look and what parts of my full figure body are showing. I squirm, still fighting, but not one of them

is looking our way. It's as if we're not even standing here.

"You just cut off a man's finger," I mutter in shocked haste.

"The tip. Not the finger," he corrects, like it's not a big deal.

"You can't do that." My arms flail around as I'm jerked with each shred of material. "Will you stop!" I slap at his hands.

"I just did," he continues like I didn't just demand he stop ripping my dress.

"Demetri, you could go to jail."

"Don't insult me. Jail is for little boys." He continues cutting, ripping, and tying my dress with determination.

And I'm letting him.

I suck in a breath. Has this man just admitted to being in prison? What the hell am I thinking? He had a knife at my throat and a pair of scissors at my mid-section. He's slicing and dicing centimeters from my pale skin. My white dress has become his virginal sacrifice. He just cut off someone's finger. Now he's pulverizing my dress. Am I crazy? What is wrong with me?

"You've been to prison?" I boldly and abruptly inquire.

He stops all movement and stands to his full height, staring at me like I'm the biggest mystery. Amused astonishment fills his handsome face. "This can't be true," he mumbles, shaking his head. "You can't be true."

"What?"

"This fucking innocent."

"I'm not." I shoulder the hurt, scrutinizing him with a bravado I don't have.

"You are. I just wasn't aware of how much you really are."

"I'm really not." I try to fight for something unknown rearing its ugly head inside me. It bothers me that he thinks I am so innocent. Why? I don't know. This man is regal in stature, and I'm positive he is experienced beyond the normal realm of a typical sex life between two consenting adults.

My body is suddenly still. Demetri takes a step back and looks over his

work. I am admittedly shocked at what my dress looks like. From what I can see, it actually looks... good, great even.

I'll never tell him that, though.

He watches me for my reaction. I run my hands over the material, touching the skin that has now shown itself due to his precise cutting.

Slowly, I glance up at him, speechless.

“Now lose the panties.”

“Excuse me?”

“Excused. This once only. Lose the panties or I will lose them for you.”

“I will do no such thing!”

One second, I am looking up at him in shock at his demand, and the next, I am gazing down at the man who just ripped my dress to shreds in shock as his skillful hands run up the length of my calves.

“What are you doing?” I screech.

“I will never ask you twice. Once is all you will get from me. If you chose to disobey, then you chose the consequence instead of the choice.”

“There was no choice!”

“Exactly. I want the panties gone.” He slides his hands further up my legs, his thumbs caressing the soft skin of my inner thighs just above my knee.

“Stop!” I slap at his hands which are doing all kinds of strange things to my lower stomach.

He waits, watching me.

My inner good girl is waging a war against the unfamiliar wayward girl making her initial appearance.

I lean down, shifting my dress as best I can, trying to be discreet as I shimmy my lace panties down my legs. I stumble a bit trying to get them over my heels. Demetri reaches out and holds my elbow to steady me. His face is unreadable when I glance up at him from his touch. When I free the material from the spike of my heel and stand straight, Demetri is waiting with

a held-out hand.

My wide eyes flick from his demanding gaze to his expectant hand and back. “Absolutely not,” I balk, flabbergasted at his audacity.

Silent, his hand hovers midair, waiting.

The intensity of the moment feels like minutes are passing, but the reality is, it’s only tense, demanding seconds.

My inner self screams, reprimanding myself as my arm starts to move. I drop my panties in the palm of his hand. The corner of his lip lifts with a satisfying smirk. Then he lifts my panties to his nose and inhales deeply.

My mouth drops open with a gasp.

My eyes widen as a crimson blush creeps across my skin.

He reaches up and holds my garment under my nose. “Do you smell that?”

I close my eyes, embarrassed at his boldness, and I start to take a step back.

“Open your eyes, young pup.” He grabs my waist and jerks me flush against his body.

I find myself lost in his glassy gaze.

“That is the smell of your arousal, innocent one. That scent is your scent. A fragrance as rare and as unique as a snowflake. No two are alike. Yours is as decadent as they come. A lethal combination with your beauty.” He pulls back and shoves my panties in his pocket. “Now, let’s go before I waver on the discipline I pride myself on.”

CHAPTER  
**THIRTEEN**

**D** EMETRI

I LEAN IN. “Tell me, how does that breeze feel on that bare pussy of yours?” I tap her ass as she jumps into motion and climbs inside the SUV. Her mouth hangs open for the third time tonight as she plops her bare bottom against my leather seat. I wink at her then reach across her body and grab her seatbelt. “Close your mouth, young pup, before I lay my dick on your tongue.” I snap her seatbelt in with a harsh click.

“You are... You can’t... You are so...” She’s flustered, flapping her lips over dead sentences.

I gruffly chuckle at her loss of words as I slam the door closed before she can finish formulating a sentence. Walking behind the vehicle, I have somewhat of a smile on my face as I scan the area with a skilled eye. I need to be more diligent and keep a close watch, especially now.

“Crude. That was—”

“Honesty.” I cut off her ramble with the truth as I slide into the driver’s seat.

“Are you taking me home?”

“Do you want to go home?” I question, pushing the button to start the

SUV. It's not a request I will permit but I ask only out of curiosity to hear what her answer will be. I have no intention of taking her home.

I turn my attention to her when she gives no reply. She is strikingly beautiful. I don't blame the guy in the restaurant for admiring her. If she was on someone's arm and I saw her walk by, I would regard her with interest too. Her body, those full curves, the way she moves with a gracefulness so pure it should be illegal in every country. That would be the only law I would abide by, locking her away in my basement and throwing away the key. What's mine is mine and all that. What little Ms. Haven doesn't realize is that she has already been given to me. Devine intervention.

But it's her innocence. It's something I wasn't privy to, wasn't aware of the true depth of it when I was initially introduced to her. I am exceptional at reading people. Her naivety caught me off guard.

She is an aphrodisiac. A straight up shot of juice into my mainline.

To say I'm attracted to her is an immense understatement.

I pull out into traffic, checking the rearview mirror to make sure no one pulls out behind me besides Luca and Drago, a made man we have allotted to work under Luca. We have a tight circle, one that is held together by trust. Drago is new. Not new to our world but unfamiliar to us. Only time will tell if he can be trusted. It seems as if that time will be a lengthy one because Drago is quiet.

When Luca is guarding Lilah, Antonio's wife, Drago is sent on minuscule jobs to prove his worth or he is with me so I can watch his performance. No one, and I mean no one, gets close to the boss' wife without proving their worth in weight.

I have never had a significant other in my life, nor did I want one. There has never been a defining moment in my years as an adult where I wanted to be that man to someone, but I do understand my boss' possessiveness all too well.

Once we reach the light half a block from my exited parking spot, I notice

the SUV Haven was watching pull out behind Luca. I have to wonder if Haven's big brother sent the bodyguard to keep watch or if the bodyguard felt the responsibility to take it upon himself. Either way, it will be addressed.

"You don't plan on taking me home, do you? Even if I said I wanted to, you wouldn't, would you?"

"No."

"Then where are you taking me?"

"Does it matter?"

"It might."

"Museum, night club, or sex club?" I offer all three to see what she would say.

"What?"

"You choose. Be prepared though, if you choose museum, I'm going to be bored. To make it more exciting for myself, I am going to have to think of something to do to liven up the time. Not sure your innocence can handle that so soon."

"That feels like a challenge."

"It's a promise. You'll have a better chance of me controlling myself in a club."

"A man with no self-control is a man not worthy of trust."

"If I had no self-control, young pup, I would have had you on your knees sucking my cock in my boss's pool house the first night we met when you decided to disrespect a made man by addressing him by his first name."

Her swallowed gasp makes my insides smile. "You're disgusting."

"Never put your lips on a dick then, I assume?" I comment, knowing the answer already.

She goes quiet. Her gaze floats to the passenger window. I can feel her indecisive uneasiness. A full minute later, she utters, "Museum."

Challenge accepted.



“MR. CARBONE, IT’S A PLEASURE.”

“Gabriel.” I reach out with the hand not holding Haven’s and shake the hand of the security guard who opened the museum at my request since it is after-hours.

“I’m the only one here tonight.”

“My request?”

“Done.”

I give Haven’s hand a tug and walk us through the back hall, making our way to the front. Room by room, her head swivels as we pass, but with the lights still off, she can’t see much.

“You really did take me to a museum,” she states softly in amazement.

I stop and look over my shoulder at her. “Is that not what you asked for?”

“I did but I didn’t think you would. You like the arts?”

“You can say that.” I half smile, half smirk.

Just as she says, “Thank you for bringing me.”

The lights come on and lower down to barely a dim. The flash of brightness was just enough for her to see her surroundings. Her intake of breath has my insides amused. “What?” Her head swivels. “You said you were taking me to a museum.”

“I did.”

“This is *not* a museum.”



“It is. You did not specify what kind of museum you wanted to visit so I brought you to the one I wouldn’t be bored at.”

“This is a sex store.” She glances around at all the eventful sightings.

“It is not. It is history. It is the sexual culture of years passed. The Museum of Sex is education on the years of everchanging human sexuality.”

She turns back, placing herself directly in front of me and admires the image in front of us. A woman in bondage laid out so elegantly has her attention. I stay silent, letting her soak it all in.

“That looks like it hurts,” she mutters after a few quiet moments of being absorbed by the image.

“If not done correctly, it would.”

“You’ve”—she nods her head towards the figure—“done that to someone?”

I grin, leaving her question unanswered and ask my own. “Have you?”

“I would never.” Her breathy answer makes her ample chest rise and fall.

“Why is that?” I question, turning her back around to face the provocative picture. I wait a moment, letting her soak it in before leaning down and getting a hair’s breadth away from her pierced, diamond studded lobe. While she’s wrapped up, thoroughly intrigued by the beautiful vision before her, I whisper, “Look at her. Look at the beauty of her body. She is captured in the wrath of her partner, giving him full control.” I slide my hands over her full hips, slipping my thumbs inside her now reconfigured dress and caress her exposed skin as I step up and brush my body against hers.

“There’s giving control and then there is relinquishing it altogether. She is vulnerable. Exposed. At his mercy.” Her breathing become heavier with each stroke of my thumbs.

“Exactly.”

She snaps out of her enamored spell and takes two steps away, placing herself in front of the next picture.

“It’s an aphrodisiac. Isn’t it? You can’t stop admiring, can you? Have you

pictured what you would look like all trussed up?”

“I would not be as beautiful as she.”

“On the contrary. I think you would exceed her beauty.”

She snorts her disbelief.

I step up behind her once again. “Your vulnerability would show through the eroticism of the image, only making it more alluring to the viewer or the aggressor of the art.”

She stares at the picture a moment longer and then shuffles her feet to the next image. A woman on her knees in bondage is spared no mercy with her arms captured and seized by a leather strap, stretched out in front of her to unnatural lengths while her ass is in the air and on full display.

She stays silent. So do I as I follow her to the next image. Before she can turn back to me at the last display, I walk into the next room, leaving her to linger on her own. Her small steps are hesitant, but after a few moments, she follows.

Good girl.

“I’m staring at animals in a way I never thought I would. Do you not find that disturbing?”

“It’s nature. At least they are unapologetic in their needs.”

“They don’t know better. They’re animals.” She scoffs.

“Are you saying a threesome would never exist in your world?”

“I’m saying I feel like I just walked in on an Animal Planet episode.”

I have to chuckle at that.

“Have you ever?” She gestures towards the display of three fornicating animals.

“Have I ever participated in a sexual act with more than one person?”

“Don’t play games. You know what I’m asking.” She side eyes me.

“How about yourself?”

“Not willing to answer the question I assume?”

“Not sure you can handle the answer.” I grasp her elbow and walk her

into the next room.

“Your sex life is not for me to handle, Mr. Carbone.”

“Then why ask?”

“Curiosity, I suppose.” She stops short when she sees every color, size, and shape of dildos mounted on the wall.

I step up behind her and slowly finger my way into her dress, grasping the exposed skin of her hips. She stiffens but relaxes after a moment. “Ever use one?” I whisper next to her ear.

She stays silent.

“Tell me, if you had to choose, which one would you pick to use on yourself?” Her breathing picks up as her hips shift in my hands. “Show me which one you have at home hidden beneath your bed.”

“I d-don’t...” I visibly see her throat bob with her swallow.

“When you touched yourself. Felt the inner lining of your cunt throb when you came on your fingers, who were you thinking about?”

Her audible gasp at my word usage makes my lips twitch. Her breath is a shudder of unsure excitement. I pull my hand from inside her ripped dress and slide my fingers up the curve of her waist and rest them on her bare shoulders. My thumbs play in the curled hair at the nape of her neck while my fingers caress the skin at the center of her collarbone. It’s a position of power and she has yet to remove herself from my touch.

“Touch one.”

“What? No.”

“What’s your favorite color?”

“What color do you think it is?” she counters.

“Purple. But it could also be yellow.” I slide my hand down her arm to her hand and lace my fingers through hers.

Lifting her hand to the display, I wrap her fingers around a purple vibrator. She is hesitant at first, like a virgin touching a cock for the first time. Her timidity is a turn on. She is not pushy nor fake like some women I have

encountered. She is quiet, innocent in her gestures, almost too innocent, but it's refreshing and a challenge to see if I can bring out her inner diva, the woman she becomes when her past partners have ignited the fire inside her, turning her on.

I squeeze her fingers beneath mine while my thumb still rubs the fine curls on the back of her neck with my other hand. She smells divine. The scent of her arousal rising and mixing with her lightly flowered perfume makes me hard.

"Tell me, what do you think this one would feel like inside you?" I breathe the question next to her ear.

"I don't know."

"Close your eyes." I wait until she does. "Good girl. Now picture this penetrating your opening. How those sensitive nerves at your entrance beg with tingles for that first initial deep plunge of a hard cock. Is this one big enough to satisfy you or do you need more?" I move her hand to a larger one and wrap our fingers around its girth. "Do you like it fast? Or do you like it slow?" I loosen my grip on her fingers, shocking her when I spit on her hand and spread my saliva over her palm with my tongue. Then I reconnect her hand with the vibrator and slide it up and down the rubbery veined shaft. She's speechless, with closed eyes and heavy pants, so I push further. "When you get yourself off, what do you think about? What scenarios play in your head? Are you the good girl getting railed by some unknown stranger or are you the bad girl driving your hips down on a man who lays beneath you, pledging his love? Tell me, giovane cucciolo. Which one are you?"

Her hand springs open beneath mine just as her eyes follow. She steps out of my embrace and to the side. Her chest heaves as she licks her lips, collecting herself.

I grin. "Can't handle it?"

"More like don't want to."

I cross my arms over my chest and survey her for a moment. "That is the

first true lie you have let pass your lips when you have been in my presence.”

She ignores me, twists in her spot, and heads down the hallway to a room so black it feels like the dead of night. Her feet falter, the unknown too scary for her to enter. I place my hand on the small of her back and walk her inside. I flick a switch just inside the door. Dim lights illuminate the pictures on the walls once we get farther inside. The room is set up as a lounge, almost a replica of Antonio’s private lounge at Temptations. It’s dark and moody, sexy in a way that sparks an inner desire to awaken.

“This feels like a club in here without the music.”

I sit on the black velvet couch and pull out a smoke. I watch her walk around the room, taking everything in. Her body moves with such grace. It’s only when I fluster her does she become unsteady. She turns back and glances at me over her shoulder as I blow a grey, billowing puff of smoke from my lungs. We hold each other’s gaze before she turns away. There is no doubt in my mind if she were someone else, I would lay her down right here, strip her bare, and make her come. But as I watch her move, something tells me not to. There is an innocence to her that twists my insides. Something so pure, it would be a shame to tarnish its glow.

“Fuck.” I drop my head at the realization and run my hand over the back of my neck.

It hits me, hard. I may have said it before but never gave it any more thought except for the fact that she was mine to do with as I please. She is the epitome of what I lost deep down in my soul. She is wholesome and fresh, untarnished by scarred hands. A virgin in white with no blemishes to speak of. “She has never even been touched by a man,” I mumble to myself.

“What?” She turns back as I stand.

Clearing my throat, I ask, “You ready to go?” I need to take her away from all this. I need to remove myself from all these erotic images.

“Why? Can’t handle it?” She throws back my own words.

“Baby girl, if you only knew.”

“Knew what? That you want me? I do. But you can’t have me.” She smiles with a confidence she doesn’t hold.

“Little do you know.”

“Meaning?” She twists in her spot and walks towards me with the sultry grace of an experienced woman. Which I now fully understand she is not. This is an act. The museum has raised her sexual awakening, and I would all but be there for it, but she would not be able to handle what I would give her.

“What are you doing?” I ask as she stands in front of me, asking for something without verbalizing it.

She hesitantly takes another step, brushing her body up against mine.

“Don’t start something you can’t finish.”

“Who says I can’t?” Her voice is low as she runs her hand down my dress shirt and gazes up into my eyes.

She leans in and brushes her lips over the skin on my neck just below my beard. It takes every bit of strength I have to hold back. But when her hand daringly finds its way to the top of my belt and slips her nervous finger inside, I snap. I grab the back of her neck and hip simultaneously, flipping her around to face the couch and plunging her body down on the spot I just warmed with my body. Her gasp is loud, unsure, her eyes wide as she views me from over her shoulder. I flip her back to face me and shift her shredded dress up her thighs and expose her to me. The bare skin of her pussy is swollen and glistening with her arousal.

“Fuck.” I grumble deep in my chest. “Open.”

She watches me, her thighs stiff where my hands tensely rest in waiting. “I am going to ask you a few questions. All you will do is nod. Understood?”

“Okay.”

I lift a brow in warning.

“You are a virgin, correct?”

Her head dips.

“You have never been touched by a man at all, have you?”

Her hair moves, the curls springing to life with the subtle shake of her head.

“Your body has never been spoiled by another?” I question that part, but I already know the answer as she shakes her head once more.

I watch her, read her body, decipher the emotions behind her eyes, then tell her, “I am going to put my mouth on your pussy, my tongue inside you, and I am going to bring that heat festering in your loins to the surface. You can hold it all inside, but if you open your mouth and let it out, it will feel so much better.” I shift in my spot, adjust my raging hard-on, and slide my hands up her thighs. With both thumbs, I run them over both lips, caressing the smooth, soft skin. I watch her muscles contract at the contact. Her gaze is on me. Not my hands. I dip one thumb and run it up the tender tissue of her insides until I get to her swollen nub. Her body tenses, then shakes a bit at the new sensation. Her arousal pours out of her, staining the black material beneath her.

“Fuck, you are gorgeous.” I massage her a little harder, a little faster. Her eyes ignite with a glow so bright it’s like releasing a handful of fireflies into the dark of night that have been kept in captivity. It’s hypnotizing and disturbing. Especially for a man like me. “Close your eyes,” I order, wanting to disconnect. When she listens and her eyes flutter closed, I praise her. “Good girl.” Her lips part when I slide my finger inside her, the tight channel almost too much for me to bear. I yank her hips closer to the edge and bury my face, losing myself in her sweet scent. She comes with a breathless gasp. I stroke her until her legs stop shaking, becoming tense when the warm tingle subsides, and the stinging intensity begins. Her eyes spring open. One orgasm for the night is sufficient. I don’t think I can handle giving her another without burying myself inside her.

CHAPTER  
**FOURTEEN**

**D** EMETRI

“WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME?”

“Home?”

“Why?”

“I have a meeting.”

She stays quiet, her gaze floating to the side window as I drive through the city streets. The hand resting on her thigh plays with the frayed material of what is left of her dress. When I pull up to the gates in front of where she is staying with her brother, I glance over at her while waiting to be let through. She seems unsure, uneasy, almost sad if I am reading her body language right. Definitely not how she should be feeling after I just gave her her first orgasm. The iron bar’s part, and I pull through. When I come to a stop at the top of the circular driveway, she jumps out of the car and races towards the front door. Anger burns in my chest, and I jump out right behind her, demanding she stop in her tracks. Before she can hit the first step, I grip her arm and whirl her back around to face me.

“What’s your issue? And let me make myself clear, I don’t do sulking.”

“You have a meeting. Our date is over. Good night, Mr. Carbone.” She



twists her arm, trying to get me to release her.

“Not so fast.” I huff with agitation, stepping into her when a pair of headlights flood us in a blinding glow.

The door to the vehicle jerks open and bounces back from the force. I already know who is going to jump out. He’s been following us all night. I reach around and grab my gun, letting it rest on my thigh while I wait for his outburst.

“Get your hands off her. Haven, are you alright?” Her bodyguard comes rushing to her defense.

I shift, pulling her closer to my body. “I suggest you mind your business and proceed into the house.”

“She is my business. Answer me, Haven.”

She opens her mouth then snaps it shut when I order, “Don’t you say a word.” I tap my leg twice in warning, catching his attention.

“That’s enough, Finn. Go inside.” A stern voice calls out from the top of the steps.

Taking a moment too long, he glares at me. I take it exactly as it is intended, a silent threat. He should know better. With my eyes now glued on Haven’s, I inform her that it would be best to send her bodyguard away if she knows what is good for him. When she does and he doesn’t listen to her, I turn my attention to our business partner and reaffirm that his bodyguard is two seconds away from finding himself floating in the river. As calm and collected as I am, Haven is the opposite. She is as stiff as a board while I have her clutched in my arms. She slides her eyes over to him. What I see in them is pleading. She is begging him to leave. Begging. It fans the flame inside me. With a quick squeeze of her arm, she pulls her attention back to me. I lean down and growl, “You wanna beg someone with those pretty eyes? Then you beg me for my cock when I have you on your knees.” Her head jerks back in shock. Finn stomps off. My line of sight breaks from Haven’s only to follow him to the side of the house where a carriage house sits

adjacent to the main estate. Cillian's footsteps catch my attention when I hear them scrape against the flagstone. "McKittrick," I call, assuming he is retreating into the house. "We need to have a conversation," I inform him. Then I turn my attention back to Haven, still clutched in my arms. "Go inside." She huffs, shakes her head slightly, and damn near rolls her eyes before catching sight of mine. "Do not push me. You will not like your punishment." Her mouth hangs open, flabbergasted. "Close your mouth, giovane cucciolo. I don't think big bro would like watching what I will do to it."

"I don't think he would like his baby sister being called a dog, either."

"You also didn't think he would be okay with me taking you out." I release her with a smirk.

"I know my brother."

"Not as well as you think you do. Now go to bed. It's late." I pat her ass, sending her on her way as we walk through the front door.

"You are an arrogant—"

"Better watch," I warn, pointing my index finger at her as I head in the direction of her brother's office, and she rushes up the stairs to what I assume is her bedroom.

I step into his office at the back of the house. It's a boring library not fitting of the man. "You plan on staying in the States, you better fix this space up to suit the man behind the desk."

"You here to speak about interior decorating, Carbone? Because if so, I got that handled."

"I hope this isn't the new you? If so, you should fire your hired hand."

"What do you want, Carbone?"

"Your sister."

"You already have her."

"That I do. What I don't have is the knowledge I should have been given." He watches me. "She is as innocent as the first driven snowfall."

“That a problem?”

“The problem is that I should have been informed.”

“Would you have handled her any differently?”

“No.”

“I didn’t think so. Why are you in my office?” He stands and heads to the bar cart just off to his right. Tilting the bottle in a gesture for me to join him, I nod my acceptance. I don’t give him an answer. I wait. He hands me my drink then explains, “She’s a good girl. Intelligent. Smart as a whip with a tongue that will sever anyone who hurts someone she loves. She is devoted to family and more loyal than all my soldiers combined.”

“But?”

“But she has been confined. She has had the best education money can buy. And even though she went to college, she was still sheltered per my father’s rules. She doesn’t even know I went on vacation for a bit while she was at school. Finn was then and has always been her only bodyguard. The typical college life was null and void for her. Finn made sure of it. He had strict orders from my father to not let her engage. Anytime she did or someone would approach, they were warned off or taken care of. Although there may have been a time or two when she got some freedom.” I see the crook of a smile as if he is proud.

“Why?”

“She was the apple of Da’s eyes. He didn’t want her tainted by the world we reside in. Or following in footsteps that were less pure. He thought she would be used against us. Her beauty, I’m sure you have noticed, is captivating, and her innocence is an aphrodisiac to any red-blooded man.”

“The current situation at hand doesn’t make much sense then.”

“It does. Trust me, it does.”

“Trust is not in my vocabulary, McKittrick.”

“Do you respect your boss’ orders?”

“I respect his position, the man that built an empire, and the man that kept

his word. Therefore, I respect him. If I didn't, I wouldn't be here having this conversation with you."

"Fair enough."

I swallow the golden liquid he offered, then I inform him that he better have my drink of choice on hand in the future before stepping out of his office.

With a quick jab that I let go, he says, "Maybe you should start drinking wine for the Italian heritage you have instead of the vodka."

"My ruthless side enjoys the vodka."

I make my way through the long, dark corridor, stopping when I hear soft music come from the steps leading to the basement. It's late, and something tells me my orders weren't obeyed. I take the steps slowly. The soft glow illuminating the basement surface draws me in. *Thinking About You* by HANDS plays. I reach the bottom step and take in the graceful creature floating across the floor. The way she moves, the grace she carries herself with, it all looks so flawless, yet her body is exerting so much energy that the sweat glistens off every inch of her skin. The sports bra she wears is soiled from her exertion and showcases details of her body that should be kept private. The small cotton shorts she is wearing ride up her ample behind, showing the crease between her cheeks and thighs. I lean back and relax against the wall and watch her move while my dick lengthens against my thigh.

Breathtaking.

She is breathtaking.

She is in her own little world. She has no clue I'm standing here, watching her. Nor the fact that she has another admirer across the room who is so mesmerized by her beauty, that he doesn't realize I'm watching him as well.

The song ends and with a launch off the ground and a landing, I can only assume took extraordinary energy to accomplish with so much grace, she sits

in the final position in exhaustion.

“You didn’t obey my orders.” I step out of the shadows. “There will always be consequences to orders not followed, young pup.”

She startles at my voice and jerks her head up. “Demetri...” Her chest heaves for air. “I will never follow any man’s direction when referred to as a dog.”

I crook my finger at her. “Come here, Haven.”

She hesitates only a second before standing to her full height and strutting her sweat soaked, full-figured body towards me. She stops and stands directly in front of me with a lifted, defiant chin. My fingers clutch her jaw. “You want to know what I saw in you tonight?”

“No.”

“You sure about that? I believe you may enjoy my analysis.” She stays silent. “I saw a woman who is fighting to be looked at as an adult. The girl inside still held down by domineering men. An innocent who has been looked after so fiercely, so safeguarded, that she hasn’t experienced life. You’re afraid of your own shadow, young pup.” I hold her gaze. “I also know when I made you come on my tongue, your eyes illuminated like fireflies being set free for the first time.”

Her blush covers her alabaster skin. “You are no different than them.” She boldly stares up at me.

“But I am. You are unsure of me, but you are also drawn to me. You want to listen to my orders but you’re not sure you should because you have only listened to the family members you have trust in. However, you were sassy enough to tell me you were attracted to me while we were in the museum.”

“Why should I trust you? I don’t even know you.”

“There is plenty of time to get to know me. But know this. When I order you to do something, do it without hesitation.”

“You sound just like every other overbearing, controlling, egotistical male with so many insecurities that he has to act like he is secure in himself

by the act he puts on.”

I gruffly chuckle at that. “If I were insecure or had no self-control, I would have broken that virginal seal you have kept in contact tonight.”

“Then why all the orders?”

“Because it is who I am. A dominant man who is only attracted to submissive women. Luckily for the both of us, you are submissive, Haven. Whether you want to believe it or not, you are.” Her gaze floats over mine. I let go of her chin and pull her closer to my body. “You feel that? Put your hand on my cock,” I order as I slide my hand down to the opening of her shorts at her thigh. I back her up against the wall and hold her in place. Her hand cups me with a timidness. My fingers slide underneath the cotton and work their way to her opening. She slides her hand up and down the material of my slacks. “Close your eyes, firefly.” I work my way up her slick skin, her clitoris swollen from earlier and eager for more. Her breathing picks up. Her head drops back against the wall. Her mouth falls open. Small sounds fill her chest.

*That’s it, Haven.*

She is on the cusp of letting go when I lean in and whisper, “Yell loud for your bodyguard, firefly. Let him know who you belong to now.” She freezes at my words. I pull away, repositioning the raging hard-on I have.

“Bastard,” she breathes, puffing through her denied orgasm.

The click of the door closing behind us sounds softly through the room. “If you and your bodyguard have something going on, it ends right fucking now. Understood? I own this body. I now own you. Make sure he knows that. Or I will.”

“I—We don’t. We’re not.” She stutters over her words, shocked that he was in the room watching and exasperated that I didn’t finish getting her off.

I take a step back from her. “Now, do as you were told the first time and go to bed, Haven.” I turn my back on her and walk away, leaving her to her own thoughts at what just transpired before turning back and saying, “And

the next time you call me by my first name, be prepared for the consequences.”

CHAPTER  
**FIFTEEN**

**H**AVEN

MY PHONE RINGS INSISTENTLY. I have ignored my best friend all morning. I know once I get on the phone with her, I will spill everything and I'm not sure I want to do that just yet. I am more than confused about this thing, this... dynamic that is happening between Demetri and me. One moment, I want to run away from him, and the next, I am drawn to him like a bee seeking the comfort of its honey.

I shower and head downstairs for our customary breakfast. However, this morning, Finn is sitting at the table with Ciarán and Cillian already when he usually comes in a little later after his run. My cousin and brother say good morning as they're grabbing for their food, but Finn stays quiet. I shyly glance in his direction. His eyes, lit with fire, are glued to me. Ciarán takes notice of the heat radiating off Finn and the blush creeping across my skin at the embarrassment of Finn watching Demetri manipulate me.

I grab an orange and an apple for later and excuse myself. I don't get too far when Cillian calls me back.

"Where you going?"



“To the gym. Decided I want to get a run in before going out today.”

“I’ll run with you, Haven,” Finn gruffly chimes in, quickly shifting into the bodyguard mode.

“That’s okay. I’m sure you already got your run in earlier. No need for you to do two. I’ll just jump on the treadmill.”

“Don’t be silly. I’m sure you could use the fresh air after last night. I’m surprised you have the energy for a run.”

Shocked, I blurt, “Excuse me?”

“What happened last night?” My brother looks between the two of us.

“Yeah, what happened last night?” My cousin chimes in after my brother questions.

I glare at Finn. “I was dancing most of the night.”

“She was more than that.”

I shoot beams of fire at Finn’s disrespectful hints at something more.

“More?” Cillian questions then looks at me with concern. “You okay, Haven?” He turns in his chair and gives me his full attention.

“I’m fine. Just felt like I needed a good long workout. No need to worry,” I explain, knowing my brother has fears about me relapsing.

“If you’re sure.” He watches me with skepticism.

“I am.” I turn to walk away then turn back. “Hey, Cillian, do you need Ciarán this morning?”

“No. Why? What’s up?”

I turn my attention to my cousin. “You up for a run?”

Finn coughs through the sip of his coffee. “I’ll go with you, Haven.”

“No. You stay. Enjoy your breakfast. Ciarán, are you ready?”

“Yeah, just let me get my runners on.”

“I’ll wait for you outside.” I turn and walk away, leaving Finn to his half spit out coffee and my brother scarfing down his second bagel.

As I’m stretching, Ciarán comes out the door with a cocky smile. “What the hell was that all about, cuz?”

“What?”

“Don’t what me. What was that between you and Finn?”

“Nothing. We had a disagreement.”

“Clearly.”

“You ready?”

“Try and keep up, treadmill queen.” He takes off on a sprint.

“Just because I run on the treadmill doesn’t mean I can’t run in the streets,” I yell, chasing after him.

We ran for a good two hours and once we got back, I collapsed on my bed and slept for hours. I only woke because Ciarán barged into my room and told me to get up and get ready because he was taking me out. He left with Cillian an hour ago for business, but I was to be ready once he got back. It’s already late and I’m ready to go back to bed. I leave my sweats on and head to the kitchen. I just have to change into my dress once Ciarán returns.

I’m rummaging through the refrigerator when I feel a presence behind me. Just as I’m turning, I hear, “He doesn’t deserve you.”

“Feckin hell, Finn. You scared the shit out of me.”

“My apologies.”

“Why aren’t you with Cillian and Ciarán?”

“I was needed somewhere else.”

“Oh.” I pull the strawberries and whipped cream from the refrigerator and place them on the counter. There is an awkward tension in the air and I’m not sure how to handle it. Finn and I have always been so easygoing with each other.

“Finn...” I start to say but he stops me.

“I apologize for my actions. This morning at breakfast, I was out of line, and last night... I’m sorry. I heard you down in the basement. I went down to check on you but when I got downstairs, he was there. I wanted to make sure he didn’t hurt you.” He stays quiet for a moment, struggling for something to say. “I got caught up. I should have left, but I don’t trust him.”

“I’m an adult, Finn.”

“I’m well aware.”

“I don’t know Demetri well enough to say he wouldn’t hurt me, but I can say I’m smart enough to know what to do if the time comes.”

“He’s not a nice guy, Haven.”

“I never thought he was.” I think back to last night when he chopped off the guy’s finger. “He’s very... demanding.”

He mumbles something under his breath as he grabs a strawberry and the can of whipped cream. It sounded like, *I can’t believe your brother is letting this happen*, but I couldn’t be sure.

“What?” I question wanting to know what my brother has to do with this. I can only assume it’s because Demetri really did ask Cillian for permission to take me out. There’s a part of me that gets a little giddy over that.

“Just know I will always be here for you.” He holds the cream covered strawberry in front of me. He nudges it forward, motioning for me to take a bite. My eyes flicker over his as I reach up and take it from his hand instead of biting into it as he has gestured. “Strawberries have always been your favorite.”

“They have.”

The tension breaks when he turns away to grab a water. We make small talk for a few minutes before Ciarán comes walking into the kitchen. There’s a snippet of a moment where he shoots me a look. I’m not sure what the meaning is behind it, so I stay quiet.

Finn and Ciarán make small talk. Finn asks how the deal went and Ciarán tells him it was finalized. That was the extent of their conversation. Business is never discussed in front of me.

Cillian walks into the kitchen with his phone attached to his ear. “It’s already in the works, Ma. I’ll make sure it happens.” He walks to the refrigerator and grabs a beer. Uncapping it he says, “Yeah, she’s right here, eating her usual.” He hands the phone to me.

“Hi, Ma. How are you?” I jump off the stool and head out of the kitchen.

“I need my phone back when you’re finished, Haven,” Cillian yells.

“Yeah,” I confirm as I walk with a slow gait while heading upstairs to my room. “How are you?” I ask again. “How’s Da doing?”

“Same, my sweet girl. Same,” she mutters her answer.

“Mam...” I sigh hearing the sadness in her voice.

“You worry about yourself, my girl. Your da would hate to know you’re wasting your time by worrying about him.”

“It’s not wasting time, Mam. We don’t know how much time we will have with him.”

“I know. Tell me, how are you? What have you been up to? Are you dancing?”

I give her all the answers she wants to hear. The answers that make a mother happy. The truth is, I don’t know how happy I am here in the States with Cillian. I would rather be home spending my time with my father before it’s too late.

My phone beeps with a text message. I reach for it as I answer my mother’s questions.

Cuz: Be ready in thirty. No dress. Ripped jeans and a rocker T.

Me: I don’t have a rocker T-shirt.

Cuz: Fuck, Haven. You have been sheltered way too much in your life.

The next thing I know, my bedroom door flies open, and a shirt is flung at my head.

“Wear that!”

“Hold one second, Mam.” I hold the phone against my chest. “U2?” I question my cousin’s choice of T-shirt.

“Damn straight. Let’s represent. It’s not mine, though, it’s Finn’s.”

I look at his shirt. “Why do you get Drop Kick Murphy’s?”

“I got a Hozier one too if you want that one.”

“This is huge.”

“Tie that shit in the back like every American girl does when her shirt is too big. Now get ready and tell my aunt I said hello.”

“I’m sorry, Ma.” I turn my attention back to my mother once my cousin walks away. Then I hear the beep alerting me to another message. I pull the phone from my ear forgetting I’m on Cillian’s phone and glance at the screen. I quickly ignore the message and put the phone back to my ear when it hits me the name on the message that was sent was titled Carbone. Putting my mother on speaker I open the message from Demetri.

Carbone: Something came up. Make sure the hen stays in the house.

*What the heck does that mean?*

“That’s okay, my sweet girl. Where is Ciarán taking you?”

“I don’t know.” I return my attention back to my mother.

“That is not good.”

“You’re telling me.”

“You go. You get ready and have a great time with your cousin. I love you.”

“Wait! I want to talk to Da?”

“I’m sorry, honey. He has fallen asleep.”

“Oh.” My disappointment is clear. “Tomorrow, maybe.”

“Maybe. Go. Go have fun.”

“I love you.”

“You are the apple of my eye, my sweet girl.”

I hang up with tears in my eyes but excitement for the night ahead.

CHAPTER  
**SIXTEEN**

**H**AVEN

“WHAT IS THIS PLACE?” I yell, trying to scream louder than the music blaring through the dark, smoky hallways.

“This is a typical American rave, cuz.”

“Ciarán! Cillian will kill you for this!”

“You want to go back home, or do you want to live a little?” I waver a moment, my words nowhere to be found. “That’s what I thought. Now get your ass moving. We need to find some cups or you and I will be drinking this scotch straight out of the bottle I brought.”

“You are so dead for this. But a good kind of dead,” I yell over the screaming music as I watch a girl with a pacifier in her mouth walk by. “What the?” I turn to Ciarán.

“She’s most likely high on X. It stops her from grinding her teeth.”

“The fuck?”

“Yeah. It’s not for you. I did bring some pot, though.” His smile is cheeky. “Don’t play innocent with me,” he tells me when my eyes widen. “I know you’ve taken a hit off the green before. Also, put this on.” He pulls a

costume mask from inside his hooded sweatshirt.

It's beaded and beautiful. Emerald green sequence shines bright, reflecting off the strobe lights.

"Why?"

"Keep your identity safe."

"Like anyone would know me here." I roll my eyes.

"Humor me."

He pulls me through the crowd once we both put our masks on. Smoke fills the air, and every half hour or so, foam fills the space. We hand the bottle back and forth between the two of us. His are more of a gulp whereas mine are more on the sip side. Ciarán can hold his alcohol well, and I know once we start winding down, he will stop drinking.

We dance. We sing along with the music. We drink from our shared bottle. I took more than a few hits off God's weed. We people watch and laugh our asses off when a guy dressed as a rabbit hops around and starts to hump a guy dressed in a sexy Little Bo Peep outfit. People with silly masks run amuck along with people wearing beautiful masks. Then there are the people with bare faces, and I can't help but wonder what it would be like to live a life so open and free without the worry of enemies.

I'm feeling good. Really good. I'm having the time of my life, and I'm dancing with every suitor that comes along. I don't think I have ever felt so free.

Ciarán is doing his thing. Ten minutes ago, he was making out with a stunning brunette and right now he has his tongue down a blonde girl's throat. I have denied all advances. Although, I won't say I wasn't intrigued. I turn to my left and see three people all over each other. I'm captivated by it, watching on through alcohol hazy eyes. It's a female crushed between two men. Her smile when the man devouring her mouth releases her lips is illuminating. It brings me back to Demetri's question the night before about participating in a threesome. Would I ever? It also brings me back to the fact

that Demetri evaded the answer when I asked. Not that it's really any of my business, but he didn't think I could handle the answer which is why he wouldn't answer.

I float around the floor, swaying to the music when I stop and grab for my cell phone. With the false bravado of alcohol and drugs in my system, I hit Demetri's given name.

Me: You never answered that question last night.

It takes a minute for the bubbles to appear.

Sir: And what would that question be?

I pause with a thought of maybe I shouldn't ask again. Then I say, fuck it.

Me: Have you ever had a threesome?

Sir: If you ask me a question, make sure you want to know the answer.

Me: I wouldn't have asked, sir.

I throw the sir in there because it seems to stroke his ego. And at this moment, I feel cocky.

Sir: Haven, where are you?

Me: Still won't answer the question, I see.

Sir: Where are you, young pup?

Me: I'm in a place where an opportunity may arise. And if one does, I'm not sure I'll say no to the temptation.

His text comes through immediately.

Sir: Where the fuck are you?



Me: Tell me your answer.

I smirk, giddy with myself at my confidence to demand an answer.

Sir: I promise you, that when I find you, your ass will be flaming red.

Me: Big talk for a man who can't answer a simple question.

I laugh at myself getting cockier.

Sir: I have fucked many women. One at a time, three at a time. I have shared women with other men. I have had my tongue in one woman's cunt while my dick was in another. I have performed specific sexual acts that would make you run back to your father's house in Ireland. Now, where the fuck are you? And, Haven, if you do not tell me, there will be consequences.

Me: Oh, fuck you and the threats you keep making.

My hand vibrates. The ringtone set on my phone comes next. I look down at the screen and see that he's calling. I lift it to my ear but there is nothing but silence. I pull it away, not sure if I can't hear because the music is so loud or because we got disconnected. Sir flashes across my screen again. I immediately duck the call as panic starts to set in. I jerk my head up and glance around the open space feeling as if I'm being watched. My phone rings again a second later. I watch the screen as if Demetri will jump through it. I duck his call once again. The next thing I know, a FaceTime call comes through. I don't know why, but my nervousness flips and intrigue rears its ugly head. I feel compelled to answer his demand. I hit accept. It connects and Demetri's angry face shows on the screen. The music is still blasting, and at that moment, foam starts shooting out from the cannons above. I let out a squealing giggle, raise my hands, but still hold the phone so he can see me, and start swaying my body to the beat.

“Where the fuck are you?”

I look around and shrug my shoulders.

“What the fuck is on your face? Take it off.”

“Yes, sir.” I salute him and proudly whip off my beautiful green mask and show him my sweaty, red face.

“Are you drunk?”

I tilt my head slightly and try to hold back a smirk while fluttering my eyes.

“Answer me!”

“And high. Definitely high.”

“You’re high? What the fuck did you take? Did you take X?”

“No, but...” I look around. “The people who have look like they are having a really good time.” I flip the screen to the three people in the corner going to town on each other.

“Tell me where the fuck you’re at.”

“I don’t know.”

“What do you mean you don’t know? Who are you with?”

“Definitely not going there, Mr. Carbone.” I don’t want to get Ciarán in any trouble.

“Joseph!” Demetri thunders. “Get your ass over here.” That’s all I hear before the line goes dead.

I hold the phone in my hand, just staring at it as if Demetri is going to call again. After what feels like an eternity has passed, I say, “Fuck it.” I let a held giggle loose, tuck my phone into my pocket, and start dancing again.

I’m feeling myself when I notice a guy a few feet away, watching me. While the rest of the bodies move around the floor, he just stands there, studying me. With my mask back on, I feel self-assured, but there is something about this guy that is intimidating but also intriguing. I glance over at my cousin, just to make sure he’s still close before turning back and having to take a step back because the man from across the room is now standing directly in front of me. He is even more intimidating up close. The half-black mask adorning his face shows his strong jawline. The air around us feels like

it was snuffed, and it's kind of alarming. But there is also something familiar about him and that makes me stay instead of run. His hand reaches out and grips my waist. He pulls me into his body and starts to move his hips. The music is fast, but our bodies move slowly. I let the music take away my fears. He can move. Boy, oh boy, can he move. The music playing is still fast, but he has our bodies shifting across the floor at a slow, seductive pace. Our eyes have stayed connected from the moment I turned around, and before I know it, I'm on the other side of the room.

“What is your name?”

His silence alarms me, but then he replies, “You are a beautiful woman. Your curves, the way you move, it is... beautifully graceful.”

“Thank you.”

When I go to speak again, he interrupts saying, “Your man, yes, he mustn't let you roam free too often.”

“I don't.” I shake my head. “No man.” I stumble over my words.

“Da, I'm sure that's a lie.”

“Your accent? You're not from around here. Where are you from?”

“A place far away. Just like you.”

That startles me, making me uneasy, until he explains, “You have an accent as well.”

“Oh. Yes. Are you here in the States on business or pleasure?”

“You could say that.”

“So, both?” I give a small smile as he whirls me around.

“This business I need to tend to will be rewarding once I succeed at securing my acquisition. So, it will be pleasurable in the end.”

A commotion by the tunnel entrance draws his attention. I glance at where he is looking and watch the crowd part for whoever is making their way through. He holds me in his grip, but he is no longer moving us around the floor.

“I must go.”

I turn back to him. “But...” I linger not sure why I don’t want him to leave.

He backs away. His eyes still on me. “Wait! You didn’t tell me your name.”

“Nick,” is all he says before turning and vanishing into the thick of the crowd.

I stand there a few moments before turning to look for Ciarán. I jump on a random large wooden crate, shoving a guy back so I can stand and search the sea of people. Foam shoots out of the cannons once again, drenching me in suds. Ciarán is not far from where I stand above everyone else. He’s with some girl, leaning against the wall, talking while sharing a joint. I yell for him, more like scream, and wave my hands to get his attention. He notices me almost immediately and leaves his smoking companion. A song comes through the speakers and my body automatically starts moving on top of the crate. I’m taller than everyone else and it feels fantastic to be able to see the whole crowd from a different view. Ciarán hands me the joint and what’s left of the bottle. He hops up on the crate with me and some girl follows him, knocking the two others off. The three of us dance to the song blaring throughout the space. Me on my own little corner while my cousin makes his moves on her on the other side. Sirens start blaring and strobe lights start flashing. The crowd to my right starts shifting and separates. I turn to look but it’s hard to see because of the blinding lights, but the energy coming from that direction is strong. It takes a second, but within that second, I see him. Demetri. A man amongst little boys. Behind his eyes is a darkness lurking. He swaggers towards me with nothing but confident arrogance. He is lethal, deadly in his endeavor to reach me. He moves bodies without a word or gesture. The crowd just splits in two, giving him the authoritative wide berth he silently demands.

He stands directly in front of me when I fully turn to face him. He angles his head to the right and stares at me. His facial features are stone. His hands

are at his sides, but he is not relaxed. The look in his eyes; it's feral. I take in a deep breath and seductively smile. The next thing I know, I'm being manhandled and ripped off the top of the crate. Ciarán shouts a slew of profanity. I hear his booted feet hit the concrete floor next to me. I'm dizzy from the alcohol and floating high from the hits off the joint. My focus zooms in on my assailant. Ciarán stands there, watching our one-sided exchange. Words are spoken but I can't hear them because there is a ringing in my ears. I go to give him a proper Irish lashing when his smell hits me.

"You..." I murmur while taking all of him in. He's in dark wash jeans and a black hooded sweatshirt and boots. His jet-black hair and beard are perfectly in place and his eyes, the heat radiating in his unique dual-colored eyes is menacing. Chills run up my arms. I can't help the flush of arousal that hits my core by how devastating he looks. His leer is provoking. A temptation the starry-eyed little girl in me knows I should steer clear of. But the woman in me, she is screaming at me to take the bait. The twist of his lips when he notices me surveying him is alarming. It's menacing, a promise of retribution, and I feel myself involuntarily trying to take a step back.

"Not so fast." His grip becomes firmer around my waist, stopping me from pulling further away.

"How did you find me?"

"Young pup, you have a lot to learn about me." He turns to my cousin. "This your doing?"

"Fuck, man." Ciarán runs his hand through his hair. "She needs to experience life before she is strapped down."

*Strapped down?*

"Oh, trust me, she's going to get strapped down," Demetri rumbles next to my ear. "You high on X, young pup?"

"And if I was?" I sneer.

"Then I would use it to my advantage."

"What does that mean?"

“What did you take?”

“Just smoked and drank. That’s all, man. She’s fine. She was having a great time, as you could see,” my cousin answers for me.

“Here’s one thing you need to remember about me, Ciarán. I am not careless with the things I own. Therefore, if someone is careless with my possessions, they could potentially find themselves in a situation not conducive to living a healthy, active lifestyle.”

“Did you just threaten him?” I twist in his arms, wiggling to get free, but he doesn’t release me.

“You know how lucky you are?” My cousin shouts at Demetri, confusing me.

“Luck has nothing to do with business,” Demetri tells Ciarán.

“What are you two talking about?” I yell, now holding my head. “Feck, my head is starting to hurt.”

“Joseph, go get the car,” he orders a younger guy standing next to him. That’s when I notice another guy standing at his back. His eyes are scanning the scene around us. “I’m good, G. I’ll handle it from here. Go home to Izzy.”

“Don’t hurt the kid. We don’t need the blowback,” the guy Demetri referred to as G says before walking away.

Demetri stares Ciarán down. “He’ll stay alive for tonight. Can’t promise what tomorrow will bring.” My arm and waist are grabbed with strength, and the next thing I know, I’m in the air, landing with a thud, the air expelled from my lungs because his shoulder is embedded in my stomach.

“Put me down.” I gasp. “The room is spinning.”

“Was it spinning when you were up on that box dancing for all to witness?”

“I have to pee. Put me down.”

He continues walking through the crowd, ignoring my demands. People part for him in fear. He continues in the opposite direction from where we

came in. With each step he takes, I flop over his shoulder as we get deeper inside the building. I'm high as a kite with the added fuel of alcohol running through my veins. I finally let loose tonight and now I have to deal with a raging madman for reasons unknown to me.

My body jerks at the same time I hear a loud crash. I brace my hands on his back and twist around to see the bathroom door swinging back after Demetri's booted foot kicked it in.

"Get out!" he thunders. "All of you. Now!"

I watch the crowd. Everyone stands there, stunned, until one person whispers to another, "Do you know who that is?"

Then it's like wildfire. People start scattering like mice. Before the last few people exit the bathroom, Demetri walks through the scurrying crowd. That's when I notice Luca standing just off to the side watching everything and everyone in the hallway. He reaches in and grabs the door handle. Just before closing the door, he grins at me. Demetri turns and flicks the lock. With rushed steps, he drops me on the vanity and brackets me in when he braces both arms on either side of my hips and leans down getting nose to nose with me.

"You want to tell me what tonight was all about?"

"Feck off. What is it any of your concern?"

"I told you last night. You belong to me."

"I belong to no one."

"You don't think so? Remember that promise I made you?"

"What promise?"

"The one where I told you there would be consequences to your actions."

"Oh, feck off." I jerk my head back. "Talking to me like I'm some child. Fuck you," I blurt, pushing at his chest thinking he will let me climb down, the liquor and drugs speaking for me.

His eyes turn black. He looks down at his chest then slowly, he lifts his head back up to look at me. Within a split second, I'm yanked off the

counter, spun around, and my jeans and panties are ripped down my thighs.

Panic sets in.

I'm twisting and turning, fighting him while watching him in the mirror that is two inches from my face.

"Demetri!"

"Sir or Mr. Carbone," he growls before landing his first punishing *whack*. The sting is shocking.

I even saw his hand rise and fall. The radiating heat from his open hand against my skin lingers with an unbearable heat. I yelp, shocked, and twist my body, but he holds me in place as his fingers lace through the strands of my hair. The second one connects with double the force. I turn and try to bend my body, but I still and close my eyes as the heat radiates across my tender skin. The third one comes down twice as hard and I can't help but wail a defenseless howl that turns into a groan as my insides tighten.

Demetri watches me in the mirror, his eyes piercing.

The fourth one rains down on my behind with so much force my knees buckle, forcing my hips against the counter. My core clenches and my thighs become slick. Embarrassment flushes over my skin as I gasp for air.

"Stop!" I cry.

He releases my hair and wraps his arm around my waist, holding me up while his other hand rubs my sore flesh.

"Cosabella." He hums. "There she is. Spanking you turned you on, firefly."

It's not a question but a statement already knowing it did.

"No," I counter, mortified at the thought and nauseous from the alcohol being sloshed around in my system.

"If I slide my fingers over your cunt, will it be dripping for me?"

"No," I indignantly pant as if it's an absurd assumption.

"Oh, I think it will be." He grins, running the tips of his fingers down the seam of my ass. He releases my waist, places his hand between my shoulders,



pushes my chest down to the counter, and instructs me to raise my behind. For some unknown reason to me, I do. My body taking control over my muddled mind. The need to please him overwhelms me. I'm not sure if it's the drugs, the alcohol, or just wanting to feel how I did the other night inside the museum again, but I arch my back for him.

"Demetri..." I moan his name as his palm caresses my angry skin.

A sharp pain makes my eyes flash open. They connect with his in the mirror. He says nothing, just stares, but I know what he wants.

"Sir," I whisper then drop my head, needing to disconnect. And not because I'm ashamed but because I'm not now.

"Look at me, Haven."

I waver for just a second.

"Haven," he sharply barks with a demanding tone.

I raise my sight to meet his.

"Good girl." He runs his full hand over my burning behind while watching me. "I cannot wait to bury myself in your virgin pussy." He looks down and stares at his hand moving over my red flesh, a satisfied grin on his face. "I am going to tear through those membranes that hold your innocence intact, desecrate your body with the loins of my own and when I am finished with you, firefly... I will fuck you so hard you will scream my name and beg me to stop. But you'll want more. Not only because it felt good, but because I will become your addiction."

*I think you may already have.*

He plunges his finger inside me. I release a squeal of startled pleasure. I'm panting, griping for anything to hold onto as my body is rocked. I find myself pushing back against his forceful thrusts.

"That's it, Haven. Keep searching for it. Good girl."

My confidence soars at his praise. I can feel my inside tightening. It's almost painful up until I tip over, and the white-hot tingling sensation bursts into death gripping throbs. I whimper with each squeezing pulse, mewling

my pleasure with each rock of my hips while Demetri continues to work my insides.

“Open your mouth,” his husky voice demands.

With half lidded eyes and parted lips, I hold his gaze. Not expecting him to shove his fingers in my mouth.

“Suck.” He pulls me up to lay my back flat against his chest while his hips pin my hips to the edge of the counter. “Watch.” He works his finger in and out of my mouth. “Swallow.” He imprisons my heavy gaze in the mirror. “Now you know exactly what I tasted when I tongue fucked you.” He withdraws his fingers and orders me to get dressed.

Then everything goes black.

CHAPTER  
**SEVENTEEN**

**H**AVEN

MY THROBBING HEAD rolls from one side to the other on what should feel like the fluffiest cloud. The home Cillian has rented for our time here has spared no expense in the luxuries they have filled the estate with. I'm half in and out of sleep, chastising myself for making bad choices the night before, but only because my brain is killing me.

Really, though, I am smiling at how much fun I had.

I roll over and wrap myself around a pillow with a scent that makes me snuggle down even further into the sheets. I hear the click of a door and the shuffle of material. It's only then that I comprehend that someone is in my room. My eyes spring open and it takes me a second to realize I'm not in my room. I start to panic when I recognize I'm in a stranger's bed.

"If your head hurts, there is aspirin on the nightstand, but you deserve it for the shit you pulled last night."

I jump up and then halt my fast movements due to the nausea that rolls through my stomach. I slowly push myself back and lean against a massive, black tufted headboard. The cold breeze across my chest alerts me to the fact

that my upper half is bare. When I grab the sheet pooled at my waist and pull it away from my body, is the moment I realize I'm completely naked. I pull the sheet back up around my chest as my focus goes to where the deep voice came from. Demetri. He's across the room with only a pair of grey joggers on, leaning against a black dresser with his arms crossed over his bare chest.

Devastatingly handsome.

"Where am I?" I rub my head, searching the room.

"My bed."

*His bed.*

"Why am I naked?" My focus floats back to him.

"Because I undressed you."

"Why am I here?"

"Because this is where I brought you."

Frustrated at the short answers he's giving me, I change the question from me to my cousin. "My cousin?" I inquire, starting to panic because I left him alone. The last thing I remember is Demetri threatening him, but I don't remember leaving him.

"Ciarán is alive."

"You threatened him." I rub my head, remembering the argument between them.

"He's lucky he's not sippin' his orange juice through a straw this morning."

"Why?"

"Because he knew better."

"Then what?"

"Then to put something of mine in danger." His lips pull into a grim line, watching me.

"That's my cousin, my family."

"That is the only reason he's breathing."

"I wasn't in danger."

“You were surrounded by danger. You’re too fucking inexperienced to realize it.”

“You brought him here too?”

“Absolutely not.”

My head is throbbing, and I am feeling out of sorts. Half the things I want to say stay inside my dry mouth. At least I know my cousin is okay. I glance over to the nightstand. There sit two white pills and a glass of water. I grab for them and swallow with a huge gulp of water. I lean my head back, close my eyes, and take a deep breath. The quirk of my lip is involuntary as I try to recollect the night before. Even though Demetri’s short answers are irritating me, I can’t help but think about how much fun I had. I remember everything until Demetri showed up. When the bathroom memories of Demetri’s palm connecting with my behind resurface, the blush that radiates across my skin burns. I remember him carrying me over his shoulder into the bathroom and I partially remember him walking out of the bathroom with me in his arms as if I was his bride. I also remember him mumbling something as he carried me out the door. My memory is spotty and what I can recall is a dark hallway, a figure of a very attractive man walking behind us, and the feeling of being embarrassed.

“Did we...” I open my eyes just in time to see Demetri pulling off his joggers. I inhale a sharp breath as he stands before me. Heat rushes through every part of me. His torso is covered in tattoos all the way down to the carved V of his hips. I can’t help but survey every inch of his upper body.

He’s stunning.

A masterpiece of manly physique.

Handsomely rugged. Beautiful, even.

Our eyes connect. Heat radiates from his gaze until he turns away and throws his sweats into a hamper. When he turns back, I can’t help but eagerly drop my innocent gaze. Moisture pools in my mouth as I take a deep breath. He’s thick and long and hangs heavy. I study the perfection of his maleness.

My breathing picks up and arousal rushes to parts of my body that have only been touched by him. Flashes of Demetri spanking me make my heart rate speed up faster. I swallow my pooling desire as I watch his erection grow. My gaze leaves his lower half to find the demanding serenity in his eyes that I find myself seeking when I am in his presence. When I open my mouth to say something, he turns and walks to the other side of the room and through a door, leaving it open.

I can only assume it is the bathroom when I hear the spray of the shower turn on. My imagination runs wild with thoughts of water rushing down his strong body. I find myself climbing out of bed, curiosity pulling at me. I wrap the sheet around my body and make my way to the doorway. It's then I notice his entire room is black. The walls were painted in a saturated, deep black where the furniture is a contemporary shiny black wrapped in chrome accents. Splashes of a concentrated purple decorate parts of the room. The space should feel suffocating, but it doesn't. It drips in sultry sophistication with a hint of mystery mixed in just like its owner.

I make my way to the opening of the bathroom and linger at the frame. He stands under multiple sprays. His hands run over his head, washing the soap from his dark hair and beard. He lifts his arm and braces it against the tile. He raises his head and lets the water beat against his face. I watch on as he shakes his head of the water and leans back. With his free hand, he grabs his length and starts stroking. His body becomes more rigid as the seconds pass. My heart pounds against my chest. I'm so zoned in to where his hand is pleasuring himself that I don't realize he is watching me.

“Remove the sheet, young pup.”

I jump at the unexpected commanding tone of his voice. My fingers move to obey his orders but then stop as my insecurities rise about my full-figured body.

“Drop the sheet and kneel in front of me.”

I stare at him only a moment longer and release the satin material, letting

it fall to the floor. My only consolation is that I woke up naked and I know I didn't undress myself. Therefore, he has already seen me fully nude. My small steps are eagerly unsure. I step through the doorless threshold into his luxurious shower and stand before him, waiting. For what? I don't know; direction I suppose.

“You ever heard the saying curiosity killed the cat?”

I nod, slowly as I hold his gaze.

“Down.” He stares down his Roman nose at me, pointing to the floor.

With my eyes on his, I drop to my knees in front of him. There was no question for me. Not a moment of hesitation. I did exactly what my body wanted and what he ordered me to do. My frenzied gaze swirls with his intense, demanding one, waiting for direction. Demetri is a force and if I didn't know that before, I do now.

He grabs himself and slides his hand up and down his shaft an inch from my face before releasing his hand and wrapping it around my chin and ordering, “No mouth. Just your hand.”

I'm kind of relieved, but also disappointed. I remember back to the time in the club when he told me I couldn't touch him until he gave me his permission. I can't help but feel a small burst of excitement at the accomplishment, but I also want to know what he tastes like.

I wrap my fingers around his length and release a breath at how heavy he really is in the palm of my hand. Seeing him is one thing but holding him is another. I push my hand back to the base of his groin and when I bring it back up to the tip, his cock blooms into a beautiful blueish purple right before my eyes. My face is so close to him, all I have to do is open my mouth and stick out my tongue. I want to feel him between my lips, but I know I can't. I continue stroking, changing the pace from fast to slow. Never touching a man like this before has my insides fluttering with nerves.

My gaze drops to his heavy sac, and I run my tongue over my lips. Demetri still has a hold of my jaw and with each passing moment of me

stroking him, his grip becomes tighter and tighter. I have this strong desire pulling at me. I want more, but I also know I have to be patient and wait for his permission. That only confuses me because it turns me on more. A rush of tears flood my eyes, and it's not from being scared or happy or sad. It's coming from a burning desire of wanting him, needing something I'm too inexperienced to explain, and wanting to please him.

"Sir?" I raise my blurry gaze to his, wordlessly asking for permission for more.

"Ah. There they are. The fireflies. They are begging." His other hand comes to my face. He runs his thumb over my spilled desire. I'm emotional and completely aroused. "Open your mouth, firefly. I'm going to give you what you are begging for." I do exactly as he says and unhinge my jaw while still stroking him. "Wider, Haven." His hand wraps around my stroking one. "Good girl," he praises, donning an appreciative grin on his face. He begins to guide my strokes at a much faster, rougher pace. His strong gaze that is locked on mine only falters when his eyelids drop right before he stops, and his hand holding my jaw tightens just a moment before his other hand grabs the hair on the back of my head, and he fills my mouth with everything Demetri Carbone is: power, strength, and brutality.





I SIT HERE on the edge of his bed, still draped in the towel he wrapped around me, thinking about how I just took a shower with the man I am falling for. I was left alone to dress, but that was only after Demetri washed my body. I would like to say it was intimate, and in a way, it was, because we were both naked and I had just had his dick in my mouth, but it felt more mechanical than anything. When I asked if he had a spare toothbrush, he told me he did, but I wasn't allowed to use it. He wanted my cum covered tongue to be a reminder of him all day. My only thought was... How could I forget?

I watch Demetri dress into a dark grey pair of dress pants and a black button-down shirt. When he threaded his black leather belt through the loops of his dress pants, my mind went right back to the warmth of his hand against my skin. Then I shame myself for thinking about what the leather would feel like, how the thin strap would leave welts on my fair skin. I was instructed that my clothes from the night before were laundered and sitting on top of his dresser. There wasn't even a thought of who could have cleaned them during the few hours I was passed out. I just nodded and watched him walk out of his bedroom, leaving me alone in his space with instructions to meet him in the kitchen when I was dressed.

With my clothes still sitting in my lap, my mind wanders. Wishing I could call Paisley and tell her what I just did, but then also wanting to keep it a secret. My lips twist with a nervous, but giddy grin, thinking about a few moments ago. I sit here, still wet with his towel wrapped around my body, the salty taste of him in my mouth and the insecure feelings of everything that has happened in the past twenty-four hours weighing me down intensely. I can't help but wonder why Demetri hasn't taken me yet. He has had the opportunity, so why hasn't he tried? Or did we last night and I just don't remember? Then I think about his size, and I retract that thought. I would definitely know if he took my virginity.

He makes me want things. Why, I don't know. He's an arrogant, demanding son of a bitch. Promises I've made to myself, experiences I have

denied until I was in love with the person, are now changing. It's then I think those assurances to myself were silly girl imaginings that would keep me under the radar from any attention. I have never felt comfortable in my body, so why would I want to put myself through the torture of showing it to a random hook up? I also never wanted to be the defiant teenager, the center of attention. I had ballet. I had music. And I had Paisley. Finn was also someone I could rely on. I didn't need any more. I also saw the way my brother treated his women and I never wanted that for myself. But now, I am an adult. I think of my best friend. Her first experience was horrible. What if I do sleep with Demetri and it is terrible? I release a hardy chuckle at the absurdity of that thought. The few sexual acts I have experienced with him were beyond what I had imagined and left me with tears in my eyes while craving more. But then I think, who the hell is Demetri Carbone? Where did he come from? Why is he in my life at this moment? I feel like one day, we were introduced and the next, things were happening between us. I throw that up in the air to what Demetri wants Demetri gets. Was it divine intervention? Was he instantly attracted to me as I was to him when we first met? I shouldn't even be here in the States. I still don't know why Cillian insisted I had to come. The experience I assume. I argued then, but now, this newfound awakening is making me happy that I lost the fight.

I push my thoughts away and dress. I slip my hand into my front pocket, hoping my hair tie is still in there from the night before. Finding it, I pull my curls up into a top knot and make sure I hang my wet towel back in the bathroom. On my way out, I look over at his bed. Something pulls at me, and I find myself walking over and straightening the covers. Then I make my way out of the room and go in search of the man who laid me down in his bed and didn't touch me, or at least, I don't think he did. I can't help letting my insecurities rise at the fact that he didn't try. I push it down where I bury all of my body issues while I go in search of Demetri in this expansive space he calls home. It's not your typical house. It's more like a modest castle and

every aesthetic is dark and elegant. The coffered beams are stained black, contrasting against the stone colored walls, and the railings on the massive sweeping staircase I find myself walking down are black as well. Next to the beige marble steps and risers, it screams wealth. I weave through the hallways, listening for any kind of life when I hear the sharp sound of nails tapping on the marble floor. I'm just about to the end of the hallway when a black panther stalks around the corner and stops. I freeze in my spot and stare at the massive beast. I stand still while he sizes me up, praying that I'm not his breakfast in the next five minutes.

"Demetri!" I yell, my voice shaking while having a staring contest with the dark eyed creature, hoping Demetri is somewhere close by to save me from being torn to shreds.

"Thor, come!" Demetri's demanding holler echoes from not too far away.

When the beast before me strolls away I make my way down the hallway and find Demetri in the kitchen, leaning against the island drinking coffee and speaking to someone on the phone with the beast now sitting astutely at his feet.

"It's about time."

I stay still, standing by the opening of the room while I wait for him to finish his call while staring at the wild animal.

"You get lost in my bedroom?"

I jump as his deep voice fills the space, realizing he's talking to me. He twists in his spot, peering over his shoulder and raising a thick, scarred brow. It's something I've never noticed about him before. He has a scar that mixes through the dark hair of his left eyebrow only adding to his dark, mysterious demeanor. He nods at a Styrofoam container on the end of the island, but I can't move from my spot.

"He won't hurt you."

"Why do you have Satan's guard dog in your castle?"

"Thor's a purebred Cane Corso, and what you referred to as a castle is an

old, refurbished building.”

“Could have fooled me,” I mutter, glancing around and admiring the stained-glass windows.

“Eat.” He nods once again at the container.

I open it to see a breakfast fit for champions.

“I’ll make sure he complies with our arrangement.” He continues his conversation as he walks to the other side of the kitchen and opens a drawer. He grabs a fork and slides it across to me, nodding once again at the food. “Let me handle this situation first, then I’ll pick you up. Tell Izzy I said hi. Yeah, yeah. Fuck you, too. Later.” He turns to me as he slides his phone into his pocket.

“Did I just become *the situation*?” I ask, realizing I may be the morning after burden. “No need to handle me, Demetri. I’m a big girl. I can take care of myself.”

He watches me for a moment before he orders me to eat once again.

“Thank you for thinking of me but I’m not really a breakfast person. Besides, I need to get going, anyway.” My stomach now turning at the fact that I believe I’m the situation he needs to take care of. No girl ever wants to be the person someone can’t wait to get rid of the next morning. Maybe that is the reason why after the shower he became more mechanical.

“Eat, Haven.”

“I can’t eat all of this.” Which is a lie because I could devour the whole thing, but I won’t. I never do.

With penetrating eyes, he stares at me, probing. I grab the fork and cut off some of the egg, trying to pacify him and make this exit easier. “Did you run out and get this this morning?” I try and change the subject, hoping he will stop his intense scrutiny and I can get out of here faster.

“Instead of deflecting. Let’s talk about last night. Shall we?”

“In the context of what?”

“Your little trip to a rave.”

“Why are we circling back? We just talked about it. Besides, what I do is none of your business.”

“See, that is where you are wrong.”

“I went out with my cousin. I didn’t need you to come rescue me. I was having a great time.”

“I was at the understanding you were home for the evening.”

“And who would have told you that?” I ask, knowing my brother and Finn both thought Ciarán and I were home. Knowing the verbal altercation between Finn and Demetri I figure my brother told him. I hold up my hand when he goes to speak and say, “I already have a bodyguard. I don’t need another, and furthermore, if I wanted him with me, I would have instructed Finn as to where we were going. Just like I will call him to come pick me up this morning. See how easy it is to get rid of your morning after “situation”?”

“And you didn’t, because why?”

“Didn’t what? Why what?”

“Tell him where you were headed.”

“None of your business.”

“Haven.” He places his hands on the island in front of me, leaning down until his eyes are level with mine. “It would be beneficial for you if you realize sooner rather than later that you are my business. Accepting that fact would help move this along much smoother.”

“Last night... Did we...?” I flip the fork around in the air. “I mean...”

“Did I fuck you?”

“You don’t have to say it with such vulgarity.”

“If I fucked you, young pup, there would be nothing but vulgarity involved.”

I drop my fork and huff with exasperation. A piece of egg flies up onto my shirt. I swipe it away. I hate the nickname he has given me. “Must you keep calling me that? It’s really starting to piss me off.”

“Good.”

“Good?” I harshly chirp.

“Yes. Maybe I will see some fire from you.”

“Oh, you want fire? You’ll think better of it when my Irish, redheaded temper comes out. You just might tuck your tail and run.”

“I don’t have a tail. And your hair is strawberry blonde.”

“Neither do I, Demetri. So, stop referring to me as a dog. And I’ll call my hair whatever color I want. If I want to dye my hair black, I will.” I stiffen when he takes the steps towards me and whips my seat around to face him. He clutches my throat in his hand and leans down, getting inches from my face.

“When a man like me gives you a nickname, it is a term of endearment. You are young and you have puppy dog love in your eyes when it comes to life, but even with seeing that with my own eyes, I was just recently made aware of how innocent you really are.” He continues to hold my throat prisoner so that my full attention is on him. “The nickname is more suited for you than I had originally thought.”

I’m spellbound, gazing into his eyes. There is a moment when I think he will kiss me, but he doesn’t. “I like the other nickname much better,” I breathlessly tell him.

“Well, then. I guess I will have to make you come more often so I can watch your eyes flutter and light up, now, won’t I?”

“What is this between us?” I ask as he hovers inches away from my face while still imprisoning my neck.

He pushes my chin up with his thumb as he rises to his full height, and states, “You belong to me. That is all you need to know, Haven.”

As we face off, a noise to my right catches my attention. I turn in that direction just as a shirtless guy walks into the kitchen. Thor, the beast, clops over to him, wagging his nub, or should I say, his whole hindquarters. The guy is built, not as built as Demetri but very defined with dirty blond hair. His shorts hang low on his hips, and I can’t help but notice the line of hair

that travels beneath them. It's only when I glance up at his face do I realize it's Luca. The same guy who picked me up the first night for Demetri and my first date, and the same guy in the hallway from the night before who smiled at me as my body hung over Demetri's shoulder.

Pressure on my chin breaks my attention and is pulled back to the man still hovering in front of me.

"Like what you see?"

"What?" I sputter, not realizing I was inspecting Luca so intrusively.

"Whose shirt are you wearing?"

"What?"

"It's too big. Whose shirt is it?"

I look down. "Finn's. Why?"

Before I know what is happening, the material is gripped and it's ripped straight down the middle.

I flutter and gasp. Grabbing for each tattered side and holding the torn material to my chest. I quickly glance at Luca and then back to Demetri in horror. "What the fuck?"

"Finish your breakfast, Haven," he calmly orders as he stands to his full height and walks towards the hallway that leads to his bedroom. "And throw that shit in the garbage. It's no longer wearable."

"You're worried about me eating when you just ripped my shirt off my body? There is something seriously wrong with you! And stop telling me to eat! There is no way I can eat all this food," I yell over my shoulder while still holding the material together.

"Eat what you can. You're going to need your stamina."

"Trust me, my cardio is on point," I sarcastically retort to his retreating back. "I need a shirt!"

"Morning," Luca chimes as he continues his confident stride to the refrigerator, pretending to ignore the scene, Thor follows him, but I see the smirk.

“Leaving in fifteen,” Demetri replies, still watching me from the corner of his eye before entering the hallway I just came down. “Eat,” he orders once again before disappearing around the corner.

I watch Luca from beneath my lashes, embarrassed that I sit here in a shredded rock band T-shirt. I shove a piece of bacon in my mouth while watching Luca rummage through the refrigerator. His body is heavily scarred. While Demetri and I were in the shower, I noticed he, too, has two round scars—bullet wounds, I can only assume—but Luca’s scars are extensive. I’m not naïve enough to not know that their chosen profession is dangerous, but Luca’s body is riddled with past misfortunes.

He’s pouring himself a glass of orange juice when I blurt, “Who did that to you?”

He glances up at me, hesitates only a second, throws the dog a piece of bacon from my food, and says, “Someone who didn’t know better.”

“Know better? Then what?”

“That their death would be next at the hand of the man that just left the room.”

“Oh,” is all I mutter, glancing over my shoulder. “I’m sorry you had to go through that.”

“It’s part of the job. Give him a piece of bacon.” He nods at Thor.

“Is that how Demetri got his scars?” I glance down at the beast.

“If you want to know about D’s scars, you’ll have to ask him.” He nods at Thor once again.

“Sometimes that’s not an easy thing to do,” I mutter under my breath, shifting on my seat to get up and throw away the food I haven’t taken more than three bites out of. “Is he always so...”

“So what?”

“Irrational. Demanding. Hot and cold.” I glance at Thor once again, who’s still waiting. I toss him a piece of bacon and watch him chomp on it.

“You’re not eating that?” He points, not answering my question.



“Nah, need to watch my figure,” I jokingly say.

“Looks fine from where I’m standing.”

The blush that creeps over my body is embarrassing. I turn away from him and head for the sink to wash my hands, but when I get there, I hesitate because I realize I have to let the two sides of my shirt go.

“But seriously. Is he always so—”

Demetri walks back into the room with a matching suit jacket draped over his arm and a T-shirt in his other hand. He eyes me, then Luca, and then his piercing gaze comes back to me. “Put this on.”

“An explanation would be nice.”

“Wouldn’t it.”

“Yeah. It would.”

“Only good girls get explanations, and right now, you are not. Wearing another man’s shirt is out of the question. Do it again, and I will cut the heart out of the man who owns it.”

“Jesus feckin Christ, you’re an animal.”

“You haven’t seen anything yet, young pup.”

I roll my eyes and turn away. He pulls me back just as quickly. “Thor, come,” he commands the dog. “I’ll see you at the club?” He jerks his chin at Luca, asking, as he leads me toward what I assume is the front door. He stops and pets Thor’s head.

“You going to take care of that thing?” Luca asks him.

“As soon as I drop her off.” He nods at me to do the same as he just did.

I lean down and hesitantly smooth my hand over Thor’s broad head twice. His fur is smooth and silky. When his big tongue slides across my palm, I smile inside. “I can get myself home if you have something to do. All I have to do is call Finn.”

Demetri whips his fierce focus back onto me, effectively shutting me up.

“I’ll meet up with you later. Giovanni going with you?” Luca asks.

“No. Meeting him for lunch after it’s done. I’ll shoot you a text.”

“It’s cool. I have to go downtown,” Luca explains.

Thor moves closer and nuzzles my palm, so I’ll pet him some more.

“Downtown as in…” Demetri glances at me and then back to Luca letting his sentence linger.

“I’ll meet up with you later at the club.”

I watch Demetri twist his head in question. “You need me?”

“I’m good.”

“Call me if you need me. I won’t be at the club until late tonight. I’m taking her to Johnathan’s.”

“Will do.” A mischievous smile I can’t decipher pulls at Luca’s lips when he turns his focus towards me and says, “Enjoy your evening, Haven.” Before walking off with the container of food and Thor on his heels.

CHAPTER  
**EIGHTEEN**

**D** EMETRI

I'M RUNNING LATE. My attention was needed at one of our associates' stores in the diamond district. It's not far from where I live but it is from where Haven is staying with Cillian.

I pick up my phone and tap on her name.

Firefly...

The box sits empty for a moment before I cancel it and drop my phone back into the cup holder. A little anticipation never hurt anyone. The night will go much smoother if she is ready and has listened to my orders when I dropped her off this morning to wear the dress I had originally bought her. The one she refused to wear and quickly realized her refusal would only lead to actions she doesn't approve of. If not, I have all night to break her of the stubborn streak she has.

I pull up the circular driveway after the gates open and park just outside the main entrance. I glance over at the adjoining carriage house where I assume her bodyguard is staying. I had Freddy, our IT guy, do some research on said bodyguard. Nothing out of the ordinary popped up. I believe things are simpler than what I had thought. He comes from a poor family. Has

worked for Haven's father and brother since she was a kid. I'm assuming because of his economic situation he takes his job watching over Haven a little more seriously. I'm guessing his job security is feeling threatened now that someone of my stature is in the picture.

The front door opens as I walk up the stone steps. An older man stands waiting, greeting me with a nod that I return as I walk through the front door and give the foyer and surrounding areas a once over.

"Is Ms. McKittrick ready?" I turn back just as Finn comes around the corner.

"I believe she is, sir. If you'll just wait here, I'll go get—"

"No need." I wave him off and walk right past Finn as I head towards the sweeping steps.

"She likes her privacy. You should wait down here for her."

"She has no privacy when it comes to me. Run along and mind your business." I take the steps at a leisurely pace until I get to the top, disregarding her bodyguard's words of advice.

"She is my business," he hollers from the bottom step.

I turn back and lift a warning brow. "Not anymore. I thought you would have been the first to receive that memo."

I turn and go to the first door I see. It doesn't matter if there are twenty doors up here. She's behind one of them. I proceed to the third door. The sweet scent of her lingers as if she just walked the same floors I am now standing on.

I open the door and see her standing in front of a floor length mirror on the other side of the room. She seems consumed by her reflection. So much so, that she doesn't notice me standing in the doorway. Her hand slides up her thigh and goes to one of the buckles on her dress, playing with it a moment before sliding her hand through the strategically placed cutout. A strip of color shows through the opening; red silk. She pushes it up higher on her hip but then huffs when it shows through the opening, causing a rippled

swell in her hip to show through the dress.

“Take them off.”

She twists in her spot, startled, her breath catching in her throat. “Demetri,” she breathes.

I lift a brow.

“Sir.”

“Good girl. Now listen to my orders and take them off.” I walk across her room, twist her back to face the mirror, and stand behind her. I give her body a once over. Her full hips protrude, almost as if begging for the viciousness of my hands while holding on to them as I forcefully thrust into her from behind. I lift her dress, sliding it up her thighs as I lean over her shoulder and watch her face in the mirror. She leans back against my chest. Her body trembles. My fingers slide up and under her dress and twist around the delicate material of her panties. The panties I purchased for her. “You won’t need these where we are going.”

“You’re late,” she breathes heavily, trying to show some kind of stance and chastise me at the same time.

“I am.”

She huffs, laying her head back against my shoulder. “No excuse as to why?”

“I don’t need one.” I skim the tip of my finger over the meaty flesh just above her clit. She closes her eyes, her body relaxing. “That’s it, Haven,” I praise her just as I see movement behind us in the mirror. I left her door open for a reason. I’m a prick, and if her bodyguard wasn’t aware of it before, he is now. This is twice I have caught him watching. I slide my fingers down and swirl them through her wet flesh. A small moan leaves her throat. “It pleases me that you wore the dress I asked you to wear.”

“You didn’t ask.”

I huff a chuckle. “No, I didn’t. But you like being told what to do, don’t you.” It’s not a question. I know she does.

“No,” she breathes, lying.

“Spread your legs, firefly.”

She shifts her weight and does as she is told. With her panties now sitting mid-thigh and her bodyguard watching from across the hall, I forcefully push my middle finger inside her tight cunt. She gasps and her eyes spring open in shock and connect with mine but then instantly drop from the heaviness her arousal causes. “You were meant to obey, born and bred, firefly.”

“Demetri...” she moans under her breath.

I withdraw my fingers and slap her tender skin in haste. She jerks in my arms at the sting. Her eyes fly open and connect with mine in shock. “That is the last time you call me by my first name. Remember that sting of punishment. Because the next time you choose to disobey, you will receive another punishment. Let it be known, it will be harsh.”

“Sir...” she corrects, but there is a slight squint to her eyes in defiance.

“That a girl.” I slide my fingers back inside her. Her knees start to buckle at the intensity of my ministrations. I hold her up against my chest. My erection straining against the cloth separating us. “You want more? You want my cock buried inside your sweet, sweet cunt? My cum sliding down your throat this morning wasn’t enough for you?” I lean in and put my open mouth on her neck, drawing the blood to the surface. She whimpers at the sting. Her legs start to shake. My thumb holds her clit hostage with steady pressure while my finger evades her innocence. “Fuck, I can’t wait to come inside you,” I gruffly whisper next to her ear. I pull back knowing she is on the verge of coming. Her eyes spring open and her lips part farther. “You ready to go?” I step back, separating our bodies, and insert the two fingers I just plunged inside her body into my mouth and hum my appreciation. Her jaw unhinges, dropping open further, shocked at my actions. I bend at the knee and slide her panties down the rest of the way. “Close your mouth, Haven. What I am going to do to your mind and body will be much worse. And, Haven, you will love every second of it.” I stand to my full height and lean in

next to her ear. “Now, let’s go.”



SHE HAS BEEN quiet since we left, only humming to the songs playing on the radio. Finn was outside enjoying a smoke when we walked out. His eyes on her as we walked by irritated me. She told him to have a good night which he returned with a nod. She glanced at me with skepticism as I opened the door for her to slide into the passenger seat, but she never voiced her concerns.

We’re a few miles out from the club I’m taking her to when my phone rings. Domenico, the diamond handler I deal with, tells me someone paid him a visit and has left a message for me. I hang up and glance at Haven. “Change of plans.”

“Okay.” Her voice soft.

I glance back in her direction. “You’re quiet, why?”

“No reason.”

“Haven.”

“Did you say something to Finn?” She holds my gaze.

“If I did?” I watch for any signs.

“Why?”

“You and your bodyguard have something going on?”

“No.”

“Never?”

“No.”

“Your bodyguard wants to fuck you, Haven.”

“He does not.” Her voice full of denial.

“Absolutely does. Can’t say I blame him. However, if he continues on the path I see coming, he will regret he ever took on the job of being your bodyguard.”

“Finn would never hurt me.”

“Didn’t say he would. I said he wanted to fuck you,” I tell her as I pull into the alley behind the building and park. I watch to see if she will get out on her own. She doesn’t, which satisfies me. I walk to her side and open the door. She glances up at me with big crystal eyes. “Let’s go.”

“You want me to go in with you while you handle business?”

“No, but you are here, in my car. Leaving you in the alley unprotected is unacceptable.”

I escort her inside with my hand on her lower back. Once we get to the showroom floor, she steps to the side, letting me pass. I grab her hand and cup it inside mine, guiding her along. The store owner meets me halfway. He looks to Haven at my side. His linger becomes too long for my liking. “Domenico, if you don’t remove your eyes from my girl, I can promise you the threat you just received will be child’s play compared to what I will do to you.”

“My apologies, Mr. Carbone. If I may?”

“Go ahead.”

“She is a beautiful woman. You are a lucky man.”

“Luck has nothing to do with it.”

I glance at Haven. Her cheeks burn with a crimson blush that radiates down her neck to her chest where her chin has dropped. “Thank you,” she softly whispers.

“Go get the tape ready,” I order Domenico so I can have a moment alone



with Haven.

“Yes, sir.”

“Haven,” I call her name in a way she’ll know it’s an order. She lifts her sight to mine. I pull her to stand in front of me and lift her chin with the crook of my index finger. “Even though I don’t like people staring at you, I knew exactly what he was going to say. Do you not believe you are a beautiful woman?”

“I believe beauty is in the eye of the beholder.”

“I have it ready, Mr. Carbone.”

I study her for a moment, choosing to shelve the conversation because business needs to be conducted. The talk she and I will have will happen in private. “We will discuss this matter further. For now, go admire some jewelry while I take care of business.”

CHAPTER  
NINETEEN

H AVEN

I CAN HEAR them conversing while I walk around the showroom. It's more Demetri demanding answers than them talking. I stop at a case that has the most delicate watches. My eyes stop on a stunning rose gold timepiece that stands all on its own. A showpiece if I ever saw one. It's a thicker band that sparkles but the elegant filigree makes it look dainty and feminine.

I step to the next display, and hear Demetri ask, "What was his threat, Domenico?"

"Tell Mr. Carbone he took what was rightfully owed to me. Tell him I'm coming for him.' Then he smashed the case. He was demanding the stones we had just received. I told him they had already been taken off my hands just a few hours prior. That's when he smashed the second case." He shakes his head in defeat. "Mr. Carbone, the cases—"

"Will be taken care of." Demetri cuts him off.

"And Mr. Heart?"

"Will be made aware of the situation. You report to me. Remember that."

"I just don't want any trouble."

“Turn on the footage,” Demetri orders with a lift of his chin, ignoring Domenico.

I walk to the farthest display, not wanting to get any closer and have Demetri think I’m eavesdropping. Although, I am. I glance down at the case in front of me. It has stunning engagement and wedding bands. I never really thought about what style of ring I would want when the day came that I got engaged. I kind of silently chuckle at that. I have thought of everything else but that. I’ve always seen it as something my fiancé thought I should have. A ring he saw me wearing. Something that suited me, my personality, and my taste. To me, that would show the intimacy we shared between us. The small details that only someone paying attention to their partner would know.

I admire each of them, my own eyes reflecting the shine from their sparkle until I hear the man’s voice on the security screen demanding Domenico give him the diamonds. His Russian accent is too familiar, and I find myself gravitating towards it. Before I know what I’m doing, I’m standing at Demetri’s side. He glances over at me, scanning my face in question. When he sees what he’s searching for, he goes back to his interrogation. If it bothers him that I’m now intruding in on his business, he doesn’t show it. My gaze goes up to the CCTV camera. I watch the man smash the glass in a rage. His Russian accent gets heavier the angrier he gets. I feel Demetri’s eyes on me, so I glance his way. I squirm in my stance when I realize both men are now watching me.

“She knows something,” Domenico accuses, pointing his finger at me. “You know that man, don’t you?”

“What? No!”

Demetri peers down at me, analyzing me.

“I…”

“She knows nothing.”

“She’s lying,” Domenico disagrees.

The next thing I know, Demetri snatches Domenico up by his tie and

smashes his face into the glass case. Blood splatters. I gasp in shock and jump back. When I go to take another step away, my wrist is grabbed, and I'm hauled back to my original spot. Breathless, I stare into Demetri's hard eyes. Domenico struggles to get free as I stand there, watching this man fight for his life as he's getting choked out.

"Did you just disrespect my woman?"

"N-No, sir." Domenico struggles for breath.

I want to tell Demetri to let him up. To leave him be because he is right, that I might know him, but I don't want to go against his word. My hand starts to shake as I watch Domenico turn purple. Demetri glances over at me.

"Is he correct, young pup? Do you know that man?"

If I say yes. Demetri will look foolish for causing undue harm. If I say no, poor Domenico may just die. Then I see it in his eyes. This is a test. He's testing my loyalty. Right or wrong, it doesn't matter. I know what allegiances mean in his world and I am being held by a man who lives and breathes life in it.

"No." I stand by Demetri's side, pleading with him through worried eyes to let him go.

Domenico pops up, gasping for air when Demetri releases him. He rips at his tie in haste, loosening it. Blood trickles from his nose from the impact against the glass of the jewelry case.

I feel the warmth of Demetri's hand on the small of my back as I stare at Domenico. The slight directing pressure has me taking a step to the side while my eyes stay glued to Domenico's bloody nose. Demetri guides me with just his touch as he walks me through the store to the back entrance.

"Shut down the security gates. I'll have someone here tomorrow to replace the glass. And Domenico, don't ever insult my woman again." He slams his hand against the lever disengaging the door to the alley. He walks me to the passenger side and opens my door. He waits for me to get in before closing the door and striding away. I adjust myself in my seat and watch him

glide around the front of the car as he taps something on his phone. I can't help but admire his confidence while my insides rattle with uncertainty.

"Did you eat dinner before I picked you up?" He glances over at me as he drops into the driver's seat. He starts the car and begins to drive down the alley.

"Yeah."

"Haven, this will be your one and only warning." He glances both ways before pulling out into traffic then looks over at me. "Don't ever lie to me. You won't like the repercussions. In my world, lies get you killed." He stares me down. Then in a switch of a second, the levity in his voice startles me. "I don't plan on being six feet under until I'm old and my dick doesn't work anymore."

I'm silent for a moment, a little taken aback by the switch, but then I fall right into his humor. "But aren't you?" I question, portraying some sort of sassiness I don't feel.

"What?"

"Old. You are way older than me." I quirk a copper brow, my heart pounding at the split-second change in attitude.

"My dick still works."

"That it does, Mr. Carbone." I now genuinely joke, pursing my lips and blushing as I think back to me on my knees in front of him in the shower. I turn away and look out the window so he can't see my red face.

"She has jokes," I hear him mutter as he comes to a stop in front of a small non-descript building in yet another alley. "Look at me." I know better than to defy him. His voice has changed back into one of dictating orders. The dark night outside and the fact that we are now sitting in another alley has my heart pounding. I twist in my seat and give him what he asked for. "Did you eat?" he questions once again.

"No. But I'm not—"

"Was Domenico correct? Do you know the man on the security footage?"

he asks, immediately cutting me off.

It's another test. He wanted to see if I would lie about eating. Somehow, he already knew I didn't eat dinner. I was too worried that eating would cause me to become bloated. I was afraid I would pop out of all these cutouts in the dress he bought me.

He was watching my mannerisms between telling a lie and speaking the truth. He was getting to know my quirks. He already knows I know the man who was speaking on screen. At least, I think I do. This man seemed taller than the one I'd danced with. But what do I know, I was drunk *and* high. Demetri just doesn't know how I know him. He asked it as a question to see if I would lie.

"Well done, Mr. Carbone." I applaud him with the tone of my voice. I see the slight twist of his lip before it becomes a grim line once again while waiting for my answer. "Yes."

He watches me for a moment, analyzing. "Explain."

"The night of the rave. I can't be sure it was him. It was his Russian accent that drew me to the screen."

"What was he doing? What did the guy look like that he was speaking to? How many people was he with?"

"He was alone."

"How do you know what he sounds like then?"

Do I really want to tell him I danced with the guy? I saw how he reacted to Finn's shirt on my body.

"Haven." The warning is there in the undertone of his voice, cautioning me to answer him.

"Because I danced with him," I sputter before I can stop myself.

"Excuse me?" His head twists, peering over at me from the driver's seat. "You what?"

"I was dancing. When I looked up, he was there, standing in front of me, watching me. We started dancing together."

His hand resting on the gearshift flexes and tightens around the ball. “Did he put his hands on you?”

The muscles under his cropped beard covered jaw start flexing while waiting for the answer I am now afraid to give. “I mean... We were dancing.”

“Answering my question properly will only benefit you.”

Is he jealous? “We were dancing.”

“Haven.”

“Yes, Demetri. He put his hands on me. Are you jealous?” I blurt.

“I don’t get jealous, young pup. I get even.”

“What does that even mean?” I question just as the door to the back of the building opens and a man walks out.

“Get out.”

“Get out?” I repeat with anxiety, nervous about the unknown of what is inside the building and Demetri’s behavior. I watch him as he walks around the car to my side.

“Now, Haven,” he demands when he yanks open my door.

I turn in my seat and step out, my body brushing against his as I stand because he purposely left me no room. He crowds me in the small space between him and the open car door. His left hand goes to the roof just as his right hand comes up to my jaw. The pressure on my chin demands my attention. He has it. I’m not afraid of him but I am afraid of the unknown of what is to come.

I feel my breathing pick up, my chest visibly rising and falling. There is no denying this man makes me feel things. He’s so close, I swear he’s going to kiss me, his fierce gaze stares at my lips, but he doesn’t.

He pulls back and looks me directly in the eyes. “No man touches you. Understood?”

CHAPTER  
TWENTY

H AVEN

HE HOLDS my heated gaze for a moment. The intensity of his fingers leaves my face and wraps around my hand. He closes the door to his car, hits the button on his key fob, locking it, and then walks towards the man who has been patiently waiting. They shake hands and exchange pleasantries before Demetri turns to me. “Johnathan, this is Haven McKittrick. Haven, meet Johnathan Reznor, the owner of this fine establishment.”

Mr. Reznor is a very attractive man. He looks to be around Demetri’s age and holds himself with the same *don’t mess with me* demeanor that Demetri does. Where Demetri is more rugged and raw in a suit, Johnathan has more of a clean cut in combat boots look, though an air of badass surrounds him. He extends his hand and respectfully greets me, then quickly turns his attention back to Demetri.

“Your dinner will be set up in my penthouse.” He opens the non-descript door to a dark hallway and walks us to a hidden elevator. “Let Tegan know when you’re ready.”

The elevator shoots us down a floor. I shift in my stance, my nerves



getting the best of me. Demetri runs his hand over my lower back. It instantly relaxes me, and I have to wonder if his instincts told him I was nervous or if it is just habit for him to place his hand on the small of a woman's back.

The elevator comes to a stop. The doors slide open, and I'm led out by just his touch. Once we're in the hallway, he reaches for my hand. It's a good feeling being held by a man like Demetri. I feel protected. Safe. Like no one would harm me if they knew I was his. I hold my head slightly higher just thinking about being the woman on his arm. It's a boost to the low self-esteem I've been working on since I was a teen.

Johnathan opens the door at the end of the hall. Demetri stops short and I almost bounce off his broad back. "Give me a minute." He looks to Johnathan.

"Take your time." He turns to walk away then turns back. "Nice to meet you, Haven."

"You as well," I tell him, peeking around Demetri's shoulder.

Music pours in from the other side of the door Johnathan holds open. *Pray* by Xana plays. I'm excited to be here with him. I have to wonder why he didn't just take me to Temptations if he wanted to go to a club, but then I think maybe he just wanted a night away from the people he works with.

Demetri turns to me just as Johnathan disappears behind the door. "Leave your morals at the door, Haven. I don't want to hear about your feelings when this night is through."

"What?" I question just as he opens the door and the beats of *Pray* begin again. "Demetri," I call, giving his hand a tug, but he continues walking without answering me.

He leads us through the door and farther into the room. Curiosity gets the best of me, and I peek around his broad back to get a look at what he is leading me into.

The usual sounds of a club fill the space. Glasses clank, music plays, and laughter fills the building. It's not until I look deeper into the club, that my

steps falter and my lips part at the scenes unfolding before me.

This isn't a normal club. It's a club all right, but the criteria for entertainment is not just dancing and drinks with friends.

Demetri must feel the tension in my hand that he's holding because he turns back to watch me with a satisfied smirk on his face. "What would you like to drink?" he asks as he approaches the bar. He releases my hand and turns to the bartender who seems very happy to see him.

"Sir," she greets with a sultry smile.

*Sir?*

Is she calling him sir to be respectful or has she been under his command partaking in his demanding ways? By the expression on her face and the sparkle in her eyes, she's been on her knees in front of him before.

I watch the exchange between them as the little green demon in my belly rears its ugly head.

"Tegan," he greets her with a dry but respectful tone.

Demetri obviously knows her, but his return regarding her couldn't have been more neutral. He's clearly been here before because she slides a glass of clear liquid with three ice cubes in front of him without him asking for it. Her eyes drop to the bar top when he looks at her in a way that makes me question the dynamic between them.

I turn away, feeling as if I am intruding on something intimate. I'm uncomfortable and Demetri knows it because I can feel his eyes on me, watching me. I assume he is waiting for my drink order, but my gaze is now floating around the room observing the patrons. The heaviness in the air is making me more and more uncomfortable.

There is a couple in the far corner I find myself stuck on. When a third person approaches the couple, my interest piques even more. A glass of wine appears in front of me just as my lower back feels the warmth of Demetri's palm. I can't help but feel relieved when he leads me away from the bar and to a half moon booth in the corner with a reserved sign on it. He gestures for

me to slide in with the nod of his head. The song changes to another sultry beat. The silence between us is as comfortable as it can be as I take in my surroundings. Demetri leans back and rests his arm around the back of the booth behind me. We sit in silence for a few moments while sipping our cocktails. My gaze goes back to the couple in the corner. It's two men and a woman. One man is kissing the woman passionately while the other is behind her kissing the base of her neck. He has her long hair pulled to the side, and at one point, I see his teeth sink into her shoulder. I shudder at the thought of Demetri's teeth leaving marks on me. I can't help but look back to the bar to see if Tegan is looking our way. She is. I turn back to the couple. The man behind the woman now has his hand inside her shirt. I fidget in my seat as I watch her head drop back to his chest. The man in front of her opens the buttons on her blouse and removes her breast from the confines of her rose colored lace bra. When he eagerly puts his mouth on her nipple, her mouth drops open, and the man behind her takes advantage and kisses her with passionate energy. I swallow the saliva pooling in my mouth and turn away. My gaze drops to the table in front of me while in thought. Why did he bring me here? To a place like this? Is this what he expects of me? I glance back at the bar. Tegan is serving a man and woman but her quick glances our way let me know she is still watching Demetri.

"She an ex-girlfriend?" I ask, turning back to the couple. I don't even need to explain myself. He already knows who I'm talking about. Which only confirms my suspicions.

"No."

"Past partners?" I keep my gaze on the couple.

"No."

"Don't lie." I exhale in frustration.

"I never lie."

"You're lying now. Clearly, there is something between you two. She can't keep her eyes off you."

“I never lie.”

“You have definitely slept with her. By the way she looked at you, it was more than once. There was some kind of weird connection between you two.”

“She is submissive. I am a Dom.”

I turn my attention to him. “And that means?”

“She was being respectful.”

“You’ve never slept with her?”

“I didn’t say that.”

I huff and shift in my seat, turning my attention back to the couple. “You’re an asshole,” I mutter under my breath as I turn away, agitated, the jealousy I’m feeling taking over.

“Haven, I would advise you to watch how you speak to me.” I feel his fingers intertwine in my hair.

“I asked you if there was anything between you. You lied.”

“There is nothing between us.”

“This conversation is going in circles.”

“Then ask the right question.” I feel the tension of one of my curls being wrapped around his finger.

“Have you fucked her and was it recently?” I question myself as to why this is bothering me so much, but I already know the answer.

“I don’t talk about my past discretions. They are private moments between me and my partner at the time.”

“So recently, then,” I state, turning back to him.

“Are you jealous, Haven?”

“No.” I turn away, my gaze returning to the couple.

“Haven, look at me.”

I keep my gaze on the couple in the corner who are practically having sex.

“Now.” He tugs on my captured curl.

I slowly turn his way, my eyes slanted.

“That look on your face will only lead to you being reprimanded.”

“I’m not a child.”

“You most certainly are not. And I’m not an open book.”

I roll my eyes and look over at Tegan. “But I have to be.” I state a fact I already know to be true.

“Yes. I will give you one concession. The answer you are seeking is yes, I have slept with her. The most recent was a few days before meeting you. Now, tell me, did that answer satisfy you or did that piss you off even more?”

“Was she a regular thing?”

“I said one concession.”

“And I asked a question I want answered, Mr. Carbone. If you can’t do that then you can take me home right now.”

He shifts in his seat, wraps his arm around my side, and pulls me into him with strength. “This side of you, that mouth of yours, I’m not sure I appreciate it.”

“I can’t say that I care. You were jealous that I danced with someone, that they had their hands on me. Well, Mr. Carbone, I have the right to be jealous of a woman who clearly had sexual relations with you and who stands twenty-five feet away from us, as she watches you.”

“What happened to my meek Irish girl?”

“I warned you.”

He scratches the dark hair on his trimmed beard with the hand not holding me to his side. “That you did.” A small grin shows his dimple.

“The answer?” I wait, glaring at him.

“Dance with me.”

“No.”

“If you want the answer, you will dance with me. Now get your ass out of the booth.” He stands and holds out his hand.

I slide from the booth and stand before him. The heat between us is

palpable. He leads me to the floor where other patrons are dancing as well. A slow sultry beat by Rhea Robertson plays. *Lose My Breath* serenades us as Demetri pulls me into his arms. He holds me so tight against his body I can barely breathe.

“She was a woman who participated in regular sessions with me.”

“So you fucked her all the time.”

“Watch it, Haven.”

“Why did you bring me here? You clearly knew she would be here.”

“Did she disrespect you in any way?”

“No.”

“Exactly. Stop acting like a child and accept the fact that I have fucked women before you.”

“Sadly, I guess that is something I can’t repay you.”

“No, and thank God for your innocent past because I am a jealous motherfucker and just the thought of someone else touching you makes me want to commit murder. Now drop the attitude and let’s enjoy the evening.”

The fight in me dissolves as he holds me in his arms and moves me around the floor. I glance over at the corner where the couple was, only to see they are gone.

“Did that turn you on?”

I stay quiet a moment, then truthfully admit, “I believe it did.”

“Are you wet, Haven?”

“I imagine if you put your hand between my thighs, you would get your answer.”

“Fuck me. I can’t wait until I can sink my cock into you.”

“Why haven’t you?”

“Timing is everything, Haven.” I feel his hand slide up my thigh, pulling my dress with it.

“If you are a jealous man, then why are you lifting my dress to the point others will see parts of me only you have seen?”

“Trust me, I will not let it go that far.” His hand comes around to the front of my dress. “Open your legs a bit. Put your head on my shoulder and keep quiet. No one hears you but me. Understood?” His fingers find my core through one of the strategically placed cutouts.

“Is this why you bought this dress?”

“I bought this dress because I knew it would look good on your body.”

“Sir?”

“Yes, Haven.”

“I’m not sure I will be able to continue standing if you keep doing t-that,” I stutter, panting my words as he plays with me.

“I won’t let you fall.”

Butterflies flutter in my stomach at his words. I bury my face in his neck and let myself feel what he is doing to me. I whimper and moan against his skin. When his finger slides inside me, I attach my mouth to his neck. It’s a raw moment between us and I can’t help but want him inside me.

“Come for me, Haven. Come on my hand, and later if you’re lucky, on my cock.”

His words bring an embarrassing heat to my torso but my groin clenches, seeking more of him.

“That’s it, Haven. Tighten that pussy as you think of my cock. Think you can handle the size of me? Will you scream my name when I slide inside you? Will I find the blood of your innocence pooling at the base of my cock?”

“Sir...” I clamp my teeth down on the base of his neck then quickly release, thinking Demetri will be angry if I mark him, but he already knows what I am thinking.

“Sink your teeth into my neck when you come. I give you permission to draw my blood. Your pleasure will be my pain, giovane cucciolo. Fuck my hand. Fuck it until your juices flow over my fingers and down to the lifeline on my palm.”

I explode. The jagged edges of my teeth tear into the tender skin of his neck. I moan his name and shake in his strong protectant arms. My eyes spring open, and I find myself watching a couple across the room in a heavy petting session. The man has the woman spread across a table. Her dress lifted to her waist. Her back arched at a disturbing degree. Demetri holds me to his body and talks me through the rush of my orgasm while I torture the skin of his neck to the point of bleeding. I feel weak and flush. My weight becomes a burden as I stress not wanting to rest it all on him.

“I have you,” he reassures me as he walks us back to the booth.

I feel like a child when they dance on their father’s feet, floating through the kitchen as music plays. Demetri has me. It’s a feeling I haven’t felt in a very long time. It’s safety. Security in a man’s arms. And I realize in my hazy moment that I trust him.

I cling to him, my arms wrapped around his neck. My limp body is vulnerable and at his mercy, but I have faith in him that he will take care of me. He holds me steady as I slide into the booth. Once I’m settled, he slides in from the other side. He grabs his drink and swallows it in one go. I finish what’s left of my wine. Seconds later, Tegan presents two fresh drinks in front of us with a sultry smile directed at Demetri.

I push my wine back to her. “I’d like a whiskey, please. Jameson, neat.”

She looks to Demetri, seeking permission, waiting until he gives it.

“Give her whatever she wants. And, Tegan. Do not question her again.”

“Yes, sir.” She turns away to get my drink, the smile now gone.

I glance over at Demetri. A small smile pulls at my lips when he reaches for me and pulls me into his side.

A man approaches our table. He greets Demetri in a familiar way. Sitting here, observing the way the guy interacts with Demetri, is intoxicating. The guy is of importance, there is no denying it. I could tell by the way Demetri greeted him that he respects him.

It’s the power for me.



Demetri exudes power just sitting here in a relaxed position while conversing with the man. It comes so naturally to him, it's almost overpowering. He is confident in a way I have seen no other man achieve, not even my brother or my father. It's sexy. So damn sexy. A major turn on. I'm attracted to it. Drawn to it. It makes me realize as blunt as Demetri has been with me, he's actually been... dare I say... more lenient in his tone.

The two men exchange a few more words before a scantily clad woman walks up and wraps herself around the man's arm. She has doe eyes for him until she turns her attention our way. She gives me a friendly smile, but her smile turns sultry when she takes in Demetri.

She runs her tongue over her bottom lip. "Are we participating in group activities tonight, baby?" she purrs, asking the guy she is wrapped around, but her sights are still set on Demetri.

I glance at Demetri to see if he looks interested. He doesn't. He looks irritated.

"Haven, this is Leo Bonetti. Leo this is Haven McKittrick." He totally disregards the female currently salivating on Leo's shoulder.

"So, this is the infamous Haven McKittrick." The guy gives me a genuine smile.

"What's so infamous about her?" The woman hanging on Leo's arm asks, her eyes bouncing back and forth between Demetri and me.

I look to Demetri to see what he will say.

"I would like to know myself." Demetri strokes his beard watching Leo, waiting for an answer. When it doesn't come, he orders, "Leo, heel your lap dog before I do it."

"Anyone that can keep Demetri's attention deserves the title." He nods with a smile then leans over and whispers something to his female companion.

Demetri's talked about me?

He doesn't talk about the women he spends his time with per his own

words. Leo's comment surprises me, but I can't say it doesn't make me happy to hear.

"You bring what I need?" Demetri's sharp tone questions.

"It's in the office."

Leo says his goodbyes immediately after. The girl with him watches Demetri over her shoulder as they walk into another room.

"It appears you have an admirer," I comment, watching them disappear.

"I have a lot."

I lean forward and grab the wine Tegan left behind. That green monster is rearing its ugly head once again. Demetri drops his arm behind me and rests his hand on my hip. I glance around the room, sipping my wine. *Sway* by So Below starts to play. I hum along with the tune.

"This isn't just your run of the mill club, huh?" I state the obvious.

"No."

"Why did you bring me here?"

"Do you want to leave?"

"I didn't say that."

"New experiences."

"What is this place?" I ask as my body is maneuvered closer to him.

"Club."

"You could have just taken me to Temptations?"

"I could have." He glances over at me with a sinister grin that gives me butterflies and makes me smile. "Come here." He taps my hip gesturing for me to turn around as he pulls me up on his lap. "Straddle me."

I glance around. My head is telling me not to, but my insides are saying, do it. *Do it!* He helps me move the hem of my dress up just enough so that I can slide my thighs over his. He adjusts his hips, moving down a bit so I can feel his erection. One hand comes up to hold my face as the other wraps around my back and pulls me down onto him as he thrusts his hips up.

"You like when people watch?" I question, resting my hands on his

shoulders.

“I like you sitting on me.”

“You come here often?”

“Would it bother you if I did?”

“What you did before me is none of my business.”

“And what about now that you are with me?”

“I didn’t like that woman drooling over you.”

“Good.”

“Good?”

“I didn’t like hearing that you danced with some guy or the fact that you wore another man’s shirt while you did it.”

“I guess we’re at a stalemate.”

“The word doesn’t really fit the situation.”

“No, it doesn’t,” I mutter, then get quiet.

“What are you thinking?”

“I hope that in this moment, when I take this chance with you, that you will respect me.”

“You have had my respect from the beginning.”

“I doubt that very much, Mr. Carbone.”

“If you didn’t, you would have never gotten that first dinner date.”

“You mean the one where you cut off a man’s finger?”

“He shouldn’t have crossed the line.”

“Should I cut off Leo’s girl’s finger for salivating over you?”

“If you want. I’ll hand you the knife and hold her down. Think you got it in you?”

“What about Tegan?”

“What about her?”

“Would it bother you if I hurt her?”

“You would never. You’re too innocent.”

“That doesn’t answer my question.”

“She is the past. You have become my future.”

The song changes to *Edge of the Dark* and I change my line of questioning. “Why haven’t you kissed me?” I blurt, breathing just inches away from his mouth as Emmitt Fenn sings to us about darkness. The tension building between us as we verbally spar is arousing.

“This succulent mouth of yours has never been kissed before has it, pup?”

I stay quiet, my glare still locked on his in defiance when a flashback hits me. My back hitting my apartment door. Finn’s lips searching mine with unbridled passion before he pulled away. I don’t give Demetri an answer. He already has a problem with Finn. Telling him that it was Finn who gave me my first kiss will only cause bloodshed.

I hold his gaze and wait with a look on my face that demands an answer.

The pad of Demetri’s thumb rubs across my lips. “Because when I do, there is no going back.”

“Back to what?” I breathe again, grinding down on him.

“Back to a time when there wasn’t a you.”

“Do you regret being introduced to me?”

“I’ve never regretted one thing in my life, Haven. Good or bad. I do what needs to be done.” His gaze follows the movement of his thumb as he runs it over my jawline. “You look beautiful tonight.”

“Thank you.” The blush creeps across my skin at his compliment. “The dress is growing on me.”

“It’s sexy.”

“It’s definitely sexy. Thank you, by the way. I do appreciate the gesture.” I push my bottom into him.

“No. I’m speaking of the blush illuminating your skin. It’s a damn turn on.” He lifts his hips, revealing what I have done to his body.

“Never been with a woman who blushes?”

“No. I don’t fuck timid women.”

“We’re not fucking, Mr. Carbone. And I am not timid.”

“We will be. And you most certainly are, but with you, it’s not displeasing.”

“It’s called morals.” I lean down next to his ear and whisper, “I have them.”

“I informed you to leave them at the door.”

“I guess I have to since you brought me to a sex club.”

“I brought you to the innocent part of an exclusive club I pay high dollar for.”

“There’s more?” I snap my head to the left and then to the right, looking around.

“There’s another floor.” He grins.

“Demetri...”

“Yes, Haven?” He slides his hands up my thighs until his thumbs reach the bare, soft skin of my lips he insisted I have when he removed my panties back at the house. “What do you want?”

“I don’t know.”

“You do. Ask for it.”

The blush creeping across my skin is furious with need. “I want you to kiss me.”

“You sure about that?”

“Yes.” I gasp, my head thrown back, not prepared for the intrusion of Demetri’s finger inside me.

“Look at me, Haven,” he gruffly demands.

I drop my head to his shoulder, unable to hold his challenging gaze. “If you want my lips on yours then you have to look at me.”

“I’m not sure I can kiss you when your finger is doing... Mmm.” I bear down on him, seeking more.

“This?”

“Mhmm. What...” I pant then whimper, trying to catch my breath. “What are you doing to my insides?”

“Come for me, Haven. I want you to come for me again.”

“I’m not sure I can.”

“You will.”

“Sir...” I worry about how far this is going.

“Fuck them. You watch me. Right here, firefly. Eyes on me.”

“I want... I want you inside me,” I mutter, admitting my desire, shocking myself at what’s coming out of my mouth. My hips thrust on their own volition. I ride him as if he is naked and buried deep within the walls of my body.

“I am inside you.”

I shake my head and bite my lip, panic setting in because I want to voice my opinion but can’t without the whole club hearing me.

“Fuck.” He shifts beneath me. “Keep riding me, baby.” He shifts again. The high-pitched zing from his zipper being pulled down scares and thrills the hell out of me all at the same time. His cock juts out from the separated halves of his pants. He grabs both my hips and lifts me. “You will listen to me, Haven. Do not move. I’ll move. You stay completely still. There is no way I am taking your virginity here in this club. I want to see your blood on my sheets when I rip through your walls. Don’t deny me that privilege. Do as I say.” He grabs hold of himself and hovers me over his cock. His movements are quick and precise until he starts to slowly lower me onto his glistening head. He’s barely breaching my opening when he demands that I hold myself in my spot. I want to thrust my hips and take all of him in, but the heated glare in his eyes stops me from being careless. This is a tease. He knows it too. I want all of him. My thighs begin to quiver, the strain too much. His arm wrapped around my waist tightens, holding me steady. His thumb slides over my bottom lip. “Suck,” he commands, and when there is enough saliva, he goes straight for my clit. I cry out from the burning sensation in my thighs from holding myself steady and the tickling torture my clit is deliciously suffering from. Sweat trickles down my neck. My insides

feel like they're on fire. I look down at where we are joined, a hasty jolt of tingles whips through my lower belly. It's only the tip of his cock inside me and this is how he makes me feel. I can only imagine what he will feel like fully sheathed. All I can see is his bulging, vein-filled shaft. He's so thick, I shudder at the thought of him being fully seated.

He gave me what I asked for, but it's a tease, and he damn well knows it. He knows exactly what he is doing to me. I watch his thumb work me, blushing when I see my arousal glistening as it seeps down his shaft. My insides tighten with a strength I didn't know I had. I whimper at the burn in my thighs as they convulse, begging for relief.

“Eyes on me, firefly.”

“Sir...”

He moves his hips just a torturing touch.

“There she is.” He hums when our eyes connect. “You want me to kiss you?”

“You're enjoying making me s-suffer.” My voice shakes. I moan as he works my body to a frenzy, teasing my insides as he sits the tip of himself inside me without moving.

“I'll devour everything you exhale while you're coming.” He places his hand against my chest and pushes me back to lay on our table. He shifts his body half standing to stay inside me. “Arch your back and say my name when you do come.”

The table is a cool touch to my heated skin. The back of my head rests against the hard surface.

“Eyes, Haven.” He leans over, hovering above me just enough so that the tip of him teases me, the slight movement pinches my opening. “Eyes on mine.” His voice is harsh with arousal. I'm flush and on the verge of climaxing. I feel almost as if I am in a fog, a hazy bubble that's on the verge of bursting. The shadow looming above me makes me tense but only for a moment because my core steals my attention when it starts to tighten.

The smell of whiskey hits my senses right before the room temperature liquid drenches the valley between my breasts where Demetri swiped my dress down. The liquid follows a path and pools in the hollow at the base of my throat. It's then I realize that Tegan has delivered my drink and Demetri has retrieved it from her and poured it on my torso.

Demetri's tongue lashes out and licks my alcohol-soaked chest. "Thank Tegan for delivering your drink, firefly," he demands as his thumb rubs my clit with an agonizing speed.

I'm speechless and holding on by a thread. My body shakes. My eyes roll. My hands reach for him.

"Haven." He holds his thumb against my clit with strength in punishment for my silence. I'm ready to explode and trying to hold back my orgasm is painful. "Haven." His sharp tone reprimands me in a way that makes my insides hurt worse.

"Th—Thank you, Tegan." I shudder and close my eyes, embarrassed.

"Eyes on me, firefly," he harshly demands, a sharp pain startling me from where he pinches my swollen nub.

My eyes spring open, connecting with his for only a second when my sight is blown wide, turning black. I fall into the depths of the unknown and hope to never come out. "Demetri," I whisper, gasping for air when it's sucked from my lungs.

His name is swallowed by his devouring mouth. His lips move over mine. He tastes of vanilla and nicotine. My chest burns for air. My thighs scream to be saved and my core, she begs for all of him. His hand swoops under the back of my neck, cradling it, lifting my torso at the same time he pulls the head of his cock out of me with a groan. He settles me down on his lap, forgoing tucking himself back into his pants. His thumb still works me while his mouth continues to devour my lips. He ingests every one of my feelings through my sounds. He incinerates the breath I try to hold when I can't stand it anymore and releases it all in a painful rush of agonizing groans.



I collapse against his chest and pant through my scattered thoughts.  
Reality comes rushing back as the seconds pass.

“That was cruel,” I breathe, my forehead resting against his chest as I collect myself.

“That was reality, Haven. She needs to know you are my woman.”

“My chest was exposed.”

“Only to me.”

“Do I want to know how many eyes were on us?”

His chest rumbles with a manly chuckle. “There isn’t a man or woman in this room that isn’t getting off right now with thoughts of you coming in their mind. You were beautiful.”

CHAPTER  
TWENTY-ONE

H AVEN

“IF YOU NEED ANYTHING, just hit the call button on the intercom in the kitchen.”

“Thanks.” Demetri leads me into the elevator and presses the button for the top floor after he thanks Johnathan.

“What are we doing?”

“I’m not through with you yet.”

The doors slide apart, opening to a lavish penthouse. He slaps my behind and sends me on my way out of the elevator.

I walk the few feet inside. The black frames on the picturesque windows showcase the energetic city below. The small amount of nervousness I had before as we rode up the elevator has ramped up at Demetri’s promise. I walk to the opposite side of the room needing some distance. As much as my body wants to be with him, my head screams at my heart to be careful, because I know once I sleep with him, I will no longer have fallen for him but fell. The truth of the matter is, I already know it’s too late.

“Those morals you speak of have held you back.” I hear his feet scuffle

against the hardwood floor.

“Is that all there is for you, sex?” I quickly ask from over my shoulder then turn my attention back to the view, away from him.

“No.” I feel the heat from his breath on the soft skin of my ear and the warmth of his hands on my waist as they wrap around my sides and pull me back against his chest. “Marry me.” His gaze connects with mine in the reflecting glass.

*What?*

Seconds evaporate. The silence between us drags out because of my confusion. The air between us becomes intense. Too enforcing. My focus slides from him to something less jarring. Down below as the city beats with energy, there is a light I have turned my attention to. A substitute safety net when I can no longer bear to hold his captive gaze in the glass. The light blinks twice in a row and then waits a beat before blinking red once. It has held me hostage for what now seems like an eternity as Demetri’s words linger in the air between us. I want to pinch myself, wake myself up from what must be a dream. He said marry me. Not “Will you marry me,” but marry me. Not the grand gesture I had always dreamt of, but two words that have frozen me to my spot.

Demetri Carbone just asked me to marry him. More like demanded, but I expect nothing less from him. He is a man who takes what he wants. I have known him all of what feels like two seconds. I don’t know anything about him except for the fact that he is a possessive son of a bitch, and he is one of the top caporegimes in a powerful organization known worldwide. Is that enough? Would Cillian be okay with Demetri being my husband? I mean, he was okay with us seeing each other, but marriage?

The self-doubt kicks in. There is no way this man wants to marry me. We are complete opposites. Yes, we are having fun. At least, I know I am. I can only assume he is as well or he wouldn’t be wasting his time on taking me out, but marriage?

“Haven.”

“Don’t.” I take a step closer to the glass and farther away from him, needing a second to just breathe. To absorb his words and digest them. He had his chest pressed up against my back and just that simple connection makes my thoughts unclear. But something feels off. And the only rational thought I have is that this is a joke. A cruel joke.

“Don’t play games with me.” My anger coming forth.

“I don’t play games, Haven. You should, at the very least, know that by now.”

“Then why? We haven’t known each other but a minute. And besides the point, why would you want to marry someone like me?”

“Someone like you?” One dark brow raises. “Why wouldn’t I?”

“Because, Demetri.”

“Tell me why.”

“Because you and I... We don’t match. We don’t fit. We don’t make sense.” I can hear the panic in my own voice. “You’re the handsome powerful man that has women falling at your feet. Men respect you with only just a look. I saw how people react to you... I...”

“You what?” He raises his scarred brow higher.

My insecurities, the ones I have worked on for years, come bursting through in spades. “Oh, I get it.” I snort with disgust, slapping my hands together. “I’m good stock. I have good bones. My hips are first-class width for childbearing. You want children, is that it? Someone to carry on your bloodline?” I feel myself starting to lose it. “That’s it, isn’t it?” I sputter my uncontrollable thoughts.

“Is that what you think this is? That I want to marry you because you have good hips?” He damn near laughs in my face.

“I’ll be the little woman at home raising your children while you’re out with your gooms.”

“My what?” He tries to hide his grin, but I saw the glitch in his cheek.

“Your gooms. The women all you men have on the side while your little wifey, in this case, size sixteen wife, is at home cooking and cleaning and taking care of your kids and your house and feeding that horse of a feckin dog you have.”

He laughs. Legitimately cracks up in my face. Then he crosses his arms over his chest and watches me have my meltdown.

“Haven, the proper word is goomah.”

His patronizing tone pisses me off even more. “You think this is funny? It’s not. You don’t play with people’s emotions like this. We just had a great time downstairs. Why would you ruin it by doing this? Is that the kind of guy you are? It’s callous.”

“Take a breath, Haven.” He steps to me and grabs my arm just above my elbows. “I want to marry you. Not because your hips are perfect for childbearing but because you are a beautiful woman that I am very much attracted to and if I must say it... I have feelings for you. You can give that brain of yours a rest. You will marry me. You have no choice. I won’t allow it.”

“I always have a choice.”

“You wanna bet?”

“Demetri...” I feel my craziness settling into sorrow, his words striking an emotional chord that has become threadbare.

“Look at me, Haven.” His gruff voice dramatically changes to his unique demanding one.

“What?” I jerk my arm away from his grip and run my hand back and forth over my forehead. “This isn’t right, Demetri.” I hold my hand up, take a step back, and turn away.

“Turn around. Now,” he demands, giving me no choice when he grabs my upper arm and flips me around to face him. “Don’t say I didn’t warn you.” He points at me and then starts to roll up his shirt sleeves. “Now turn around and put both your palms on the window. And Haven, if you remove

just the slightest tip of a finger, I can promise you my next step will be a shock to your system.”

I twist back around and stand there baffled at what is transpiring. One minute, he is asking me to marry him, and the next, he is reprimanding me for reasons unknown to me.

My dress is carelessly yanked up to my waist, my bare ass now fully exposed to him. I hear the deep rumble in his chest and then the first sting radiates across my tender skin, completely knocking me sideways with shock.

“Count them, Haven. And at the end, you will say, ‘Thank you, sir.’”

“I am not going to—”

*Whack!*

I gasp. The shock of his hand against my skin it’s painful. I squeal as the sting radiates across my skin. “Fuck, Demetri!” I shift, looking back at him.

“You are only going to make it worse for yourself.”

*Whack!*

“One!” I scream. “Why?”

“That’s three. I thought I was marrying an educated woman. You did say you were educated, correct?”

“Asshole,” I mutter under my breath. “Why are you doing this?”

*Whack!*

“Two,” I holler as my ass jiggles from the force of his hand.

“Four, Haven. That’s number fucking four.”

“Fuck you, Demetri. Fuck you and the power trip you’re fucking on.”

“Oh, I plan on it, Haven. You can bet this red ass on it, too.”

*Whack!*

“Five,” I cry out, tears now springing to my eyes. “I would never marry a man that would do this to me. Let me go!” I jerk, trying to turn and face him, but I can’t because he has his big hand between my shoulders holding me in my spot.

“Did your hand just leave that window, Haven?”

*Fuck.*

“No!”

The pressure at my back disappears just as I hear the zip of material. I turn my head to look over my shoulder only to see my ass sticking out like a throbbing sore thumb. In one swift, lightning speed move, Demetri whips his belt through the loops of his pants. He quickly folds it in half and slaps it across his palm with a snap just as his eyes lock with mine.

“Sir!” I yell getting ready to run. My hands are seized and twisted behind my back and within seconds—and with a skill I’ve never seen before—he has his leather belt weaved around my wrists forming makeshift handcuffs.

A moment later, it hits me. I have become his prisoner. He is locked and loaded with a lethal palm.

“Sir, don’t do this.”

“Oh, now it’s sir, is it?” His fingers grip the leather of the belt and gives it a jerk. “Did you think it was a joke when I asked you to refer to me as sir or my given last name?”

“I...” My thoughts vanish. I’m so caught up in my emotions.

“Cat got your tongue, Haven?” His fingers wrap around my upper arm. He turns me towards the couch and pushes my chest down to lay against the back. I struggle to get free but it’s meritless. “Back arched. Ass up. Legs spread.” He places his hand between my shoulders and pushes me down when I start to lean up. “Push your ass out, Haven. Let me see those pretty pink lips that are slick with your cum from earlier.”

“Sir, I’m not—”

*Whack!*

I cry out. The tears that have subsided from my self-inflicted belief of physical inadequacy from just moments before has resurfaced, only now they are simply hurt feelings that flow. The sting from his hand is painful, but there is also a heat that radiates through the scorched area. I feel my inner

walls contract and release, the silk moisture of my arousal slicking my lips. I squirm in my spot, needing to move. The sensation so unfamiliar until recently, until Demetri. His hand comes down again with even more force. The sound of his flesh meeting mine, vibrating through the room, is devastating and dare I say... stimulating. I cry out once again, my head dropping to the padding on the back of the couch as I lose strength and falsely my self-worth. Because I... I think I like this.

Why do I find this arousing?

I should find this disturbing, not stimulating, but I do. If I didn't, I would fight him, right?

"S-Six." I fumble over the simple one syllable word.

"Seven, firefly. That's number seven." His palm rubs over my tender skin. His voice is gruff, harsh with arousal when his finger enters me. "Fuck. You are so damn sexy." He squeezes my fiery skin. "You will be my wife, Haven. You will wear my ring. You will carry my last name and my children when I think the time is right. And not because you have thick hips, which for the record, I plan on bruising with my unforgiving hands when I thrust inside you from behind. I will protect you, Haven, when others didn't. I will give you a real life where you thought you had one before. And I will gift you a world to find yourself in when all you have ever been is stagnant in a home that has failed to let you educate yourself in life. Your life."

I can't help the sobbing moan that leaves me. I'm delirious with arousal and emotionally wrecked by his words. His declaration is a freight train running through my head. My upper thighs become slicker from a craving I can't rationalize. My legs start to shake, and my knees begin to buckle. I bite my lip and try to hold in my vocalized desire.

"Spread your legs farther apart." I feel him shift behind me. "I want to hear you say yes."

I stay silent because the fear of rejection weighs heavy. What if this is a sick joke?



*Whack!*

“Eight. Thank you, sir,” I whisper, emotionally surrendering as fresh tears roll over the curve of my lip. The emotional rollercoaster from him demanding I marry him, to the virgin skin of my behind being tormented and tantalized, to the way he makes me feel, to the unknown of what’s to come. It’s all wreaking havoc on my body and mind, sending my thoughts into a space it has never gone before.

“This luscious ass of yours will be the death of me.” He grips both cheeks with his hands, spreading me.

I tense when I feel the pad of his finger run down the seam, stopping at a place he has never touched before. The sound of his zipper forces me to open my eyes, but my sight stays on the small pattern weaved into the material on the couch as I wait for his next move. I feel hazy. In a fog. But I still struggle to release my hands, wanting to be free, needing to be able to dig my nails into something.

“Not so fast, firefly.”

“Sir.” I know better than to push him anymore by using his first name. I’ve goaded him every time I’ve used it. It was my small way of showing some kind of defiance against a challenging man. Pushing back against a powerful man who demands he be treated as if he is a God is foolish. But isn’t the power he exudes what I am attracted to the most?

“Good girl.” The warmth of his hand on my back relaxes me. His fingers disappear and the blunt head of cock slides up and down through my lips. I tense and wait for the intrusion. It never comes. His fingers slide around my neck. He lifts my upper half from the couch, turns me to face him, and pushes me down to my knees. “I want my cock down my fiancée’s throat.” His hand cups my chin while the pad of his thumb runs over my bottom lip. “Say it.” He gazes down at me with unrelenting determination. “Say it, Haven.”

I gaze up at him through heavy lids. “Yes.”

“That’s my good girl.” More tears drip from my lower lashes. “Do not

cry, firefly. What you are feeling is normal.” His thumb runs over the swell of my cheek as he watches me from above. “Your tears make me feel compelled to fuck you right here. To take what I’ve been given on a silver platter. If I was a weaker man, someone with no self-control, I would.” His eyes flicker over mine. “I won’t. Not here. I want you in my bed. Now open that pretty mouth and take me in like the good girl I knew you were from the first day I met you.”

He has done what he has set out to do. He broke me.

I unhinge my jaw, part my lips, and willingly push my tongue out over my bottom lip. An offering bed of soft muscle waiting for his hard cock.

His hand slides around my head and grips the hair at the nape of my neck. There’s a cruel grin that hides beneath his obsidian beard. He steps up to me and grabs his extensive shaft, lifting it to my mouth. He teases my upper lip with his glistening head. Then he rubs the cum that has betrayed his control and seeped out down the center of my tongue before bringing it back to the soft skin of my upper lip. His gaze hasn’t left mine. I notice his pupils have expanded and his eyes shine with a yearning that’s intimidating. It’s not a hardship to take this man into my mouth. I have done it once before, but I know this time will be much different and that thought starts to overwhelm me.

“Please, sir,” I beg, impatient for what’s to come.

With my hands bound at my back, my knees screaming from the pressure against the hardwood floor, my tongue stretched in waiting, and my heart full, I close my eyes and wait for his full intrusion.

The hair at the base of my neck screams to be released. My throat begs for mercy, but my ego makes me challenge myself. I cough and choke, and spit flows down my chin as I take what he gives me. The small grunts I’m privileged to hear Demetri make urge me to take him in more. He is not gentle or even nice. This is ruthless and raw. There is a finish line and Demetri is callously thrusting his way to it.

My head hangs from exhaustion. The once wet tears on my face are now dried black stains. The heaviness my body feels makes me shift my weight from my aching knees to my sore behind. I lean my weight against the back of the couch to give my body some relief. Demetri stands one foot in front of me, collecting himself. I note his fisted hand jammed against the frame of the couch, bracing himself. His knees are bent from weakness and his breathing is still heavy, but his gaze... his gaze is firmly on me. There was a morsel of a moment when his release took over and barreled down his veined shaft before his eyes closed and his cum coated my throat that I saw a different man before me as he emptied himself. When I swallowed what he gave me and licked my lips in thanks, approval gleamed from behind his hooded gaze. In that flash of a second, I saw a different man.

CHAPTER  
TWENTY-TWO

H AVEN

HIS KEYS ARE CARELESSLY DROPPED in a bowl sitting on an entryway table when we enter his home. Cujo the black panther he calls a dog greets us, sniffing me over. Demetri pats Thor on his head and gives him a command. He strides on his four legs over to the kitchen and gets a drink. Demetri follows his lead with me in tow.

I'm a little thrown off by the fact that he brought me here and not home, or to the place I'm temporarily calling home while we are in the States. Then with that thought, I think about my future. I am now Demetri's fiancée. My insides are giddy, but my head is not. I won't be going back home when Cillian decides it's time for him to head back to Ireland. I'll have no one here, no family in the States, no cousin or bodyguard to turn to.

I watch Demetri move around his space. He grabs something out of the refrigerator that's wrapped in brown paper. I watch as he starts to cut up a raw steak. He mixes it with some cooked brown rice and blueberries. Thor sits, patiently waiting for his food.

"What are you thinking?"

I find him watching me as I'm watching him. "Are you going to feed him that raw meat?"

"He's mostly on a raw food diet." He grabs Thor's bowl and starts mixing it all together. "Sedersi." He looks to Thor who sits at his command.

"So, he too is ruthless like his father?" It's not a statement and Demetri knows it when all he does is grin. "Do you speak full Italian?" I sit on the counter stool and watch him, thinking about how he cares for his dog.

"I do."

"Are you full Italian?"

"No." He sets Thor's bowl in an elevated stand and gives him a pat on the head before turning to me. "Come. We both need showers," he states instead of explaining what other nationality he is.

"How come you brought me here and not home?"

"That is not your home. This is now your home."

"All my stuff is there."

"It's not. It's here."

"What?" I'm flabbergasted at his candor. "Why? How?"

"Because you're my fiancée and it belongs here."

"Demetri." I reach for his arm but miss. "Demetri," I call, picking up my steps as I continue down the long hall and up the stairs. I follow behind him, wanting to tell him that we're moving too fast. That my head is spinning. That he hasn't even given me a ring to celebrate the long thought-out process you go through when you want to get engaged to the person you love and respect and want to spend the rest of your life with. But I know my words will fall on deaf ears.

"You hungry?" He turns back to look at me as we head down another hallway. "I didn't get to feed you the dinner I had planned."

"We need to talk." I continue to follow him as he walks us toward his bedroom.

"We don't. Talking only causes problems, complicating things when

there is no other option.” He stops to look at me. “Are you hungry?” he asks again.

*No other option?*

“No. I’m fine.”

His gaze washes over me. The expression on his face tells me he is not satisfied with my answer. I become quiet and introspective over his use of words until I feel hot breath on the back of my legs. I turn and glance over my shoulder to see Thor at my heels. He nudges my hand and I give him a small pat. He isn’t satisfied with just the pat—just like his father—and he nudges me once again, eagerly wanting more. He begins to walk next to me. I rest my hand on his head and stroke him down his back. I’m a bit nervous. I have never encountered a dog of this size. Besides the fact that he is dark and mysterious like his owner.

We cross over the threshold to Demetri’s bedroom. His dress shirt is quickly unbuttoned and thrown to the basket in the corner. I stand there in the middle of the room with Thor at my side.

“Strip.” Demetri’s gaze slides over me.

I fidget in my spot.

“I’ve already seen every part of you.” He walks in my direction, stopping just before me. “Now strip.” He drops his dress pants to the ground a foot in front of me. I glance down. He’s already beginning to grow an erection.

“Does it ever stay down?”

He turns with a smirk and begins to walk around me, his finger tracing my skin with each step he takes. “Do I need to undress you or are you capable of doing it yourself?”

“I think I dressed myself, Mr. Carbone. So, my guess is, I know how to undress myself as well.”

“Then let’s get to it.” He rolls his finger in the air once he is back in front of me. “I have plans for you.” He turns his back to me and walks towards the bathroom. “Posto, Thor,” he commands over his shoulder as he crosses over

the threshold. Thor leaves my side and walks to a bed I assume is a dog bed but not. It looks like it's a bed fit for a king. Which by the confidence with which Thor struts his stuff across the room, he possesses king tendencies.

I sit on the chair by the dresser and remove my heels. I feel off. Giddy that I am marrying a man like Demetri but also feeling a little lost in the feeling too. I remove my dress that has both our DNA on it and grab Demetri's shirt from the hamper he just removed. It smells of him, and I inhale with a deep breath. It's such a profound musky scent that matches its owner. I go to button his shirt but then decide not to. One day I hope I'll have the confidence to walk around naked in front of him, but today is not the day. So, I leave the two halves unbuttoned but grasp it closed with my hand.

I make my way to the bathroom. Demetri stands, completely naked, legs separated, and his broad shoulders flexing as he moves. He stands in front of the toilet relieving himself. I blush at my thoughts when I think about what it would feel like to hold him in the palm of my hand. I lean against the frame of the door, observing his every move.

My hands clutch his shirt to my chest. He turns, glancing over his shoulder, and sees me watching him. We connect eyes. And in that blip of a moment, I see something flicker in his expression. It was an indecipherable emotion from an emotionless, controlling man that lets me know there is more to him.

He reaches for his phone and takes a few steps towards me. "Drop your hands. Let one hang at your side and the other rest on your neck. Let my shirt fall open so I can see the curve of your breast."

I do what he asks with no qualms. When I glance down at myself, I feel sexy. I lift my leg, bend it at the knee and partially slide it over the front of the other. Years of ballet have distorted my toes, so I curve them around the back of my straight leg.

He lifts his phone and takes a few pictures.

"Open the shirt more."

I hesitate just a bit, but I do as he asks. His voice is a softer tone than what he normally carries his demands with. I pull his shirt to the side more, showing more of my chest and the soft swell of my belly. He snaps a few more images. Then he switches his phone from one hand to the other and turns the faucet on. Cupping the water in his hand, he walks to me and pours it over my cotton covered breast, highlighting the peeked point of my nipple through the material.

“Fucking perfect.” He reaches for the water once again. This time, he starts at the base of my neck and lets it drip down my center. His wet hand reaches for my full breast. He gives it a squeeze, leaving a handprint behind. Then he moves the material to the side and leans down and pulls my nipple into his mouth. My insides tingle and I can’t help but wonder how it is he can still perform after the multiple events of tonight, but then I remember, he only came once. It was me who got off multiple times, and I still want more of him. He slides my shirt back over my breast and strategically places it so that more is showing. He pushes the tail of the shirt resting over my hip to the back, showcasing the swell of my flesh. The rumble sounding in his chest makes me look up at him. He leans down and attaches his lips to mine. He slides his hand around my neck and plunges his tongue deeply down my throat. It’s slow and erotic, and I feel my insides tighten. His thumb under my chin forces my face to stay elevated to his. My fingers twitch at the need to touch him. I reach for his erection and wrap my hand around his length. With a slight tug, he groans. Our breathing picks up and the moment turns from a sensual photo session to a fiery moment of lust. I step into him, needing him closer. He continues to devour my mouth. I need air so I break away and go straight for the base of his lotus flower on his neck where I drew blood earlier with my teeth. His hands grip my still sore bottom, squeezing. In a moment I wasn’t prepared for, he lifts me with demands to wrap my legs around his waist. His cock rests at my seam, and I want nothing more than to push him through my entrance, but the fact that he is holding all my weight in his arms



has me on edge. No matter what this strange dynamic is between Demetri and me, and my issues with my self-confidence, I know without a shadow of a doubt I want to give this man my virginity. I want to know what it feels like to be consumed by him. I want to go down in flames with him. Burn in sexual desire with him. Come with him and fall with him.

He walks us into the shower and turns on the water. The sprays shoot from all directions, soaking us. His shirt clings to my body, and with agility, he removes it from me without setting me down. Bare chest to bare chest, he pummels my mouth with his. When he has had enough of my lips, he tortures the skin of my neck and works his way down to my breast. My back arches from where it is pressed up against the tile. His erection is still nestled between my lips, so I shift my weight, wanting more of him.

He stops his manipulation of my nipple with a groan, and a sharp, “Don’t.”

“Don’t?”

“It’s going to happen, Haven. Before this night ends, I will have embedded myself inside that sweet cunt of yours. Breaking through that barrier that was meant just for me.”

I moan with impatience then state a fact I’m not sure he is aware of. “You know there is a chance I don’t have a hymen anymore, right? I have performed extensive, physical dance moves since I was a child. I have most likely torn the small bit of skin little by little over the years.”

“Whether your hymen is intact or not, your cunt knows no man and will never know any other man, but me.”

My eyes flicker over his. His hand comes to my face and pushes my wet hair from my cheek behind my ear. I lean in and nibble on the soft skin of his neck just below his beard. He sets me on my feet and turns me towards the water. He reaches for the soap and washes my body. It’s then I notice it’s the same bodywash I use. I look to the other bottles set on the ledge and notice my shampoo as well.

“How?”

“Haven, you will learn that I am a man who doesn’t take no for an answer. I have many ways of getting what I want. My reach is far, and the respect I demand from my peers goes even farther.”

“What if I said no to your proposal when you demanded I marry you?”

“I would have fucked you into submission.”

I balk. “So romantic.”

“I’m not a romantic guy, giovane cucciolo. And the fact of the matter is, you’re stuck with me. This is now your life. I am the rest of your life as you are mine. You need to let that sink in.”

“That was kind of romantic in a brusque way, but you also make it sound as if this is a contract joining us.”

He snorts a burst of air then grabs for the shampoo. He massages it into my hair and then guides me under the water to rinse it out.

“Can I wash you?”

He hesitates a moment, observing me, to the point I think he will say no, but he doesn’t. He lifts his arms as if to say go ahead. I grab a bottle of body wash and hold it up for him. He nods and waits as I lather my hands. I place them on his chest and watch him as I move them over his skin. His chest flexes. I can’t ignore the desire to lay my lips against the firm muscle. I pull back and continue washing him, working my way down his torso to his groin. His erection is thick and so virile that it’s close to laying against his stomach. I reach for it, wrap my fingers around it, and give him a stroke, all while never taking my eyes off his. My hand ripples over his rigid head with an upstroke, and as I sweep back down, I hear the rumble in his chest. His mouth parts, and he sucks in a sharp breath between his clenched teeth. I take it as a good thing and repeat the movement. When I get to the base of his cock, I feel more confident and slide my hand down and cup his balls. He adjusts his stance, opening his legs, giving me more room to move. I fondle him and move my hand down further to his inner thigh. I bend at the knees

and squat in front of him. The whole time we've not broken the steely lock of our heavy gazes. With two hands, I wash his legs, lathering the soap over every part of his skin. When I pull him towards me by the globes of his ass so that I can rinse him off, I lean forward and wait for the water to rush by clean, and then wrap my lips around his girth. I swallow as much as I can of him on my own and it's only when his hand slices through my hair, gripping the strands at the base of my head, that I can take more of him in from his remorseless guidance. My hallowed lips pop when he pulls me off. He grabs the underside of my chin and pulls me up to stand in front of him. The crook of his index finger holds steady under my chin. His gaze flicks over mine. He's silent and contemplative. I part my lips to ask what his thoughts are or if there is something wrong, but before I can, he leans down and kisses me. Then he slaps me on my behind and orders me to get out and get dressed and make sure I dry my hair. I'm completely confused about the whiplash at the moment, and before I know it, he is leaving the bathroom and walking into his closet. He comes out, buttoning a fresh black dress shirt and pants as I stand there dripping in one of his towels. I glance at the clock next to the bed, thinking I'll see that it is after midnight but it's not even ten p.m. I feel like this day is never ending. But it's been a good day. More than that; a great day. And if Demetri keeps to his promise, I will end this day with him and without my virginity.

CHAPTER  
**TWENTY-THREE**

**H**AVEN

AFTER SEARCHING for my clothes and finding a second walk-in closet in Demetri's room, I dress in a pair of white skinny jeans and a Swiss dot sheer black shirt that has a plunging neckline. I contemplate not wearing the black tank underneath that I usually pair with it for more coverage, but in the end my insecurities win, and I slide the tank top over my head in defeat. Though sans the underwear—because I don't want panty lines—and the black lace bra I put on does make me feel sexy. I give my curls a quick fluff and grab one of my lip glosses that have been set neatly on top of the dresser. Whoever Demetri ordered to bring what little stuff I had at the rental over here did an amazing job at organizing it. I prepare for anything and slip a pair of silver heels on instead of the sandals I was going for because I don't know where he is taking me. Before giving myself a once over in the mirror, I call Paisley because it feels like I haven't talked to her in forever, but she doesn't answer, so I make my way through Demetri's expansive home in search of my fiancé.

I make my way towards the kitchen which is where I hear him and Luca talking.

“I’m not sure the decision made is going to be an asset for the organization,” I hear Luca voice his opinion.

“It is what it is,” Demetri answers with a dry tone.

“You sure you want to do this?”

“I was given orders.”

“There will be major blowback. You know that, right? You’ll have a target on your back.”

“I already have many.”

“This is different. You know it. I got your back, though.”

“As I will always have yours,” I hear Demetri reaffirm.

“At least the incentive is gorgeous.”

I hear Demetri hum his agreeance. “That it is.”

“Talia overheard Antonio and I talking about tomorrow night’s event. She was a little put off that she didn’t know anything about it. Boss did warn you not to fuck the help.” He laughs. “This could get interesting.”

I stop dead in my tracks and listen.

“She’ll be fine. She’s an adult. She knew the rules from the beginning.”

“Don’t they all? I don’t know, though, man. Apparently, Tegan was upset and called her crying. Talia was pissed.”

“I’ll handle her.” It’s quiet for a moment, then I hear, “Eavesdropping on the wrong person will get you killed, Haven.”

I jump in my spot at being caught, but then I steel my backbone and walk into the kitchen with a snarky attitude. Hearing my fiancé’s past proclivities was not on my list of fairytales on the day I became engaged.

Luca notices me first when I come around the corner and announces my entry with a long, slow whistle. I blush at the sexual tone of it as I make my way farther into the room. Demetri turns his attention to me instead of pulling containers out of a brown bag. His observation glides over my length twice. The gleam in his two-toned colored eyes turns heated. He turns his attention back to the bag in front of him and after taking its contents out, he slides one

in Luca's direction and then one in mine as I walk up to the island. He watches me with interest.

“Apparently my fiancé has fucked a lot of women.”

He glares at me as I stand across the counter from him,

“I don’t know. It’s really kind of a turn off.” I crinkle my nose. “He gets pure as snow, untouched, untainted by past men, and I get dirty used deeds.” I raise an eyebrow and shrug my shoulder while quickly glancing at Luca.

“Sit.” Demetri ignores my statement and continues with what he is doing.

“What’s this?”

“Dinner. Eat.”

I open the lid and find grilled chicken and broccoli. I glance up at him and give him a quick smile. I look at Luca’s container as he’s opening it and I’m consumed by a delicious smelling steak with the same broccoli as mine. When I glance at Demetri’s meal, he too has the same as Luca. My mouth salivates at the smell, and without hesitation, I grab the offered knife and fork Demetri is handing me and I dig in, trying to swallow what I just overheard along with my chicken.

Besides the music playing at the quietest level throughout the room, we eat in silence. Which is fine by me. I’m starving, and green with jealousy, and both don’t really mix well. I savor each piece of chicken I pop into my mouth. I keep my head down but after a few bites of my food, I look up at Demetri through my lashes. The top two buttons of his shirt are open. The scattering of dark hair beneath his black shirt is dangerously sexy. I watch his Adam's apple bob when he clears his throat, and that’s the moment I realize he caught me checking him out. He turns away and grabs a couple bottles of water from the refrigerator and hands one to me and the other to Luca.

I break the silence by asking, “Am I dressed okay?”

“I would think by the look in my man’s eyes and my low whistle as you walked into the kitchen you should know the answer to that question,” Luca answers before Demetri can get a word in.

“I meant for wherever you’re taking me?” I look to Demetri.

“Yes.”

Luca finishes his meal and throws what’s left in Thor’s bowl.

“I thought he only gets raw food?”

“He gets leftovers.”

“I guess you’re fortunate not to get that from me.” The snarky comment pops right out of my mouth.

His glare scolds my pale skin, but my own heated gaze gives it right back to him.

“Come here.”

“No.”

“Now, young pup, or your ass will need medical attention.”

“I think it already does.”

“Haven.”

“Demetri,” I challenge.

I hear a choked laugh to my right, and I glance over at Luca who is standing by the sink with his silverware midair watching the back and forth between us. It isn’t until he grins the most salacious grin and nods his head in a manner that would suggest I turn around that I feel Demetri’s heated energy on my left side. I turn and have to look up because Demetri is so close. My food is slid across the counter in haste, and within seconds, I am lifted off my stool and tossed on top of the counter.

“What the fuck?” I fluster, hiding the excitement I feel at being lifted so easily.

“You did it now, gorgeous.” Luca crosses his arms and leans against the sink to watch Demetri’s show.

“I will tell you this one time and one time only.” His hand snakes around my jaw so that I have no choice but to look at him. “You being jealous, it’s a turn on for me. You not listening to an order, is not.” He runs his thumb over my bottom lip. “You want to play games with your refusal to obey, then I’ll

have to show you what really happens to bad girls who don't listen."

My belly flips at his words. There is something about Demetri that makes my insides squeeze with an unbearable intensity before becoming jelly. "It isn't fair. You know that, right?"

"What isn't?"

"That you get me, and I get your past."

"I'm a damn lucky man, aren't I," he states it as a fact.

I huff a breath. "Luck has nothing to do with it." I throw his words back at him that he said to Ciarán and Domenico when they complimented me and told him he was lucky to have me.

"When it comes to your virginity, you couldn't be more wrong."

"Arrogant ass." I push at his chest, wanting him to back up so I can get down.

But he doesn't budge.

"Ah, ah," he tsks, pushing my see-through shirt to the side and finagles my tank top and bra to expose my breast. The tip of his middle finger circles my nipple, teasing it to a hard point. He opens his hand and palms the tender tissue, squeezing a few times before dropping his head and sucking me into his mouth. I whimper at the force he uses. When his teeth connect with my rosy bud, I drop my head back and mewl at the warm, stinging sensation. I feel his arm snake around my waist. He pulls me to the edge of the counter, into his hips. His erection is on full display through his dress pants. My ego soars knowing I can make him that hard, that fast. I'm in my own little world as he works me. Then he pulls back and says, "Think of it this way." He watches his thumb flip back and forth where his mouth just left. "You get the expertise of an experienced man." He pinches my nipple. "Instead of a fumbling idiot." Then he drops his head and sinks his teeth back into my now throbbing nipple. My hands go to his shoulders and my head drops back. He maneuvers me to lay back. The button on my white pants is popped. The zipper released. His lips caress every inch of my soft belly before gliding his



tongue down through the open V. I moan knowing what is about to come. Me. My pants are jerked off my hips. It's a sudden movement that jilts my body, making my eyes spring open. I hear the deep, unforgiving thunder of pleasure in Demetri's chest, but in that moment, I am frozen. Because with the first swipe of Demetri's tongue over my clit, my eyes roll back in my head, and when I reopen them, I see a shadow. Luca is standing there, leaning against the counter. His arms are at his sides, and he is watching us. Our eyes connect. His pupils flare. My back arches as Demetri manipulates my clit. I want to jump up, cover myself, run and hide, be embarrassed for myself, but the look in Luca's eyes and the clench of his jaw as he watches on has me staying in my spot. My hands go to Demetri's hair. Luca's hand goes to his groin. I pull Demetri into me. A deep chuckle sounds through the room. Not one of ridicule but of satisfaction. My mouth drops open. My insides tighten and when Demetri slides a finger inside me, I moan with the deepest urge to come and please myself, Demetri, and the witness to our sexual act. Two pumps of Demetri's thick, unforgiving finger has me mewling, gripping at his shoulders. When I don't think I can take anymore, when I think the world will explode around me, shattering into shards of shiny pieces of me, Demetri stops. His hand grabs mine and pulls me up to face him, breaking the connection between Luca and me. My focus is blown wide at the change, spinning back to normal when I connect with Demetri. His hand captures my jaw and his thumb presses against my bottom lip. He swipes at what's left of my gloss while his gaze is steadfast on mine. "Bad girls don't get rewards."

I'm flustered, confused, and stunned at the sudden shift in what is transpiring. He knew Luca was still in the room. He knew he was watching. It was me who never gave it a thought until he and I connected eyes. How could he be mad at that? And why was I so turned on by Luca watching? I open my mouth to argue that point when Demetri pulls me down from the counter. My legs shake, feeling weak. He steps into me and pins me against the edge of the stone. "Eavesdropping on the wrong person will get you

killed, Haven. I'd rather not defend my wife just because she can't stop herself from being nosy. Secrets aren't secrets in this family. They are withheld protection. Which is what I made a vow to do. Protect you."

"I—"

He plants his lips on mine. They're hard, bruising, and unforgiving. When he pulls back, his gaze flicks over my shoulder to where I assume Luca is still standing, still watching. Then he turns his attention back to me. The look in his eyes is so feral my insides twist into a knot. He huffs a disbelieving noise and steps back. As he walks away, he orders me to go clean myself up, that we are leaving in five minutes.

I button my pants and as I'm adjusting my shirt, watching him walk away, he turns back and says, "That black garment you covered your body with. Take it off. I want to watch every man salivate over what is mine."

I linger, watching his back disappear around a corner I have yet to explore. I just stand in my spot when I hear Luca behind me.

"Better do as he says."

I twist and look at him. "Is he always so moody?" I look back in the direction Demetri walked.

"No."

"He knew you were there, watching us. How could he be mad?"

"So did you but you did nothing to stop him."

"I didn't know until I saw you. He has a way of making my brain become mush."

He snorts a chuckle. "And yet you let him continue while you connected eyes with me."

My skin flushes, knowing he is right. I look away, embarrassed that he just watched Demetri go down on me. "This is not how I thought..."

"What did you think?"

"Nothing." I shake my head, feeling overwhelmed, wanting to tell him how my feelings and emotions have been all over the place these last few

days. Excited that I will be a wife to a man like Demetri, but also lost when it comes to his ups and downs. That I have fallen completely for his overbearing friend, but there is also a small voice telling me to be careful with my heart and only give away so much of my love. But I also know my own words have fallen flat and it's already too late.

I don't even excuse myself. I just walk away. An emotion I've never felt before hits me hard. I take off my heels and run up the stairs, and instead of going into the bathroom to take care of myself, I drop down onto the edge of his bed. After a few minutes, I grab my phone and call Paisley once again. She doesn't answer. I try my mom, needing to hear the comfort of her voice, but she doesn't answer either. I sit for a few more minutes before I decide to get up and get ready. The whole time, my thoughts become scattered unanswered questions only I have the answers to.

I make my way back downstairs. Demetri and Luca are now standing in the living room talking. Luca is now dressed in a dark suit, looking sharp with a dangerous edge to him.

"We need to make sure the container gets past the coast guard. Maybe we can off load at the Redhook terminal in Brooklyn."

I clear my throat letting them know I'm within hearing distance. I may have been sheltered from my family's business, but I do know that when they are talking about shipments, it means business.

Demetri turns and looks at me. His eyes go straight to my see-through shirt and my ample chest. "I'll talk to Leo tonight," he tells Luca while watching me. "Come." He crooks two fingers at me. "I should have been down there already but a vixen in disguise has made me late."

With his hand on my back, he walks me down a hallway to a hefty door. It's made of steel and looks like it belongs in the basement of a castle. Although this place does look like a mini castle. There is a sleek box on the wall next to the door. Demetri touches it then waits for a keypad to show. He punches in a bunch of numbers and then grabs for my hand. He places it in

the dark box, and after a few seconds, a green light flashes.

“What is that?”

“It’s a security feature. This door is to the basement. It’s always locked. If you want to go downstairs, all you have to do is lay the same hand against the screen and it will unlock for you.”

“Okay,” I mutter, knowing I will never want to go down there without him.

Demetri enters first. Then Luca motions for me to go next and he follows behind me, making sure the door is secure. I expect it to be creepy once we get to the bottom step but it’s not as creepy as I thought it would be. It has a barreled stone ceiling, and the walls are stone as well. We walk down a long hallway that has multiple doors. There are gas lanterns hanging that light our way. *Déjà vu* hits me. It reminds me of the night I used the restroom at the fight my cousin took me to. The night Demetri was standing across the hall from the bathroom opening when I came out. I’m just about to question Demetri, but he stops short by one of the doors. I stop with him, but Luca keeps walking. As he’s passing us, Demetri tells him to tell a guy named Joseph that he has security detail.

Luca nods at Demetri and then he looks at me. With a grin and a wink, he says, “Thanks for the porn show, gorgeous.” I suck in a surprised breath and glance at Demetri, waiting for him to say something, but he doesn’t. “I’ll be thinking about you later when I shower.”

My mouth falls open in shock.

“Cut your shit, Luca.”

Luca’s grin turns into a devious smile. “That’s what I thought, D-man.”

I jerk my head in Demetri’s direction, but he is just standing there staring Luca down. He doesn’t look angry. He’s just standing there with no emotions. Then it hits me. “You’ve shared your women with him, haven’t you?”

He turns to me. “We’ve shared women, *giovane cucciolo*.” He steps to

the side and opens the door and walks inside the room.

“Is that what you will do with me?” I walk in behind him.

“Didn’t I just,” he says, turning back to look at me. “Are you saying you didn’t enjoy it?”

“You planned that?”

“No, but the moment was there. Did it turn you on?”

I don’t know how to answer his question, so I ask one of my own to bide my time. “Is that what you want from me?” If I say yes to his question and tell him that after the shock subsided at seeing Luca watching us that I was turned on, it may infuriate him? If I say no, will he be happy that it was only him that I wanted? Maybe this is a test. One I am not prepared to pass or fail. I don’t know how to answer but it doesn’t matter at the moment, because when I become aware of the room we’re now standing in, my heart flutters with so much happiness, it’s painful. “Demetri...” I breathe his name in wonderment as I quickly spin in a circle and take in the entirety of the room. “When?” I ask with excitement as I turn back to him.

“Do you like it?”

“It couldn’t be more perfect.”

“Good. Come. We’re late.” He holds his hand out for me to take.

I step to him. “Wait.” I slide my hand in his and brush myself up against him. “Thank you for giving me this studio.”

“You’re welcome.” He steps back to walk out.

“Wait! Demetri, are you mad? At me?”

“No.”

“Then why are you being... I don’t know. You’re hot and cold. After we left the club, you became a little distant. Did something happen when you stepped out to take that call?” I question. It was just after he and I finished. We were collecting ourselves when he got a phone call and excused himself for a few minutes while I redressed. When he came back, he seemed a bit closed off. “Or is it because of what just happened in the kitchen? You’re

more on edge. I can feel it. It feels like you're mad but then you show me this, what you did for me. It's confusing me."

He pulls me into him. "I am not mad. I am glad you like your studio. I am late and I need to get inside before the first round goes off."

"The first round?"

"You liked the fight you watched with your cousin?"

"Loved it." I exaggerate the two words.

"You still owe me."

"I don't." I shake my head and smile.

"You will always owe me, but I will be more than happy to take it out on your ass. I mean that literally and not figuratively."

"My behind is off limits."

"Nothing is off limits. Trust me, you will beg me for it all. Now come."

"Yes, sir." I follow him out the door, feeling better, my head swimming with happiness over the dance studio he had built for me. I can't wait until I get a chance to leave my sweat behind on the hardwood floor after an exhausting workout.

I follow him down another hall and through another door that has the same security feature. It's not until we cross over into a new hallway after the steel door is closed, and the security is reset, that I hear cheering. "Wait, the fight is here?" It finally hits me that these walls are the same ones I walked through. "In the basement of your home?"

"Yes."

We pass the bathroom I used the last time I was here and make another turn. The closer we get to the fighting cage, the louder the crowd noise gets. It makes me a little sad because I feel like I haven't seen Ciarán, Finn, or my brother in forever. These past few weeks are turning into one big blur for me. Then I think about the way Finn reacted to me leaving with Demetri. It was puzzling and more than uncomfortable.

We get to the mouth of the roped off area and a thrill zings through me.

There is already a match going. Two lightweights battle it out. One man drops to the mat and the fight is called. The crowd cheers. The man who lost is pulled off the mat by two men. The winner raises his arm in victory and the crowd goes even crazier.

“You love this,” he leans down and says next to my ear.

“I do.” I turn into him, my eyes sparkling.

“Want to place a wager?”

“I have no cash on me.”

“Let’s make it a personal bet.”

“That makes me nervous.”

“It should.”

“What’s your wager?”

“If Ghost loses, you have to marry me tomorrow.”

My eyes widen. I recoil. “Tomorrow? I have no dress. We have made no plans, and not that I care but I don’t even have a ring.”

“You do. I just haven’t given it to you yet.”

“Demetri... That’s... That’s... Are you sure you want to get married so fast?”

“Today, tomorrow, next week, a year from now. What’s the difference?”

“What if you hate me in a year?”

“I’ll still be stuck with you.”

My mouth drops open. “Stuck with me?”

He smiles and pushes my mouth closed with the crook of his finger. “Close your mouth, young pup, before I slide my dick in it.”

“You are... You’re...”

“Make the bet. Shake my hand and call it a deal.”

“Fine. Deal. You have your bet, Mr. Carbone. I don’t want to disappoint you, but Ghost will win.”

CHAPTER  
**TWENTY-FOUR**

**D** EMETRI

“JOSEPH,” I call, yelling over the roar of the crowd as I walk Haven into the office. Now a grown man who was once just a directionless teen getting himself in trouble, swaggers towards me with respect and confidence. Giovanni took Joseph under his wing per his father’s request and the boss’s approval and made him a loyal soldier. When Antonio had him watching Lilah, when they couldn’t figure their shit out, Joseph did a stellar job. So, I trust him to do the same with Haven.

“Sir?”

“She is yours tonight.”

His eyes sparkle with mischief as they start to lower. “Watch yourself,” I warn. The fact that he is just a year or two older than her only adds more depth to my warning. He laughs and returns his gaze to mine. “She will become my wife tomorrow.” I give him another warning through the tone of my voice. It goes without saying, you don’t touch another man’s wife, but no one touches a woman married to a man in the mafia unless you want to die.

“Only if Ghost loses. Which he won’t.” Haven jumps into the conversation with more sparkle in her eyes than she had when we walked in



here.

Joseph smiles at her. Then looks back to me and raises his brows.

“Take her over to the south corner of the ring,” I tell him, so that I can keep an eye on her—them—since Joseph can’t keep his eyes off her. In hindsight, challenging her to go without the shirt underneath her top was not one of my best orders.

The announcement is called for the next fight. The two of them start to walk away but not without me pulling Haven back and laying an unforgiving kiss on her lips. I leave her breathless, and me somewhat shocked at my actions. I watch until Joseph has her where I asked him to bring her before I head to the back where the fighters wait for their match to be called. I pass one of the fighters in the hall, and a few minutes later as I am discussing business with another fighter, the next guy is called to the ring. I finish my conversation and head back to the main floor.

Haven stands at ringside, excitement fueling her body. Watching her is an aphrodisiac. If she knew how stunning she really is, she would be lethal. I have to say, there are men in my position who may not be so lucky as to have someone like Haven placed in their path, but I must admit I’m beginning to think I lucked out.

I start to head back to the office to watch the fight but find myself stepping up behind her. “Want to bet on this one too?”

“I am not marrying you tonight.”

“You will be. It will just be in the sexual union way and not the before God’s eyes way.” She blushes. “Are you ready for me, cosabella?”

“What does that mean?”

“Beautiful thing.”

“So, I moved up now? I am no longer a puppy, but a thing?”

“A beautiful one.”

“That makes me feel so much better.” She smiles at me with mirth. “I feel like we have been having sex all day.”

“We have. But tonight will not be innocent.”

“I don’t think the word innocent should ever come into play with you when you talk about sex.”

I huff a hard laugh. “You have no idea.” I turn her around to face the ring and pull her back to my chest. Leaning down, I whisper, “You pick, and you make the bet.” I nod towards the ring.

“The guy in the red shorts will win. If he does, you have to...”—her cheeks become fevered—“let me explore you without you giving any orders.”

“And if I win?”

“You tell me.” She looks a little weary letting me decide.

“I’ll think of something,” I tell her just as the bell rings for the fight to start.

“Hey! That’s not fair.” She tries to twist in my arms to face me, but I stop her, nodding towards the fight.

“Life isn’t fair. You just better hope your man wins.” She rolls her eyes. “Don’t worry, you will enjoy whatever it is.”

The first round ends, and by the looks of it, the guy she picked, Viper, looks like he is getting his ass beat. I know better. She picked well but she doesn’t know that. My attention is on her when a commotion breaks out on the other side of the ring. I quickly turn to Joseph, snap my fingers and point, telling him to go check it out. I see Luca fly through the crowd from the opposite direction. I stand behind Haven and watch on, not wanting to leave her side unprotected but also knowing I should be over there. It isn’t until I hear someone yell, “Gun!” that I grab her arm and pull her through the crowd. It wouldn’t be the first time there was a side fight while the real fight was happening, and it won’t be the last, but when a shot is fired off and the crowd becomes chaos, I know I have to get Haven to safety. I’m two feet from the office door when I shove her in that direction, yelling for her to go inside and lock the door. She does exactly as I ask. When I see her enter the

room and the door slams shut, I push my way through the crowd and head directly into the danger.

When I get to where there is a struggle happening, I see Luca pulverizing some dude. The gun is handed off to Giovanni as Luca rips the bloody guy off the concrete ground. Just as I turn to Joseph and order him to go to the office and check on Haven, some guy comes out of nowhere and sucker punches him. He's knocked off his feet and blood spurts from his nose when he hits the ground. I instantly react, nailing the guy in the jaw before thoroughly working him over. Joseph quickly gets to his feet and wipes the blood from his upper lip, murder dancing in his eyes. Luca has the guy he handled up against the wall. He's patting him down to make sure he has no more weapons. Giovanni orders Luca to take the guy to the back. He starts questioning the guy because he knows as well as I do that this was a setup, a distraction. But from what? We have had fights here before but nothing of this magnitude. Most viewers know whose event they are walking into. So, besides the few that are too cocky for their own good, everyone is pretty much on their best behavior. There's a moment as I'm stepping towards the exit that I stop dead in my tracks and look towards the office. The door is still closed, but something tells me I need to get to her. I hand the guy that punched Joseph off to him. I yell over to Giovanni and tell him to call Antonio, who is at a dinner meeting with his father, Mr. Heart, our Don. I briskly walk over to one of our security guys who secured the cage and order him to announce the next fight so we can get everyone's attention off the two men being removed. It's still chaos in here. People are scattered all over. I can barely get through the crowd without shoving someone. Women are screaming and men are yelling for the next fight to start. It's bedlam, and I'm even more suspicious of the madness happening now that the culprits have been removed. When a fight breaks out, it's no big deal, but the gun being shot off is.

I'm just about to the office when one of our security guys tells me he has

an issue. I glance over at the office door to make sure it's still closed before I follow him to where he says there is a problem. He enters the hallway that leads outside. Another one of our security guys is kneeling down next to a girl who looks to be wasted.

"I gave her some water, but she keeps passing out. She can't stand."

"O.D.?" I question.

"Nah, she smells like a bourbon factory."

"Who is she here with?" I kneel and give her face a couple of taps.

"I asked. She didn't answer."

"Sleeping beauty, wake up." Her head rolls. "She's more than wasted." I give her face a harder tap. "Who are you here with?"

Her eyes spring open and then fall immediately after she mumbles. "Nicol."

I stand to my full height. "Take her three blocks over to Lucky Sevens Deli and call an ambulance. Wait with her until you hear the sirens and then get in your car and wait to make sure they take her. She's young. From now on, no more young females allowed in here."

"Got it."

I turn away and head back toward the ring and my office to check on Haven. The next fight is beginning. When I get to the open space, all has calmed down, and I find Haven standing at ringside by my office watching the fight begin. My insides burn. I head in her direction, furious, and step up behind her.

"I told you to stay in my office," I harshly reprimand her.

She jumps in her spot then turns to face me. She seems nervous. It may be my demeanor because she has never heard me this angry. "I gave you an order, you disobeyed it." My jaw clenches as I stare down my nose at her. Her full attention is on me and the fear I see in her eyes is not one I like.

"Someone knocked on the door. I thought it was you or one of your guys that needed the office. I opened it and no one was there but I noticed that

everything had calmed down. I thought it was okay to come out when they called Ghost to the ring.”

“It wasn’t.”

Her palm slowly comes to my chest. “I’m sorry.” I watch her eyes melt with her apology. “I should have stayed in your office.”

I soften just a bit at seeing her genuinely upset at pissing me off. “Yes, you should have.” I run the back of my hand over her cheek while observing her nervous behavior.

“Demetri...” she breathes, the next words on the tip of her tongue vanish when I hear a deep voice behind me.

“Demetri.” I respectfully turn to my boss standing directly behind me with his son.

“What the fuck happened in here tonight?”

I step back from Haven and shake Mr. Heart’s hand. “Haven, you remember the Don of our family, Mr. Heart?”

“I do. It’s a pleasure seeing you again, sir.” She reaches her hand forward to respectfully shake his, but he pulls her in and kisses both her cheeks in greeting without letting her go.

“The pleasure is all mine, young lady.” He continues to hold her hand. “Are you okay?” He places his other hand on top of hers, caging hers between his. “You look a bit nervous.”

I watch the exchange between the two of them with mindfulness. He has also picked up on her jittery behavior.

“I’m okay.”

“It seems we’ve had a bit of a situation here tonight.”

Haven only nods.

“Has it been handled?” Mr. Heart turns to me.

“Everything is secure.”

“Where are they?” Antonio questions.

“Down back. Let me get security on her, and I will walk back there with

you.”

I call one of my guys over and instruct him to watch over Haven while Ghost is fighting. Then I turn back to her and tell her to wait in my office when the fight is over. She agrees, and when I stare her down, getting my point across a bit more, she nods and says, “I promise.”

I leave her and head toward the back where the men are being held. We’re halfway there when Mr. Heart says, “She seemed nervous.”

“She did.” I don’t disagree. “She was nervous when I was speaking to her before you got here.”

“You two have a fight? You seemed irritated with her.”

“She didn’t listen to my orders.” Then I question, “Would it matter if we did have a fight?”

“No. However, if one of my captains isn’t happy then I need to find a way to rectify the situation.”

“I’m marrying her tomorrow.”

“Did she readily agree?” I hear the surprise in his voice.

“She made a losing bet.”

He grins. “You will be an eye opener for her.”

“I already am.” I open the door to the room we have the two guys tied up in. Mr. Heart walks past me into the space. He stands in front of the two men strapped to a chair. “Gentlemen, do you know who I am?”

“No,” one sputters through a bloody lip. The other stays quiet.

“Your stupidity would only confirm your answer. But I have to say, I think you are much smarter than that and know exactly who I am and whose establishment you came into and disrupted.” He walks around to the back of them and stands behind the guy who stayed quiet. He holds out his hand and waits for the leather belt Giovanni hands over to him. Within a second of that belt being laid across his palm, the man in the suit, the one we all look up to, becomes a vicious killer. He whips the belt over the guy’s head and wraps it around the mute guy’s neck and yanks back. The guy convulses, his arms and

legs jerk beneath the rope he's been detained with. He sputters noncoherent words. I lunge forward and slam my foot down on the seat of the chair, bringing it back down to the ground when the chair is rocked back from the force of Mr. Heart choking the guy. He releases the belt only a few inches, and says, "I would advise you to speak before you can't. And when you do, the information better be the truth."

"Mister. We don't know who you are."

"Why take on a job when you don't know who you're working against? Because your partner here knows exactly who I am."

"He paid us a grand."

"Shut the fuck up, Richie." His buddy speaks.

"No, man, I'm not going to die over this stupid shit. It was a simple fight. Just start some shit and get lost. Tell him what he wants to know."

"You do realize that you are the unintelligent one, correct, Richie? You see your friend here has all the information I need. That is why he isn't speaking. Ask him if he got paid more. Ask him how much he kept from you when he only gave you a grand to do the job."

I watch Richie's face wrinkle with confusion and look to his friend. "Is that true?"

"You're a fucking pussy, man." The guy tells his so-called friend. "You're going to die whether you tell them or not. So just keep your mouth shut."

"What?! No!" His head frantically twists on his shoulder, looking at each of us, and then his focus goes to Antonio. "No!"

"Then tell us what you know?" I demand as Mr. Heart starts strangling him again.

He chokes on his words, sputtering, "It was a guy with dark hair." He looks at his buddy with worry and starts talking faster. "Tall. Built. Had an accent, I think. I'm not sure. I think he was trying to hide it. He kind of looked like... you. A mean motherfucker." He looks at me then at his friend.

“Let him go, man. Let him go.” He jerks in his seat, trying to get loose from the rope. “The guy asked us to come in here and start a fight. That’s it. The gun was his idea.” He nods at his friend, staring at his blood-red face, who now has saliva dripping out of his mouth.

“Why?” I ask, my gut twisting.

“Don’t know. All I know is that he was here too.”

“He was here?”

“Yeah, man.” The nervous sweat pours off him. “He was on the opposite side of the room with an older guy.”

I look to Luca. He, too, realizes that if he is telling the truth, that means the guy was behind Haven and me. I look at Antonio and then to our boss. He’s cool, calm, and collected while still choking out Richie’s buddy. “Go.”

I hold my spot for only a moment, questioning if I should leave my boss and the men I consider my brothers. Then I turn and walk out the door, hitting the hallway at a pace just under a jog.

We were in danger.

I am always in danger, but she was as well. I didn’t see it coming and that doesn’t sit well with me. I see everything. I’m prepared for it all. That thought weighs heavily on me as I hit the main area and search for her. I glance over at the ring. Ghost’s fight is just ending. Haven isn’t where I told her to be. I scan the area, a feeling I am not familiar with radiates in my chest. I ignore it and look for the security guy I ordered to watch over her. I find him standing on the opposite side of the ring, Haven not by his side. I head in his direction and when I get there, I interrupt his discussion with an attractive blonde.

“Where’s Haven?”

“She’s in your office.”

“Then why are you over here and not by the door guarding her like I told you to?”

“She’s in your office.” He says it as if it’s no big deal.



“You’re fired.”

“Boss?” His full attention is now on me and not the woman he’s been flirting with.

“I told you to watch over my fiancée while I handled business. You didn’t. I’d advise you to leave the premises immediately before your life ends here.” The woman gasps and scurries away.

I head for the office, pushing people out of the way as they are lining up to collect their winnings. I fling the door open, anger behind my strength, and halt to a complete stop when I don’t see Haven but Tegan sitting on my couch.

“What are you doing in here? My office, no less.”

“What you did was wrong.”

“What I did was put you in your place.”

“It was cruel, Demetri. We’ve been seeing each other for a long time. For it to end with no explanation... Then you show up with someone else and throw it in my face. It’s wrong.”

“You knew we were not exclusive.”

“But I was.”

“And that is your fault for assuming there was anything more.”

“Who is this girl? Where did she come from?”

“That is none of your concern.”

“I think it is.”

“Tegan, you’re pushing me.”

“Good. You like to be pushed and I like to be punished, remember?” She steps up to me with a sultriness in her eyes I have seen many times before. She places her hands on my chest and instead of removing them, I stand there, my rejection more powerful by my refusal to move from her touch.

My arms hang at my sides as I say, “Leave. Now.”

Just as she is dropping her arms, Mr. Heart and the rest of the guys walk into the office. The proximity of her being so close should make them raise

their brows but the only one that does is my boss.

As Luca is closing the door, blocking any spectators from the show, Mr. Heart looks at Tegan. “Leave, young lady. Now.”

She hurries past him but not without looking back at me. Luca opens the door as she gets closer. The noise from the crowd outside filters through. Once she crosses the threshold, Luca closes the door on her.

“Can I assume that situation won’t be a problem?”

“It won’t.”

“You’re sure?”

“I’ll handle it,” I’m quick to say.

“Where’s your fiancée?”

“I don’t know.” I grab for my phone, dialing Haven’s number as I explain, “The security guard I assigned to her was supposed to be her shadow while I was in the back. He said she wanted to come in here and wait for me. Clearly, she didn’t.”

“Which guard?”

“The one I fired.”

His face becomes stone at my blatant disrespect. Reining in his own temper, he ignores it for the moment, and questions, “Where would she go?”

“I don’t know.” I dial her number and listen to it go directly to her voicemail again. “She was supposed to be in here.” I look over to the CC footage Giovanni is going through.

“Anything?”

“Nothing yet.”

“Son, sit down. We need to have a discussion.”

I stop in my tracks and take in his disposition. He’s pissed, there is no arguing that, but is it at me for losing Haven or for my disrespect at his questions about me losing Haven? Whichever it is, it doesn’t matter to me right now. Haven is not where she said she would be, and I need to find her.

“With all due respect, sir, I’m wasting time standing here.”

“I got her,” Giovanni says to the room.

“Where?” I turn to him and take the three steps needed to get to the monitor.

“She’s walking through your living room.”

“What?”

Giovanni points to the screen. “She just got upstairs. Thor is at her side, walking with her.”

I turn to leave. I’m furious. Little miss Haven is in big trouble.

“Stop.”

I break my stride and give him the respect I should have given him before but also questioning why he is stopping me from going to her. “Sir?”

“Demetri, you are one of my top guys. The men standing in this office are what give my organization the reputation it has.” He stops speaking and turns towards the door. The crowd outside chanting for their winnings is getting louder and louder. He turns to Luca and Joseph. “You two go pay the crowd their money. When you’re done with payouts, make sure the fighters get their cuts.”

“Make sure Ghost gets ten percent more and his commitment for next week’s fight,” I add, interrupting him. Mr. Heart looks at me quizzically. “Had to make sure I was getting married tomorrow.”

He grins. Then walks to my desk and takes a seat. He opens my desk drawer and pulls out my box of cigars. He clips the end then offers Antonio, Giovanni, and I one. “Sit, boys. I have a story to tell you.”

CHAPTER  
TWENTY-FIVE

D EMETRI

I FLING the door open and there lays Haven curled up in a ball on my couch, half asleep. Her arm is draped over Thor's body. Her eyes snap open when she hears the scuffle of my shoes.

"Hey." She sits up, worry etches into her features. She rests her hand on Thor's head. The traitor is staying right by her side. Her mascara is smudged at the corners of both her eyes. It looks as if she may have been crying.

"You left."

"Yeah."

"You didn't want to watch the fight?"

"I only watched the first round."

"Why?"

"I was worried about you."

"Worried about me?" She stands with unsure movement. "Did something happen? Did someone approach you while I was gone?" She stays silent. It tells me all I need to know even without seeing it on the security footage. "Haven," I push with a warning, waiting to see what part she will tell me. The security footage showed a man talking to her. It also showed her

standing by the door, watching when Tegan and I were in my office.

“It was nothing. Just some jerk. I didn’t think anything of it at first. I thought he was harmless, just a spectator. He asked me a question about the fight. I answered. I guess that opened it up for him to start a conversation.”

“And?”

“He told me I was beautiful. It made me feel good, but when I didn’t return his complement with a thank you, he got mad. In his next breath, he told me I looked like a cheap whore because I was wearing a see-through shirt. That if I was his, he would never allow me to wear such revealing clothes. Because no man should let his woman be seen by any other eyes than his. That my man doesn’t care about me. It made me feel uncomfortable. Then he started saying I should have been his. That he would never leave me to my own defense.”

“Then what?”

“Nothing. It creeped me out.” She fidgets.

“Where was the security I placed on you?”

“He wasn’t there.”

“Dead man,” I mutter under my breath.

“It wasn’t during Ghost’s fight. It was before.”

“What? When?”

“When you went to speak to some of the fighters when we first got there.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?” I question, confused because when I saw the guy approach her on the security feed, it was during Ghost’s fight.

“I started to, but then Mr. Heart showed up and he called you over. I didn’t want to interrupt. Then you left. While I was watching the first round of Ghost’s fight, I saw the guy again. He was on the opposite side of the ring. He was staring at me through the cage. It creeped me out. I pretended like I didn’t see him. I kept my focus on the fight, but then the next thing I knew, he was standing next to me. The security guy was talking to a woman who

asked him for help. I told him I was going to go lay down in your office.”

“You should have told him about the man.” I’m furious at her and ready to murder him. That female was a decoy to get his attention off her and he fell for it. At least Haven listened to her intuition and removed herself from the situation. Now I know why she was nervous when Mr. Heart was speaking to her. “You are going to be my wife, Haven. It comes with consequences. You need to be vigilant in watching your surroundings. In the future, if something happens, if someone makes you uncomfortable, or if something doesn’t feel right, you need to tell me immediately.”

“I just didn’t want to bother you while Mr. Heart was there.”

“He would have understood. He has a wife, two daughters, and granddaughters.”

I wait to see if she will tell me she saw Tegan in the office with me.

She steps into me, placing her hand on my chest. Her hesitation is led by insecurity. The emotion doesn’t have a chance at succeeding. I grab her upper arm and pull her up against me. “Learn from your mistakes, giovane cucciolo.” Her body stiffens at my sharpness and moves to step back. She’s pissed at me for calling her young and naïve again. “I don’t think so, firefly.” I pull her back up against me. “Let’s be clear. The only man whose opinion matters on how you look is mine. Trust me, tonight I am going to show you exactly how I feel about the way you look.” I lay a harsh kiss on her. She melts in my arms, becoming pliable. My erection grows as soon as her ambivalent tongue barely touches mine. Thoughts of laying her down right here blister my insides, but she is holding back, and I don’t like it.

I pull apart from her but still hold her in my arms. “Anything else I need to know?”

“No.”

That’s a shame. The lie rolled right off her tongue. It’s unacceptable. I know she saw Tegan and me. I also know right after seeing us, she was upset and came up here. If seeing Tegan with me made her not trust me, then I need

to make sure she knows she can, or this isn't going to work between us. I made a promise, a commitment and I will see it through until my death and then beyond.

"Come." I turn on my heel and hold out my hand. She reaches for it, but the movement is laced with skepticism. I wait until she has stepped closer to me. Then I walk her toward the door to the basement and nod for her to place her hand on the security panel to unlock the door.

"Did Ghost win?" she asks, her steps falling in stride behind me as I walk down the stairs.

"No."

"Oh."

"Oh?" I turn back with curiosity. "Did you think you were going to get out of marrying me tomorrow?"

"I just..." Her steps falter. When I don't stop, she tugs on my hand, stopping me.

"You just what?"

"I think maybe we should slow down."

"And why is that?"

"I just... My family. I would like my family to be at my wedding. My father, he should be there. He... I don't know how long he has, and even though he could never walk me down the aisle, I would like for him to at least see me walk down an aisle and get married."

"Are you getting cold feet, my dear fiancée?"

"No. This is just moving so fast."

"That it is. Now come."

I continue down the steps. Walking her down the hallway that leads to her dance studio. What she doesn't know, is my studio is called my dungeon, and it's the door directly across from hers.

"Close your eyes."

"Why?" She glances up at me with confusion.

“Don’t question. Just do it.”

Her lashes flutter to the tops of her cheeks. I’m surprised she didn’t fight me harder. I open the door and walk her inside. I lead her across the room and start to remove her clothing. She squirms in her spot and wants to open her eyes, but like the good girl she is, she keeps them closed. I watch her skin flush and ignite with goosebumps. Her nipples become erect and when her cold back presses up against the carved wood, her shoulders square and her spine stiffens.

“Sir...?”

“Keep your eyes closed. Do not open them until I tell you,” I order in a voice she has never heard before.

“Demetri...” she breathes my name as if she has just orgasmed without me even touching her.

My own breathing has picked up at her erotic image and my name rolling off her tongue. Although, she will be reprimanded for the use of my first name. The depth of my arousal bothers me. It has never heightened this quickly with any other partner before. I have been aroused, sure, but not like this. Not without even touching. The image of her before me is simply erotic and powerful.

Haven has my discipline wavering. I hate it. She is quickly becoming a weakness I need to strengthen.

The first leather strap encases her right wrist. The second, her left. Her knees become unsteady, and her body starts to tremble, but she still doesn’t open her eyes. She is trusting me, and that does something to my head. I trace a finger down the inside of her thigh, stopping when I get to the back of her knee. I run the tips of my fingers over the soft skin before working my way down to her foot. I lift her leg, making her bend at the knee, and I suck on the tender tissue just below the swell of her ankle. I run my tongue back up the muscle and sink my teeth into her calf. I watch her lips part. She sucks in a deep breath. Her chest expands but it doesn’t collapse on a release. She is



holding in her pleasure.

“Breathe, Haven.”

I strap her right ankle down, then her left.

“Sir...”

“You trust me?”

She moans as I tighten the strap with a swift jerk. I take a step back and admire her beauty as I watch her energy-filled body shake with anticipation. She is gorgeous. A stunning woman with curves she shames. Her heavy breasts move with each inhale she takes. Her belly is slightly swollen with extra weight which she thinks is unappealing, but I find arousing. My dick pulsates at the thought of my semen being smeared across her firm skin. She may have weight on her, but she is firm from all the years of dancing. She shifts her position, her curvy hips capturing my attention. They flare off her narrow waist like an hourglass. The image of my fingers sinking into the soft skin of her flesh from behind as my cock slides inside her untarnished body has me unbuttoning my pants and reaching in to soothe my painful cock. I give myself a squeeze, and for the first time in my life, I pray that I make it through this session. She is a priceless portrait of beauty. One that will never go up for auction.

I strip from my shirt and carelessly toss it to the side as I walk over to the surround sound and turn it on. *Craving* by Haux breaks the silence. I admire her from across the room. She wants to open her eyes so badly but won't. Her head swivels from left to right, silently searching for me. When she slowly turns in my direction, sensing right where I am in the room without physically seeing me, another piece of me becomes bound to my commitment. I inhale a deep breath and walk in the direction of the woman that is in tune with me. She has this pull, this charm, a charisma that draws you in, but she has been repressed and her self-esteem is shit. Is it self-inflicted or has someone else paved the road and triggered her own degrading? I believe I know the truth. At least, I know part of it. Haven

herself will tell me what no one else can through this session she is unaware is about to take place.

If this woman comes out of her shell, is allowed to bloom and flourish, she will be unstoppable. She already is to me. I have to say, I believe I saw a glimpse of that woman the day I met her when her cockiness at addressing me came to light. It was the wrong place and the wrong time, but if she were schooled properly in the world we move around in, she would be more than an asset. She would be a force of power at my side. A solid union of unmitigated strength.

I stand before her, her head leans back against the interconnected wood of the cross I had handcrafted for me by my boss' son-in-law, and friend of mine, Caelan O'Reily. I stand before her, shirtless with my dress pants open, my erection fighting behind my briefs to get to her, to feel her, to be inside her. An emotion I have never found myself experiencing before hits me. It resides heavily in my chest as my gaze worships her. This woman, nude and vulnerable from her head to her painted red toes is strapped to a Saint Andrew's cross waiting for my command. She will become my wife tomorrow. She has no choice. It's a done deal. A woman I would have only given a second or maybe a third look at in the past will now wear my mother's ring. She has become someone I feel the need to take care of, to cherish, to hold at my side.

"Demetri..." Her timid voice flows with nervousness.

"Right here, firefly." I softly run the pad of my finger over her cheek.

"I know."

"Tell me what you want."

"I can't."

"You will."

"It's hard to explain."

"Just say it."

"Can I open my eyes?"

“Did I say you could?”

“No.”

“No, what?”

“No, sir.”

“Good girl. Now tell me what you want, Haven. Tell me exactly what you want. Say it with no shame.” I bend at the knee, coming eye level with a part of her I plan to own by night's end.

“I... Mmm...” She moans as the tips of my fingers barely caress her folds, tickling her tender skin, bringing more blood and want to the surface between her spread thighs. I want her to hurt. I want her muscles to contract so hard, it becomes painful. I watch her clench and quickly release, only to do it again. It's not good enough. I want her to scream in unbearable euphoria.

“My good girl is dripping for me.” I watch the blush cover her body at my words. “When I call you a good girl, does that turn you on?”

“Yes,” she breathes, jerking at her restraints, wanting to get to me.

I caress the outside of her, running the tips of my fingers over her, stopping to play with her clit. She is swollen from the sexual acts throughout the day but also fully turned on by my repetitive touch. “If I slide my finger inside you right now, will you grip my finger, seeking more?”

“Yes.”

I circle her entrance with the tip of my finger. Her arousal becomes a flood of want. I grab my cock and strangle the fuck out of it, trying to calm myself down. It does nothing to help. If anything, I am ready to stroke myself off to her and start all over. I slowly slide just the tip of my finger inside her and tease her nerve endings. She is a ball of fire in front of me, a vision of the rawest sex. Her mouth is slack, holding in a breathless moan. Her head rocks from side to side. Her hair's a crazy, wild mess. Her usual rosy nipples are peaked and flushed with such an awakening, they become darker. Her stomach muscles tense, and I watch her thighs stiffen. When her core starts the slightest bit of a tremor, I pull back. She exhales the breath she was

holding and refers to me as sir when seeking why I stopped. I bring her back to the high again then let it float away. I watch her body become rigid from the lack of release. I do it two more times before I bring the world she thinks she hid from me crashing to the ground.

“How do you feel?”

“Crazy,” she pants. “You’re being cruel. Please, sir. Let me finish.”

“Ah, firefly, you are learning. I’m a cruel man, but this, this is a truth serum to release you of your past.”

“What?”

Then I hit her with it while her emotions are running high. “Tell me why you have such low self-esteem?”

“What?” She turns her head in my direction. “Sir?” she questions the change.

“Tell me.”

“Demetri, don’t. I’m going to open my eyes.”

“You won’t. If you were going to open your eyes, you would have done it by now. You trust me. That’s why you haven’t. Trust your gut, firefly. I have you. Now, tell me,” I order with an even tone. “And, Haven, if you call me Demetri again, especially in this room, I can promise you I will bring you higher than I have before and watch you suffer from the pain of not getting off.”

“Why are you doing this? I thought—”

“Tell me,” I demand in a harsher tone as I watch the first tears push their way through her closed eyes and roll over the blush of her cheeks.

“I believe I am not what society says is acceptable,” she half-yells and cries with frustration, yanking at the restraints.

“Fuck society. What do you believe?” I stand, stepping up to her.

“I believe I am not a size two, nor an eight or even a twelve.”

“And that bothers you?”

“I can no longer pursue my dreams because of my body. So yes, it

bothers me.” She tries to hold a strong tongue.

“This the reason why you play with your food instead of consuming it?” She stays silent, her eyes flicking back and forth under her lids, but she doesn’t open them. “How long?”

“How long what?”

“You know exactly what I’m asking, Haven. Playing games with me will be met with repercussions.”

She takes a breath before answering. “Since I became a teenager and puberty wrecked my body.”

“Your brother get you professional help for that head of yours and your issues with food?”

“My brother was too caught up in the business. It was around the same time I was going through changes. Finn was the only one who noticed. He was there for me. He has always been there for me. *He* has never hurt me.”

*Unlike you*, is what she is insinuating.

“Your bodyguard,” I mutter under my breath, crushing my molars together, ready to murder him. She needs to watch the way she speaks about him. He’s already on thin ice. “What does that say about your family?”

“I love my family.”

“I’m sure you do. Though, only some of them deserve the purity of your love, Haven. Now, answer the question.”

“It says they were busy and didn’t have time for the youngest of the family.”

“Because their attention was on who?”

“Stop, Demetri. Please stop.”

“Did you just call me by my first name?”

“Damn feckin right, I did,” she screams, her accent laced with hate. “Why are you doing this?”

“Shame.”

“What is? That you’re an asshole. Why are you doing this? Who told

you?” She throws her head back when I pinch her swollen nub. “Oh, God,” she screams.

“I warned you. Remember that.” I bring her up to the highest of highs only to let her fall without a soft landing. Her head hangs, her chin rests on her chest while she tries to catch her breath.

“Tell me, firefly. Does any of this have anything to do with an older sister you looked up to? A sister that treated you poorly. A sister you refuse to talk about. A sister who couldn’t keep her legs closed. A sister that got herself in trouble and was sent away after sleeping with a guy from a rival family in an alley behind a nightclub? The same sister who lied about her age to get into the club. She was then sent away, only to be murdered by the hands of one of your father’s enemies in retaliation. Is that why you’re still a virgin? Because you’re afraid you’ll end up like her?”

“No.”

“I think you’re lying, Haven.”

“I’m not. I watched my brother fuck all kinds of women. He would bring them home. Treat them like dirt. Use them and then throw them away within the hour.”

“Did you ever think that maybe it was an arrangement they had?”

“An arrangement doesn’t make a girl cry as she is walking out the door.”

“True. Although some do. You’re shedding tears right now.”

“Because you’re an asshole and bringing up a subject I don’t want to speak about. As for my sister, she was free-spirited. And I loved her. Very much.”

“I have no doubt you did. And your sister had every right to be free, but she needed to be responsible, and she wasn’t. Now, tell me about her.” I push, knowing there is more to bear on this cross.

“Seems like you know enough.” She jerks her arms, pissed, wanting to get loose. “I don’t want to talk about her.”

“Why’s that? Because your sister was part of the reason you have an

eating disorder?” I give her a second to digest that. “You looked up to her and she made fun of you when you gained weight, didn’t she?”

“Why would you say that? That’s cruel.”

“But the truth. Isn’t it?”

“I loved her.” The tears pour down her cheeks. “I wanted to be just like her. She was perfect,” she cries.

“Open your eyes, firefly.”

Slowly, they rise to meet mine, anger radiating in them. It quickly turns to hurt, and she turns her face away from me. She tries to lift her shoulder to swipe at the tears, but the restraints hinder the movement. I step into her and tenderly brush my hand over her jaw, my thumbs swiping what remains on her cheek after she shakes her head to rid herself of the truth coursing down her face. I lean in, grasp her chin, and press my lips to hers. Her lower lip trembles and fresh tears swell and seep over her waterline.

I lean in and press my beard against her cheek, my mouth a hair’s breadth away from her ear and explain, “What you consider wreckage, I consider damn sexy. What you consider a shortcoming, every man out there that admires you would like to put his dick in you. What you think has ruined you, has, in fact, made you a stunning woman. A woman that other women envy. You are sexy as fuck, firefly, and behind every sexy curve is something even more valuable.” I pull back and hold her gaze. “A smart, strong woman I am honored to have placed at my side.”

“I miss her. My sister. I miss her so much.”

“I’m sure you do.” I brush my lips over hers. “Do you believe me when I say that you are sexy?” She shakes her head. “Your sister was jealous of you.”

“No. She was so beautiful. If you saw her, you would have never chosen me.”

“I didn’t choose you. Life did. Now ask me if it would have lasted long between her and me, had I had the option to choose her? It wouldn’t. I would

have used her body just like your brother used the women you saw coming and going. She may have been beautiful, but beauty is nothing if you're dead inside."

"How do you know about her? About me?"

"Just know that I know. Also know that I won't tolerate my wife walking around with her head down. I saw you tonight. When you came back to my office after using the bathroom. You saw Tegan and I. Instead of walking away, feeling defeated, letting those demons in your head win, as my fiancée, you should have walked right in with confidence and come to me. You will become Mrs. Carbone tomorrow. You will be married to a very powerful enforcer of the Italian mafia under the leadership of one of the most influential Don's in this country. I've said it once before. We have a saying in this family when it comes to the women in our lives. Secrets aren't just secrets. They're withheld protection. That being said, your secrets are mine and only mine. I will always find the hidden truth. Tonight was about you trusting me. You didn't. This right here, what just transpired between us, it was about trust. Your sister was a wild girl, firefly. She was looking for love in the wrong places. You were the golden child receiving all the attention. She projected her insecurities on you to make herself feel better, but I can guarantee you, it didn't work. As for Tegan, she is insignificant."

"Not if you're fucking her still."

"Am I standing here with you? Is it not you strapped to my cross? Did I not just filet my fiancée open to get to her insides so I can get to know her better? Something I have never done with any female. I hate to tell you, firefly. I am your brother. Whether you like that truth or not. You may want monogamy, but that does not mean everyone does."

"I won't be in a relationship that isn't faithful."

"I will always be faithful to myself."

"That's what I thought." She jerks at the chain. "Let me down."

My palm goes to the center of her chest, stopping her thrashing body.



“You are now a part of me, Haven. Which means, I will be faithful to you as well.”

She turns her attention back to me. Scrutinizing my words. I watch her deflate. She looks away, thinking, before she turns back. “You knew her? My sister?” I see the look in her eyes and the question she isn’t asking.

“Not in the way you’re thinking. She’s come to the States many times with your brother. She used to hang out in a club I frequented.” Her eyes widen, thinking it’s where I brought her earlier tonight. “Not club Abyss.”

“Promise me.”

I lean in and whisper, “I don’t make promises, firefly. My word is a guarantee.”

She curls her head into the side of mine, brushing her damp cheek against the coarse hair on my jaw. “Sir?”

“Yes, firefly?”

“Will you kiss me?”

“With pleasure.”

CHAPTER  
TWENTY-SIX

H AVEN

“ON YOUR KNEES, HAVEN.”

The cuffs holding my wrists captive clank as he releases them. I’m exhausted from the highs and lows that he has brought to my mind and body. It’s cruel in a mind-numbing way. He has made me ache for something so desperately, it physically hurts.

I gaze at his open pants through a haze of desire as I drop to my knees in front of him. The head of his erection is stretched beyond the elastic band of his black briefs. His cum trickles out over the sloped ridge and seeps into the cotton material. My body feels heavy, but my head is light. I almost feel like I am floating but in a way that weighs me down. It’s confusing and enthralling and it scares me. I have given myself over to him. Given him control over me.

I watch his movements with relaxed interest.

He steps in front of me, holding something small in his hand. His fingers slide over my chin with commanding tension. He lifts my face and makes me connect with him instead of where my sight was focused.

“Normally, I wouldn’t let you watch what I’m doing, you would be sightless, feeling only my touch. Since this is your first time, in this room and in general, I’ll allow it.”

“What is this room?” I start to pull my chin from his grip to look around. But he applies more pressure and holds me in place.

“My playroom, firefly. It’s directly across from the studio I had built for you.”

His gaze is heavy, intense in a way that makes me squirm as he looks down at me. I take in his stance. His strong legs are set shoulder width apart. His torso held with a confidence I envy.

“Sir?”

“Yes, Haven?”

“May I?” I nod at his straining erection, wanting to feel him, taste what he is unable to contain.

“Say it. Tell me what you want?”

“You are aroused.”

“Very much so.”

“I want to taste you.”

“Ah, hearing you voice your thoughts makes me harder.” He runs his thumb over my bottom lip. “I will let you if you tell me you’re beautiful.” He releases my face and runs his thumb over the crest of his cock, smearing the semen with the pad of his thumb. He holds it out in front of me like a prize.

“Sir.” I turn my head away from his demanding hand.

“Look at me.” He grips my chin with his opposite hand. “Say the words, ‘I think I’m beautiful.’”

“I don’t think I am unattractive.” My eyes float with heaviness as I struggle to look up at him.

He grins. “That’s a start.” He steps closer to me. The strip of curly obsidian hair from his belly button down to his groin is on full display. My fingers ache to touch him.

“I don’t, though.” I gaze up at him with a sudden thought. “I don’t think I’m unattractive. I just think my body is.”

“Open.” He applies pressure on my chin until my lips part. “Take me out,” he gruffly orders.

I reach up and slide my hands inside the waistband of his briefs and push them down to where his pants have stopped at his thighs. It’s just enough that he becomes fully exposed to me. His erection straining, the tip glistening.

He presses the pad of his thumb on my tongue. “Suck.”

My mouth explodes with everything man and musk.

“Do you see how turned on I am?” I agree with a weighty nod. “That comes from no other woman but you.” He steps closer to me as he slides his fingers through my hair. He grips the back of my head and twists the strands into a fist. It’s a strong hold, one I won’t be able to break free from. One I don’t want to, either. “Close your eyes.” My lids flutter shut at his command. “Open your mouth and slide your tongue out, and like the good girl you are, you’ll wait for me.” I do as he says, but it isn’t good enough for him. “Push your tongue out farther, Haven. You’re not dealing with a teenage boy. I want the bed of your taste buds to explode with the essence of me as I lay my shaft down your throat.”

A moan from somewhere deep inside me emerges, shocking me. It’s scandalous to my virgin ears but also so stimulating to hear.

“Fuck, that was beyond beautiful to listen to.”

I hear him shift. His hand releases my hair. His close presence disappears. I sit there, with my eyes closed and my tongue out, waiting for him. The beat of the music adds to the heaviness in my chest. When he steps back up to me, I can tell he has crouched down to eye level because I can feel his heavy breath on my face. I hear the snap of something and then a buzz. Within seconds, I know what it is when he runs it over my bottom lip and then down my stomach to my core. He holds it steady against my sensitive skin. I begin to mewl like a cat in heat wanting to procreate. Noises leave me, noises I’ve

never heard myself make before. It's disturbing that he can bring this out of me.

"I c-can't," I stutter, unable to voice my thoughts, seeking some kind of solace from the tension he is causing my body.

"You can. His hand circles the back of my neck. "Lean back a bit." He guides me, holding me so I don't tumble back. I do as he orders, and then my insides explode with an intense sensation. "Lean back up and spread your knees more. Bring your bottom to just above the floor to hold the vibrator in place. It won't hurt you, it's small. It's only stimulating your opening where all the nerve endings are."

"S-Sir." My voice rattles, pleading for mercy.

"Open your mouth."

I do as he asks and wait. His hand slides back through my hair as mine grasp his hips and hold on. It gives me a sense of security from the onslaught of emotions raging through my body. I take what I can of him, bringing him to the back of my throat in rhythmic measure. But it isn't enough. I grasp the base of him with my hand. My core tightens with every second that passes. Worry begins to lace my thoughts. I'm afraid when my orgasm hits me, I'll clench down on him with my teeth. He groans with satisfaction. It urges me to take him in more. I'm higher than high, and carelessly ignoring my throats rejection, knowing the crash will be exhausting.

I pull back when the tingles start. "Sir." I glance up at him, warning him. "Sir," I groan long and heavy, my body tensing.

"Keep going."

I swallow him again, only to pull back with urgency. With saliva dripping down my chin, I beg him through tortured eyes.

"I've got you. Keep going."

"Oh, God," I cry out, pulling back after only one more stroke over my lips. My head is forcefully yanked back, and my body is lifted and flipped so that I'm lying flat on my back. Demetri hovers above me. His eyes are

dilated, blown wide as he takes in my trembling body. His nostril flare with each burst of inhale and exhale. “Oh God,” I shout. “Sir!” My back twists as my lower half takes control of my whole body. “Please, sir,” are the last words I say before I lose my breath and become paralyzed in a wave of euphoria that unhinges my jaw and arches my back to breakable heights.

Curses ring out as my hearing wavers to come back to normal. My body is shifted, my legs spread. I fully expect Demetri to plunge into my body, but he doesn't. A warm sensation carries me through my orgasm, prolonging the torture with each stroke of his tongue. I'm in a haze when I feel my body being lifted, carried like a bride. My head lulls on his chest. The damp air makes me lift my eyes. His feet slap the concrete ground. The dark hallway only shadowed by the dim flickering gas lights. My body begins to jiggle. I open my heavy lids once more. Demetri is jogging up the stairs to the main living quarters. I'm fully naked and I don't even care. I'm sated and tired, and I'm being held by a man who has made me damn near comatose without even entering me. I find it hard to keep my eyes open. They were half-lidded at best, but now almost impossible to keep open. I succumb to the need to sleep and fully close my eyes. Then I hear Thor's nails on the marble as I float through this weird headspace. I try to open my eyes again, trying to focus through the small slit my heavy lids allow. It was enough. I see a figure watching us pass as my head rest on his chest.

“She good?”

“Better than,” I hear Demetri's gruff answer as we pass by.

CHAPTER  
TWENTY-SEVEN

D EMETRI

I LAY her down on my bed, her body exhausted, her head soaring with endorphins. I could have taken her while we were downstairs. I wanted to. I was on the verge of doing just that, but something stopped me. The urge to have her in my bed when I took her virginity was damn near animalistic. When she thrashed her body in ways I had never seen before, something inside me switched. Her body was unnaturally tortured but also pure in its movement. It was so damn sexy. I lost control and covered her belly with my cum. I admired her while catching my breath making the decision to bring her up to my room.

She is laid out before me. Her eyes slowly open and close while getting her bearings. Striping myself bare, I climb in the bed and hover above her nude body. I spread her legs and rock my shaft through her folds. Her legs tremble, the sensation too much for her sensitive core. Her hands reach for me, griping my shoulders. I allow it and lean down.

“Demetri...” she breathes in a dreamlike state.

“Open your eyes,” I gruffly growl, ready to lose myself again. “Open.” I reach down and grab the back of her thigh, gripping her hard enough to

bruise her fair skin. Her eyes flutter open, trying to focus on mine. I wait until the precise moment our sight connects, and I plunge into her body full force. She cries out with a scream I should feel bad about. Her nails dig into my shoulders and draw blood. I withdraw and then thrust back in. I hover above her, watching, waiting with each thrust for the streaks of red to decorate my cock with ownership. Satisfaction grinds in my stomach when it does.

Her wide eyes return to being heavy. Her hips start to meet mine. I grunt and groan from the strength I use, owning her body with every thrust of my hips. She pulls me down, her lips meeting mine. Her panting breath mingling with my own. I kiss her hard and deep before pulling back at her whimpering moan.

“You going to come again, firefly?” She nods her head in a frantic manner. “Good. Look down at where we are connected and watch me fuck you while you come.”

Her gaze rips away from mine and glances down at where we’re joined. She gasps with a sob, her eyes rolling to the back of her head. Then she clamps down on me, strangling me, I suck in a breath of satisfaction and pain as I bury my cock to the hilt inside her.

I collapse on her. My head buried in the crook of her shoulder as I pulsate my release inside her. Her nipples pierce my chest like uncut diamonds. It’s as if in her exhaustion she comes to life beneath me. She begins to rake her nails over my back and kiss my shoulder with feather light kisses. I catch my breath and lean up, surveying the damage. She is wrecked. Her arms drop to their sides as if they weigh a hundred pounds. I lift, separating our bodies, and glance down at the apex of her thighs. Half of me still lays nestled inside the warmth of her core. A thunderous groan rattles inside my chest when I see her legs slick and stained red. Just like I knew they would be. I pull out and lean down, my mouth hovering above my newfound home. My eyes connect with her then take the key to my kingdom and run my tongue over the blood I shed. She startles at my touch, and when she sees my mouth after



I look up, a horrified gasp escapes her. Embarrassment flushes her cheeks. I lean down and kiss the meaty flesh of her mound and then put my dick right back inside her.

I wait for her to tell me she has had enough, but she never does. I take her repeatedly, in every position possible until I can't physically go anymore.

I fuck her until she can't move. I fuck her until I can't function. Then I collapse beside her naked, worn-out body.

She now lays next to me comatose. I get up and walk to the bathroom to grab a clean washcloth. Her body is covered in sweat, blood, and semen. The sheets are destroyed. I walk out of the bathroom to see her lazily running her fingers through the remnants of liquid on her stomach.

She turns her head to look at me, a tired half smile pulling at her lips. "Your cum is all over me."

"That isn't cum, firefly. That's ownership. It's the lock I placed on you. And only I hold the key."

"Demetri..."

"Haven."

"I love you."

"Oh, I'm sure you do." I grin while glancing over her wrecked body.

CHAPTER  
TWENTY-EIGHT

H AVEN

THIS MORNING IS A WHIRLWIND. I woke up to Demetri and his talented tongue. He dropped two pills in my mouth, made me drink some water, and then moved back down my body to finish what he started. After a quick orgasm by both of us, he slapped me on my behind and told me to get up and shower while he handles business. With easy steps—because of the soreness he left the night before—I smiled all the way to the bathroom with a grin on my face. With thoughts of my first time floating through my head, I washed his scent off my body. When I walked back into the bedroom, Paisley, my best friend is standing in the middle of the room, smiling. Shocked, I squeal and run full speed, barreling into her and knocking her back onto the bed, and showering her face with happy kisses. Demetri stands in the doorway, curiously observing us. Now I know why Paisley wasn't answering her phone when I called yesterday. After accosting her, I adjusted my towel and walked to Demetri's beckoning index finger calling me to where he is leaning against the door jamb.

“Thank you.” I slowly lean up to the tips of my toes and give him a chaste

kiss on the lips.

“You sore?” He watches me with what I think is concern. I confirm with a slow nod, sparkles glistening in my eyes for the man standing in front of me. “Good. Have fun with your girlfriend. Sofia will be up in a minute to bring you your dresses.” He cocks his head slightly to the side, studying me. “Or I can tell her to wait, and I’ll stay here and watch you two continue to roll around on my bed.”

I pause, my gaze searching his for answers, thinking he’s joking but nothing about his demeanor says he is. I choose to ignore his suggestive statement and instead question, “My dresses?”

“You need a dress for tonight, right?” He stands to his full height from his leaning position.

I guess I do. I didn’t give it much thought. I wasn’t even sure when I woke this morning that we were really going to do this. I figured he would change his mind. I mean, it was a bet that he made. But then again, I think about what happened between us, the love we made just a few hours ago. I believe it changed things between us, for him. I professed my love to him, and even though he didn’t reciprocate with beautiful words, I saw the glimmer in his eyes as he sank his body into mine. With each plunge he thrust with his powerful hips, I whimpered my love.

It was thoughtful of him to make sure I had a proper wedding dress to wear. If anything, I would have worn one of the dresses I brought with me when we came to New York.

As I walk back to Paisley, I consider my mother’s absence. It saddens me when I think about picking out a dress without her, but I also understand the trip would be taxing on my father’s health.

“Knock, knock.” I hear knuckles against the solid door.

“Hi. Come in. Come in.” I turn and wave at the two stunning women with excitement. Sofia, the daughter of Mr. Heart and sister to Antonio, and her assistant Jessica wheel racks of dresses into Demetri’s room.

“I heard there was a beautiful girl in here in need of a wedding dress,” Sofia chimes with a cheerful voice.

“Yes!” I say with giddiness.

“I have always wondered what the bedroom of the bad boy of the Heart organization looks like,” Jessica chimes in as she surveys the room. “Just what I thought.” She nods, agreeing with herself. “Dark and mysterious.”

My brows furrow at her comment. Not sure what she meant by it. Was she one of Demetri’s past conquests? She smiles at me. I take it as a pleasant smile, but is it? Or is it patronizing? Is she bitter that Demetri and I are together, and she didn’t get her claws in him?

“Jessica!” Sofia chastises.

“What? I did always wonder.”

I give her a soft smile. “It’s okay. I know Demetri has a colorful past,” I say, now feeling uncomfortable, wanting to crawl out of my skin.

“Oh, no.” Jessica waves her hand around like she is clearing away the misconception. “It isn’t like that. No, no. I have my own bad boy, thank you very much. Luke is more than I can handle. Trust me on that.” She rolls her eyes. “Demetri is just... He’s flirty but also very mysterious and demanding. He has also been very tenacious in his appetite for the female persuasion. I’m just surprised he is settling down. Although, I can see why. You are stunning. If he was looking for arm candy worth their weight in sexiness, you would be the one. I just always wondered what his private space looked like. Curiosity is the only reason why.”

*Worth their weight?*

I let that comment slide, knowing it’s my insecurity flaring as I blankly stare at this stunning, blonde goddess with legs a mile long. I take her words as the compliment I think they were meant to be. Relief floods me at her confirmation that she and Demetri weren’t together sexually. Visions of that union would be challenging to get over. I tell myself I have to ignore it. If I don’t, I couldn’t stand here and try on dresses with one of his past partners

dressing me in a wedding gown she may have envisioned for herself if that were the case.

“Okay.” Sofia whirls around. “Now that that’s out of the way and the bride knows her fiancée didn’t screw my assistant, let’s get her ready to get married. Shall we?”

Before I know it, two hours have passed. I tried on three dresses twice, and then I tried on the figure fitting mermaid dress I kept pushing to the side because I swore it wouldn’t fit me. I had tears of anxiety in my eyes while they secured the row of silk buttons down my back. It was overwhelming, and I hadn’t even seen myself in the dress. The girls made me turn my back to the mirror while they dressed me, wanting me to see myself in the full package, shoes and all. Paisley gushed as she stood in front of me, but without seeing it with my own eyes, I felt like I was going to throw up. When they finally let me turn around, those tears of anxiety turned to happiness. The dress was perfect. It showed all my curves, and although it took a moment to get the words out, I agreed with them that the dress flattered my full-figure body perfectly.

Now, hours later, here I stand before a man I never in a million years dreamt of, let alone imagined marrying. I thought I would share my life with a man outside the organized crime circle. A gentleman. A man with a simple job and a humble life. A guy who was home by five with a smile on his face and kisses for his wife as they sat down to the dinner that was made. When the evening came and the bedding was turned down and it was time for their mundane day to end, he would wrap her in his arms and make love to her slowly, with gentle touches and murmured affirmations.

Demetri Carbone couldn’t be further from that imagery, that unrealistic fantasy. No, Demetri’s a man I watched cut off another man’s finger for disrespecting me by admiring me. It was almost as if it was entertainment for him. When he shredded my dress to suit his liking, he got off on it. Just like when he smashed the jeweler’s face into glass. He is possessive, controlling,

a boss who doesn't let disrespect go unchecked. He is a thrilling force with an intensity I never thought I had the capacity to love, but I do.

I'm astonished at how fast he has pulled our wedding together. I'm sure he had to have help from someone, but I didn't ask. The private lounge adjacent to Antonio's office in club Temptations has been transformed. White flowers, Cala Lily's I think, decorate the space. It's hard to believe that a few months ago, I walked into this club because Ciarán wanted me to experience life outside the protective bubble I was kept in. Now, here I stand, waiting, inside the same club getting married to one of the club owner's top men.



AS I STAND BEFORE HIM, with his piercing, distinct eyes holding me in the claws of his gaze, I profess my love and devotion to him. I dreamily regard him with stars in my eyes, promising him that my whole heart is his.

Last night changed my feelings for him, it solidified them in a way I never thought possible. I wavered from inexperience. That uncertainty I had for him and his actions was something I had never experienced in the past. A dangerous road I hadn't traveled down before. Last night settled those uneasy feelings and doubts I had inside. Jessica was right. Demetri is mysterious. Not a quiet man, but a cunning one, taking what he wants, and what he wanted was me. He wants me. It's a hard thought to accept. Now, he has my

full heart whereas before I was too skittish to take the full plunge. There were times I thought he hated me or thought I was annoying. Other times he was domineering and protective, but the one thing he has always been is bossy. I can't say that I don't love it now. I just needed to get acclimated to his form of love.

I gaze up at him with devotion. He clears his throat and begins his vows. "I vow to protect you. I vow to satisfy you. I vow to take care of your needs, physically and mentally. From this day forward, you are my responsibility. I say that under oath for all to hear. You are now under my protection and the protection of the family. I, Demetri Andrey Carbone, take you, Haven Emily McKittrick, to be my wife until death parts us."

Everyone cheers as our vows are sealed with a kiss, and Father John, the family priest, announces us as man and wife. My smile is a massive beam of happiness when we pull apart. Hugs and double cheek kisses along with congratulatory words are said. Luca makes a toast that is funny and serious before welcoming me to the family. Paisley cries while giving hers. The room is packed with so many guests. Prominent men dressed in black suits mingle and talk quietly in corners. Their plus ones—whether wife or girlfriend—chatter while drinking the finest champagne and wine. Even the new acting mayor is in attendance.

The night is filled with a peculiar, but happy, energy. I chalk it up to me only having three people here to celebrate with me. Paisley and Ciarán stick close by my side throughout the night while Cillian works the room. I didn't expect anything more from Cillian. No matter what event it is there is always business conducted. It saddens me that Finn declined the invitation to celebrate our union. When I asked Cillian if he had extended the invitation, and he told me he declined, I just gave him a curt smile and accepted the disappointment in private. Finn has always been by my side. To know that he didn't want to share this day with me hurts my heart. I've known him for so long, I consider him part of my family, so his choice not to attend stings.

I excuse myself from the conversation Paisley and I were having when Demetri calls me over to where he stands talking to Mr. Heart. He watches my every step as I walk across the room. I stop in front of him with a smile and greet Mr. Heart and Antonio. They both welcome me to the family. Then I am introduced to the godmother of the family. Her elegance is unmatched. The grace she carries herself with is unparalleled by any woman, including myself, in this room. She has a strong presence and it's quite intimidating. She slides her hand into her husband's. He takes it with ease. She gives me a welcoming smile and compliments my dress. I thank her and tell her that her daughter has great taste. She agrees but then goes on to tell me that I made the dress, the dress didn't make me. Demetri agrees with a salacious grin.

When Demetri excuses himself to speak to Cillian, Ciarán calls me over to the bar. Three shots are lined up waiting.

“Do a shot with Paisley and me, cuz.”

“You're going to try and get me drunk, aren't you?”

“One shot isn't going to get you drunk.”

“Come on,” Paisley begs. “It's your wedding day.”

“One shot,” I agree, holding up my finger. “You were not there the last time I drank.”

“Two, and then we will go dance since your brother and your husband are having a pow wow.” She twists her lips, watching them as if she is in deep thought. “Wait. What happened the last time you drank?” Her attention comes back to me. “Where was I?”

“Not here,” Ciarán gruffly mumbles. “It was great until it became a shit show.”

“I missed a lot, didn't I?” I can hear the sadness in her voice.

I glance over to where Demetri stands with my brother. My sibling may have his ear, but his sight is already set on me. His promising leer is a preview of how our evening will end when we are finally alone. I lift my shot glass in the air, give him a teasing smirk, run my tongue over my bottom lip,



and throw the stinging liquid to the back of my throat. I slap the empty glass down on the bar and laugh along with Ciarán when Paisley shivers.

It's as if a rope, a fine string, a force or a silent calling has me turning back to my husband. His gaze is unmoving, still locked on me from across the room. He pulls his drink free hand from his suit pocket and lifts it, flipping it back and forth as if to study the front and back. He flexes his fingers before dropping his hand to his side. I know exactly what he is implying. The last time I drank, it was at the rave. He spanked me in the bathroom for letting myself get as drunk as I did. At the time, I was appalled at his antics, but as I stand here as his wife, I feel myself shift, arousal flushing through my core. My thighs become slick with hope. While I'm grinning at him, flirting with my new husband from across the room, I feel a tap on my shoulder. Demetri's usually unreadable face becomes readable. He is not pleased. Before I can turn around to find out the cause, a shot hovers in front of me. I take a hold of that one as well. Demetri raises a brow in warning. I can't help but smirk, provoking him. He takes a sip of his drink—that I have now learned is Stoli vanilla vodka—and watches me over the rim. I take it as a challenge. I lick the rim before I take a provocative sip while eyeing him back.

“Swallow the damn thing and stop making love to it,” Paisley jokes.

I chuckle inside and wink at Demetri before downing it in one go. Just as I turn to put the glass on the bar, I notice a woman walking across the room, heading in Demetri's direction. She comes to a halt at his side. She isn't dressed in wedding attire, but she is dressed in a business suit, so I assume she is one of Antonio's employees. Demetri's face turns to stone after she says something to him. She looks extremely irritated while articulating whatever it is she has to say. He barely speaks two words back to her, but when he does, it's quick and sharp. She turns in haste and leaves. Antonio crosses the room and steps up to Demetri and Cillian. My brother now looks pissed and says something to Demetri. They exchange words and then

Antonio walks in the same direction the woman exited which leads to his private office.

I can't take my eyes off Demetri. The situation is not wedding friendly. Paisley calls my name, but I ignore her and walk straight to my husband. His mouth is a grim straight line until I'm a few feet from him, and then he smiles as if the exchange I just witnessed didn't bother him.

"Everything okay?" I run my fingers down his arm and wrap them around his hand in a show of solidarity. What bothers him, bothers me.

"Business. Everything's good," he explains in a clipped tone, removing his hand from mine.

I'm taken aback by his actions but choose to ignore them because I can tell he is furious. "Didn't look that way."

"Haven, you know better than to question him or his business dealings," Cillian sharply scolds his two cents. "The same rules apply here as they did back home." He chastises me as if I'm a child.

Before I can articulate a sentence that will diplomatically tell my brother to go fuck himself, Demetri growls, "My wife. My rules. She is no longer your concern."

"It wasn't until just now." My brother grinds his molars.

Demetri grabs my hand and pulls me away from Cillian, but not before shooting him a deadly look. He walks me over the unrestricted part of the balcony that overlooks the club below. It's one big, massive space. He steps up behind me and puts both hands on the rail, caging me in. His beard-covered chin lingers next to my ear. "You thought it was funny taking that shot after I said if you did, I would spank you?"

"You never said such a thing."

"I implied it, Mrs. Carbone."

"Oh, is that what that was? I thought you were suddenly interested in the wrinkles on your hand since you are so old."

I hear him choke on his shocked laughter. "This old man, as you see fit to

call me, kept going last night while you could not. Age means nothing.”

“Tell that to the day you need to pop your first Viagra.”

“Firefly, the day I need that little blue pill is the day you can close the coffin on me.”

“Don’t say that.” I twist in his arms, facing him. “Don’t talk that way.” I run my fingers through his closely cropped obsidian beard. “I only just got you in my life. Don’t talk about me losing you already.”

I see a bit of sadness in his eyes or maybe it’s regret. Whichever one it is, he pauses before leaning down to kiss me. “You look beautiful in your dress. I’m glad you chose this one.”

“Thank you.” I give him a peck on the lips. I knew he liked seeing me in it. When I walked into the lounge and down the makeshift aisle, I could see it in his eyes. They flared with a want I had never seen in them before.

“Do you want to know something?”

“Is it that you can’t wait to take this dress off me?”

“That too, but no. I picked out this dress. I had Sofia bring it because I knew you would look perfect in it.”

“Why didn’t you tell me earlier?”

“I wanted you to choose it on your own.”

“Well, you have great taste, Mr. Carbone.” I wrap my arms around his waist and stop when I feel the armor on his back.

We hold each other’s gaze before he agrees. “That I do.” He runs his finger from the top of my temple to my jaw, watching his hand as he does. He’s absorbed in the movement of his hand, quiet before he turns me around to face the crowd below. He wraps one arm around my waist and rocks our bodies to the beat of the music. I close my eyes and enjoy the gentle gesture from a hard man. I lean my head back against his shoulder and watch the crowd below dance. In a way, I wish we were down there instead of up here. Even though the space has been transformed into wedding bliss, the atmosphere, the vibe, is just different than that of weddings I have been to in

the past.

“It’s our wedding and you’re carrying.”

“I always carry.”

I don’t agree or disagree. I know the life I just married into.



OUR PRIVATE MOMENT is interrupted by Antonio and his gorgeous wife, Lilah. From what I understand, Luca is her guard, and in the beginning, she was not too pleased about it. That makes me wonder if Finn will continue to be my bodyguard. Although, I highly doubt it considering Demetri hates him. Actually, from what I have seen, the feeling is mutual on Finn’s part as well.

“We good?” Demetri shifts, standing to his full height behind me, asking Antonio.

“For now. The rest is on you,” Antonio answers.

“Does that mean I can go downstairs?” Lilah bursts, twisting in her husband’s arms with a loving energy I admire as she stares at him with pleading eyes.

“No.”

“Wolfie, if you want the cookie later, you will arrange for me to go downstairs so I can dance.”

“Lilah—”

“Girls!” she yells over Antonio’s shoulder. “Want to go down below and bust a move?”

A round of yeses echo our way.

“Your ass is mine, dolcezza.”

“Always has been, Wolfie. Now round up your boys and make this happen. And wolfie, make sure they stay hidden. I don’t want them cramping my style.”

“Fucking Christ,” Antonio mutters.

I glance at Demetri who has a grin on his face. Their banter amuses him. The glimmer in his eyes is filled with mirth. It’s something I’ve never seen on him before. “What does dolcezza mean?” I turn in Demetri’s arms and ask.

But it’s Lilah who answers. “Sweetness.” She mischievously grins. “Because I have a sweet ass cookie between my legs. Don’t I, baby?” She pops up and plants a kiss on his lips.

I have all of two seconds to process the thought that she has an affectionate endearment whereas mine is referring to me as a puppy before I’m ripped out of Demetri’s arms and pulled across the room to the steps with five stunning women in tow. I glance back at my husband. He doesn’t look happy, but he doesn’t stop it either.

“Welcome to the family,” Lilah yells as she leads the way down the private stairs. “You know Sofia and Jessica, right?” She stops and points at the two women laughing at her.

“You know you’re in big trouble, right?” Sofia yells over the music.

“I love being in trouble.” Lilah laughs. “Anyway. That right there is Nikki, Sofia’s and Antonio’s sister. The redhead is Isabelle, Giovanni’s wife, in case you didn’t know. And you clearly know Paisley because she’s your bestie.” She whoops. “Now let’s dance ladies!” She looks up at the balcony where all the men are standing, watching like salivating vultures and yells, “I love you, wolfie!” Then blows him a kiss as she hustles down the steps.

I shake my head and continue following her. The dance floor is packed. Heavy beats vibrate the space. Smoke machines fill the air. Fire shoots out from torches every fifteen minutes. *Woman* by Doja Cat blasts from the speaker. Lilah and Sofia start jumping around and rush the dance floor. Paisley grabs my hand and pulls me along. A few times I see her glancing up at the balcony while we dance. I think nothing of it until I see my brother slowly shake his head and move away from the balcony. I can't help but wonder what that is about as we dance to song after song. I make a mental note to ask her later. The men continue to stand at the railing, watching us. When the beginning beats of *Consensual* by Landon Tewers starts to play, morphing into another sensual song, I face Demetri and start to move seductively. The DJ mixes it with a third song that's perfect. I lift my face to meet his heavy gaze and move my body to the music as if we are the only two in the club. I watch him adjust his stance and flex his fingers against the chrome railing. His watchful eye is solely on me. Smoke billows above him from his cigarette, creating an even more mysterious aura around him. He takes a sip of his drink then swipes the remnants off his bottom lip. Our connection is lost when I see him lift his phone to his ear. His features morph from a tense sexual expression to one of anger. Then he turns away, our connection lost. I turn back to the girls and set my attention on them. I glance up at the balcony a few times, but he doesn't return. My feelings are a bit bruised, but I also understand he doesn't live a typical lifestyle. The call may have been important, so I turn my attention back to my bestie.

I grab Paisley's arm and yell over the music, telling her I need to use the restroom. I need her help with my dress. Sofia and Lilah overhear me and decide to go with us. When I ask if we should go back upstairs, I'm assured that we have enough discrete security that it is okay to use the bathroom on the main floor. We're a loud gaggle of drunk women as we walk down the long dim hallway. We break off and slip into our own stalls. Paisley helps me with my dress in the handicap one at the end. Sofia and Lilah finish way

before we do. Instead of waiting for us, I suggest they go back out and dance. Lilah tells us to meet them at the back bar where she will have drinks waiting for us. When we exit, women primping in the mirror complement my dress and how flattering it is on my figure as we wait to wash our hands. I feel good. Happy. Giddy with a confidence I haven't felt in a long time. And it's not just from me being more than tipsy. I feel like I belong.

We leave the bathroom and make our way towards the bar, laughing the whole way there. My plan is to get a drink with the girls and then head back up to the lounge and see if I can get Demetri to dance with me. We only shared one slow dance right after we completed our vows. Then we were pulled in two different directions only meeting up for a few minutes here and there.

Paisley and I are joking and laughing, talking about trivial things as we make our way to the back bar when I stop dead in my tracks after passing a hallway. It takes me a second to process and Paisley continues walking, not realizing I stopped, but I take two steps back to make sure I saw what I think I saw. In my heart I know I wasn't mistaken. How could I be? I just married the man.

There, standing in the hallway, is Demetri with a woman, her back forcefully pushed up against the wall by my husband's hand. She is same woman that was just upstairs with him and had a heated one-sided conversation with him before he cut her off and sent her on her way. Looking up at him, her hand movements are sharp and expressive as she talks. When she points at the door directly to the side of them, he releases her chest and grabs her upper arm and pushes her into the room, slamming the door once he passes through.

Paisley, who is now standing next to me grabs my wrist and calls my attention to her. "Was that Demetri who just went into that room with that woman?" I can only nod before I lift my dress as best I can and start in that direction, Paisley right behind me. "What are you going to do?"

“I have the right to know why my husband of only four hours just went behind closed doors with another woman. Why he had his hands on her. Don’t I?” My heels stomp on the concrete floor.

“Haven, seriously, slow down. Think before you do something you’ll regret.”

“I’ll regret nothing.”

“There has to be some kind of reasonable explanation.”

“Isn’t there always.” My voice dry as I continue my path of fact finding.

“Haven, you need to calm down. It’s your wedding day. I mean, he wouldn’t, would he?”

“I’m about to find out.”

I come to a complete halt outside the door. When Demetri slammed it shut, it must not have latched because the door is slightly ajar. Paisley is so close she is practically under my skin.

“I fucking warned you to mind your business,” he harshly thunders.

“I don’t care what you do to me, Demetri. She’s my best friend, and I won’t let you fuck her over.”

“You like your job?”

“Antonio won’t fire me because you can’t keep your dick in your pants.”

“I didn’t see you complaining while I fucked you and her.”

*Her?*

“She’s pregnant, you asshole!”

“Good for her. I hope she enjoys her life.”

“It’s yours!”

“Not mine,” he firmly disagrees.

“Yours.”

“Talia, enough. Let me speak to him,” a soft feminine voice calls from somewhere farther inside the room. A voice I have heard before when she referred to him as sir.

*Tegan.*



I feel the pressure of my hand against my chest. It's as if I was unknowingly protecting my heart from the blow. Paisley hangs on my arm as if I'm her lifeline, but what she doesn't realize is that she is mine in this moment. Silently, she stands by me with wide eyes and an open mouth.

"Do the right thing, Demetri."

"If you know what is good for you, Talia, you'll shut your mouth and leave."

The door flies open and smashes against the wall. Talia, I now know for sure is Antonio's manager, comes flying out of the room so fast she doesn't even notice us standing on the opposite side of the door. Her steps are heavy and harsh as she hustles down the hallway to the elevator.

I try to make sense of it all. I can't help but wonder how far along Tegan is. If it was before he and I started dating, then there is nothing I can do about that. Though, I don't know how well I will be able to handle my new husband having a child with another woman as we settle into newlywed life. All our firsts would run parallel to all their firsts in her pregnancy and birth. But then I think, what if she is only a few weeks pregnant? That would mean he was sleeping with her while he and I were seeing each other. Am I the privileged wife and she his girl on the side? The *goomah* as he called it. I won't stand for that. What happened before us is one thing, but during our time together is another.

"Annul your marriage, sir. Be with me. With us. We can be a family. We'll be so happy."

I hear the rumble in Demetri's chest. "What are you doing? I made it perfectly clear that you and I were not a couple when we started. We had an arrangement. That arrangement ended. I thought you would have understood that when you saw my wife and I in club Abyss."

"Wife," she laughs in a mocking tone. "On paper she may be your wife. Not one that you wanted, I might add. You and I have something special."

"Had. Past tense. We had an arrangement. Don't make it more than what

it was. If you are pregnant, I'm happy for you, but I am not the father."

"You are."

"Tegan, I always wrap. Don't play these games."

"Except for that one time, sir. That one time when I drove you crazy you couldn't wait to be inside me. Remember that night?"

I freeze when I hear footsteps. My heart is in my stomach knowing they had something special together.

"Please don't walk away from me, sir. I need you. We need you."

His weighted steps stop before I hear. "How far along are you?" he growls.

"Six weeks."

*Six weeks?*

I wait with a held breath to see if Demetri will dispute the timeframe.

He doesn't.

I think back. Six weeks ago would have been our first date. The night before he took me out, he told me he had a willing body waiting for him while messaging me. I wonder if it was her. The next day is when the red dress showed up for our date. It seems like forever ago, but in reality, it is such a short period of time. What was I thinking saying yes to a marriage proposal so soon? I know what I wasn't thinking with... My head. Why would my brother not put up a fight when he found out Demetri proposed, and I said yes? Why wouldn't he have one of his brotherly talks, telling me how stupid I was for marrying a man so soon when I called him first thing this morning after trying on the dresses. Especially a man like Demetri. Six weeks means we were already seeing each other. He was actively pursuing me. It changes things for us.

"What did she mean when she said, 'Not one that you wanted?'" Paisley whispers next to me.

I almost forgot that she is here. I shake my head in a frantic manner because my head is spinning, and I don't know the answer.

“How long have you been seeing each other?”

“I met him eight weeks ago. Close to nine. Six weeks ago was our first date.”

“Oh.” Her voice falls flat.

“Yeah.”

“Honey, I’m sorry.” She lays her head on my shoulder. “But it was right in the beginning.”

“I love you, sir. I’m in love with you. You know I am. We work. We fit. We’re good together.” She begs him to understand. “She is not even your type,” she whines when he doesn’t acknowledge her truth. “Why did you agree? You could have said no.”

“Why does she keep calling him sir?” Paisley asks.

“Because it makes his dick hard.”

“Huh?” She looks at me completely confused.

“Enough!” Demetri thunders, effectively cutting off Paisley’s question. I hear the shift of fabric.

“Talia told me, sir. She overheard Antonio speaking. She only confirmed what I had figured out. I know your marriage to Haven is a farce. I know it’s an arranged marriage. As a matter of fact, I saw you sign the contract the night you were in club Abyss. I saw you go into Johnathan’s office. I went after you to give you a piece of my mind for flaunting her in my face and tell you I was carrying your child, but when I got there, I saw you and Cillian. I heard you two talking. I heard everything. I just didn’t understand it. I watched you sign the contract, Demetri. How sad is it that her brother had to find her a husband? It’s pathetic. She’s pathetic.”

I feel the lump in my throat swell.

“If you know what is good for you, you’ll stay out of my business.”

“We are your business. Tell me I’m wrong.”

The first tear rolls down my face. He didn’t deny it. My heart thumps so hard with pain I feel it in every part of my body. He asked me to marry him

twice. No, he demanded I marry him the first time. The second time was the wager he propositioned me with last night. He manipulated me through sex that first night. I saw the regret in his eyes. Or what I thought was regret. At this point, I don't know if Demetri is capable of feeling that emotion. Then, last night, he made me bet him that Ghost would lose his fight. He walked away after that. I saw him go speak to the fighters. Ghost lost. He fixed the fight so Ghost and I would both lose.

I breathe heavily, my chest constricting. She's right. It's pathetic. I'm pathetic.

*"What if you hate me in a year?"*

*"I'll still be stuck with you."*

How dare I think I could get a man like Demetri.

Did my brother not think I could find my own husband? Did he not think I was smart enough? Pretty enough? Worthy enough to marry a man who would be faithful to me?

Everything was a game. A calculating business venture.

Every word said to me was a lie, building blocks to a wedding for reasons unknown to me. By both Demetri and Cillian. Every touch felt by Demetri was felt with disingenuous hands. Every sensation he gave my body was manipulated to structure a genuine connection.

Oh God...

My stomach twists with sickness.

My hand goes to the pain swirling like a demonized serpent in my belly. I'm nauseated, about to throw up. My body shakes at the gravity of the truth, it's debilitating. That night in club Abyss after I knelt in front of him and swallowed everything he gave me, his phone rang. He left me there on my knees. It was the night he demanded I marry him. I told him it wasn't right. I told him we didn't fit. He made me believe... He made me feel... I told him not to play games with me and yet he did without a care.

*"You sure you want to do this?"*

*“I was given orders.”*

*“There will be major blowback. You know that right? You’ll have a target on your back.”*

*“I already have many.”*

*“This is different. I’ve got your back though.”*

*“As I will always have yours,” I hear Demetri reaffirm.*

*“At least the incentive is gorgeous.”*

*I hear Demetri hum his agreeance. “That it is.”*

My head hurts. My thoughts unraveling. My stomach churns. Then it hits me. So hard it’s like a sledgehammer. A wrecking ball of betrayal. He made me purge my thoughts, my inner desires, my hidden inadequacies. My body dysmorphia. My eating disorder. My faults. My failures. My... Oh, God. I can’t even say it. My... sister.

The first cry hits me as a choked sob. I hold my hand over my mouth, covering the sound of my pain.

“You and I can still be together, sir.” I hear Tegan reason through stifled cries.

“Our arrangement is over. The child is not mine.”

“Admit it, Demetri.” I hear her frustration through unsympathetic hearing. “At the very least, admit that what I saw was you signing a contract to marry her.”

“You are not wrong.”

“Admit that you love my body and that I am the best you ever had? You said I was.”

“I did say that.”

And with his admittance my heart shatters. I rip my arm away from Paisley’s clutched hands and run down the hallway as best I can in a dress that now feels like a straitjacket suffocating me. My heart pounds. My chest constricts. Air squeezes its way through my lungs with each choking cry I try to hold back but can’t. Why? Why would they do this to me? He clearly had

something special with her. Why did he give that up?

My feet carry me down the narrow hallway, heading to the unknown. I can't go to the girls. I hardly know them. Besides the point, they are all married into the family or are family. I'm alone here. I can't go back upstairs. I have no one. Not one person who watched us get married has my best interest. They watched me say my vows, profess my love, and knew it was a joke. My own brother arranged this marriage. With that thought another realization hits me even harder. Ciarán. My cousin knew. He had to know. There is no way he didn't. His words make sense now. The night of the rave Ciarán was yelling at Demetri.

*"She needs to experience life before she is strapped down."*

My memory might be hazy but those were his words. I cry out with the thought and keep running as best I can with the short steps the bottom of the dress allows me to take.

I'm mid-stride when I'm yanked so hard off my feet that I'm almost pulled out of my wedding shoes. I gasp and flutter and slap at the hands that have hold of me. I shriek as I fight my assailant. The music is so loud, no one will hear me, but I scream even louder in hopes that someone will. I'm jerked through a doorway. The door is slammed shut at the same time I'm shoved up against the interior wall and an unforgiving hand goes over my mouth, silencing my cries for help. Not even two seconds later, the door flies open. My best friend's face becomes white as a ghost when she comes face-to-face with none other than my trusted bodyguard.

"Leave," Finn's harsh voice thunders, demanding Paisley leave us alone.

"Shit." Her eyes widen in shock. She glances at me, sees the fear on my face then straightens her back and squares her shoulders, yelling, "Absolutely not."

"I said leave. Now," he bellows with so much authoritative energy before snarling at her, still holding his hand over my mouth.

I fight his hold, jerking my chin back and forth but it's no use. I think

about kneeling him in the balls, but my dress is too tight.

“Do not test me, Paisley. That is, unless you would like Haven to know the secret you’ve been keeping.”

She stills, her expression regretful. She gives me a sorrowful glance then turns and leaves the room, closing the door as she goes.

Finn releases my mouth, but not my body, his hips are still pinning mine to the wall.

“What the feckin fuck are you doing, Finn?” I slap at his chest.

“We need to talk.”

“Talk? You just accosted me! You scared the shit out of me. For a feckin talk? We have had many talks without physical abuse involved, Finn.”

“Haven,” he breathes with disappointment, pulling his hips back slightly but not fully releasing me.

“What the fuck is wrong with you?” I shove at his chest.

“I’ve been trying to get to you for days, Haven. Why don’t you answer your fucking phone?”

“I’ve been busy.”

“Being fucked by that son of a bitch, right? You gave him your virginity, didn’t you?”

*What the hell?*

My mouth drops open at his vulgarity. “That’s none of your damn business.”

“I was trying to tell you about the wedding.”

“You mean the contract. Everything I just overheard is true, isn’t it?”

“The wedding has been planned for six months. Why do you think your brother brought you here with him this time?”

“Six months?” I push him off me, furious. “You’ve known for six months, Finn? You wait until a few days before to try and tell me? What the fuck, Finn?”

“I’m in love with you, Haven.”

*Feckin hell.*

“Finn?” I shake my head as a show of my confusion.

“Come on, Haven. Don’t tell me you didn’t know.”

“I knew no such thing.”

“Why do you think I distanced myself from you? You were a job, Haven. A job. A fucking paycheck. I shouldn’t have developed feelings for you, but I did.”

*Seems like that is all I am to everyone. Just a job.*

“You didn’t!” I fight back against his truth. I knew he watched me when I was dancing late at night, but I loved having a secret audience. It made me feel good.

“I did, sweet girl.” His hand reverently comes to my face. His eyes become tender. He gazes at me with a softness I have never seen on him before.

“This is too much.” I turn away from him. “I’m married, Finn.”

“I tried to stop the nuptials from happening. I begged your brother for your hand in marriage. He flat out denied it. He gave me a choice. I could stay your bodyguard if I could handle seeing you with someone else or he would reassign me. I knew I couldn’t let that happen so I detached my feelings and separated myself from you as best I could so I could continue protecting you.”

“You did a hell of a job protecting me, Finn. I’m married to a man who is in love with another woman. A man who just said his vows and cemented that with an *I love you* while another woman carries his baby.”

“He’s good at getting people to believe him, Haven. He is a major player in importing and exporting diamonds. You are now married to a man with layers of DNA coating his hands. Think about that every time you let him touch you. Those diamonds are tainted, dripping in red before they are washed, polished, and sold. No, let me verbalize this in a way you will better understand. He *is* the *only* player, Haven. He is the Godfather in the diamond



district. Yes, he works under the real Godfather of the organization, Mr. Heart, but he is the man. The face everyone knows to fear. He is brutal in his dealings. Merciless. A cold-blooded killer. He makes their organization millions. He deals with men from all over the world. His power, his reach, it goes far beyond this city, sweetheart.”

“She’s pregnant with his child,” I utter, hearing everything he said but that is the one thing that has my insides twisting.

“I’m sorry. I tried to stop it.”

“I thought it was because I kissed you.”

His head twists, confused at my quick change in thoughts.

“I kissed you,” I quietly repeat.

“That kiss is what solidified my feelings for you. I had to physically force myself to stop the progression that connection was leading us to. I wanted you so badly. I just didn’t want to take your virginity on a twin-size college mattress. You deserved more than that. So much more.”

“It would have been fitting.” I twist my chin and turn my head away. “I have to go.” I push at his chest, needing space. He doesn’t budge. “Let me go, Finn.”

“I’ll take you wherever you want to go.”

I need to think. To come to terms with a deal made over my being. No one asked if I wanted this. No one cared what I thought. No one thought about my feelings in all this. Why? Why would my brother do this? Why would Demetri agree to a marriage? And why did I have to fall in love with him? “I need to be alone, Finn.”

“Haven,” he growls with irritation, his tone gruff and pitching high as he steps back with his arms stretched out wide. “Tell me you’re not in love with him, Haven. Tell. Me.”

“I can’t do that.” I shake my head. “I have to go, Finn.”

“Come with me. It’s not safe, Haven.”

“Then give me your gun.” I hold my hand out.

“Absolutely not.” He takes a step back, giving me more space. “I’ll take you wherever you want to go, but I won’t give you my weapon.”

“You say you love me?” I step up to him with a raised chin. “Then prove it.” I hold my hand out.

CHAPTER  
TWENTY-NINE

H AVEN

“WHERE THE FUCK IS SHE?” Demetri’s deep voice viciously bellows in my best friend’s face. His anger is tangible, and most definitely threatening as he hovers above her. His promising tone of retribution echoes off the cinder block walls of the buildings surrounding us and cascading down the alley.

“Looking for the wife you didn’t want or your pregnant girlfriend?” I sarcastically call from my hidden spot where I am concealing myself behind a dumpster where he can’t see me. I take a step out. “I’m going to go with option two.” I wave two fingers in the air as I step out further, showing myself. My breathing is a stutter of anxiety, but no more words cross my lips. Not because I’m afraid but because I feel so much pain when I look at him. He’s so damn handsome. So rugged. So rich in manliness. I feel as if I wasn’t good enough, and a special force placed him in my path and said this is the man you need in your life, and then for shits and giggles threw a contract in there to make sure my inadequacies didn’t chase him away.

I ran to the alley because I needed to be alone, to get air, to process my thoughts in private. To formulate a plan for my next move. Where was I to

go? What was I to do? Though, taking that time, recalling every betrayal behind everyone over the past few months surrounding me has only made me angrier. It's as if the liquid inside my veins that has kept me alive is boiling inside the vessels and making me irrational. I have a right to be. Everyone has betrayed me.

I take another revealing step, needing to save Paisley from Demetri's deadly wrath. She's not used to a man like him. Hell, I'm not used to it, but I've been around Demetri when his temper flairs. He's so dominant and possessive over what he thinks he now owns. It will only have him spewing careless words that will hurt my friend. She doesn't need to become the next fingerless victim, or her face smashed against the dumpster for being a loyal friend.

"Haven," Paisley huffs with relief as she runs to me, shocked that I am standing in front of her. She wraps her arms tightly around my waist and cries, "I'm sorry. I thought I lost him. I was looking everywhere for you. He must have followed me out here. He has everyone looking for you. The club has been turned upside down." She speaks with terrified urgency, her voice choppy with emotion. "There are thirty men tearing this club apart to find you." Her eyes stretch wide at the length my husband is going to find me. She has never seen this side to him or any other man in their position. The side of powerful men who become territorial when they are threatened with losing something they consider theirs.

"For what reason?" I snarl, pushing her back and looking over her shoulder at the man that caused this pain I feel suffocating my insides. It's as if his massive hand has a grip on my heart. I can only compare it to the image at the sex museum he took me to on our first date. The woman was wrapped so tightly in rope, immobile and unable to fight if she wanted to. I feel as though each finger on Demetri's large hand is a corded rope strangling the muscle in my chest of its blood flow. I'm furious at the audacity of him pretending to care by having his men hunt for me. But then I realize it's not

him caring; it's ownership. It's the loss of control. He's losing what he now rightfully possesses in the eyes of God and the men and women who watched our exchange of vows. That loss of control doesn't sit well within him.

Swiping the tears from my flushed cheeks, I glare at him with rage swirling in my veins. The frenzy of emotions I'm enduring at his betrayal—at everyone's betrayal—hits me so hard, it is violent. The few bites I allowed myself of wedding cake I shared with him to celebrate our union now lays next to the dumpster.

The anger inside me simmers, just festering like diseased meat, blistering my insides with the filth of lies.

This man standing before me lied to me and told me he loved me in front of a priest. A man of faith acting under the eyes of God.

I stare at him. My stomach churns as it all sinks in and swirls with deceit in my gut. “The first time I met you was a set up.” I looked my future husband—the one I now consider a devil—in the eyes that day, and I didn't even know it. “Every step, every phone call, every text was all calculated steps leading up to today.” He took my virginity. The very part of me I held on to for so long because I wanted it to be a memory I cherished. I gave it to him freely with innocence in my heart, but he took it deceptively, knowing he was receiving a virgin bride. My body convulsed in pleasure for him and bled its virtue for him. “You stripped me down, uncovered issues I had worked on and placed protectant layers over. You used my body and abused my emotions all for your own gain.” Foolishly, I let him. “I'm a stupid girl.” I shake my head, unable to bear the weight of it all. “I trusted you.” And now... Now, I know. “I'm a joke of a woman to you.”

But I know I'm not. And Demetri Carbone will soon see that.

I will show him.

Paisley's cries for me should break my focus. They don't.

All those thoughts funnel retaliation down my arm like an unpredictable storm. The energy builds in strength as it reaches the tips of my fingers. It's

powerful in its need to retaliate, wanting to return the pain he and everyone else has caused me. I lift my arm and straighten my index finger, bracing it against the cold, sleek steel. I point the heavy metal I have gripped in my shaking hand at the man who has done the most damage to my heart. Closing my tear-filled eyes for only a hateful second, I breathe in the painful truth of the duplicity surrounding me. I flex the muscle in my finger, energy making the digit twitch with the need for salvation, and I squeeze, pulling the trigger.

The sound of the gun releasing is deafening. My ears split with a ringing that deafens me.

My eyes close with a heaviness I can't explain. Maybe it's the shelter among the black abyss of nothing it offers. No longer feeling pain in the dark void.

My body is jerked back with a force I've never felt before. So much power is wielding around in my shaking hand.

The loud hollow ting from the metal door slamming against the side of the building startles me. A slew of high-ranking men rush into the alley, halting in their spot when they see the broken woman before them pointing a smoking gun at their friend, their business partner, their boss, and employee. Demetri holds every single title.

My brother rushes around them, pushing and shoving his way through, stopping in his tracks and holding his hands up when I turn the gun on him. He was the originator. The seed that started the growth of deceit.

"Why?" I tilt my head to the side, feeling crazed. "Why did you do this to me, Cillian?" My lower lip starts to shake. "Was I not pretty enough? Skinny enough? Worthy enough? Was I not as special as my older sister? Did you not think I could find a suitable husband?"

"Put the fucking gun down, Haven," he snaps at me, no sympathy present on his part in humiliating me.

"You had to go and find me a husband?" I flick the tip of the gun in Demetri's direction, getting angrier. "A man that doesn't even want me. A

man you made sign a contract so he wouldn't or couldn't back out." I choke out a cry, breaking down further. "The least you could have done was find someone who wanted me."

"I want you, Haven."

My head snaps to Demetri. "Don't!" I jerk my arm, aiming the gun back at his overwhelming physically fit body. There isn't a muscle on him that is undeveloped. Not a spot on him that doesn't exude sex in a way that consumes your thoughts. "Stop lying. It's all a lie. Everything is a feckin lie!" I scream at him, feeling the instability within my head and chest start to amplify and emerge to levels I've never known.

"Haven, calm down." I hear Ciáran plead as he steps up next to Cillian. I pay him no mind. My focus is solely on my husband.

"Why?" I shake my head. "Why? Last night... You and I—Why did you do it? You stripped me down. You peeled back the layers I had buried. Did you get off on that?" I huff with an irrational laugh, shaking my head. "That's fucking sick. You know that, right?"

"No."

"Then why?" I cry out, screaming at him in distress, my tears sailing to the ground around me as I shake. "Why?"

"I wanted to get to know the woman I fell in love with better."

"Liar!" I jerk the gun around, yelling. "You're a liar!" I screech, my body shaking from the shock of it all, my voice cracking from the strain of my screaming.

"I'm in love with you, firefly."

That confession is the worst thing he could have said to me.

It's cruel.

It breaks me.

Shatters me.

My eyes flood, stinging with burning, tormented tears. Without a second thought, I close my eyes and squeeze my index finger again, pulling the

trigger for a second time. The bang is loud. The recoil, powerful. My now tired and emotionally weak body is not prepared. The jarring motion forcefully knocks me to the dirty ground. How fitting for the day. A naïve bride dressed in pure white now covered in filth from the alley behind the club where she was told deceiving vows. I howl at the thought. The ache inside me so excruciating, it's debilitating.

A body lands on top of me with a thud. My head bounces off the black top. The air in my lung is expunged. I gasp on a silent cry. There isn't a struggle for the gun. I willingly release my fingers and let it lay in the palm of my hand for whoever thought they had to fight for it. I have no more fight left in me.

I want to go home.

Home.

Back to Ireland.

To a place I feel safe.

Screams, shouts, hollers, and commotion surround me. The weight of the gun leaves my hand in a violent manner. Unforgiving hands pierce the skin of my arms. My body is jerked and jilted, placed roughly on my unsteady feet. Dirty water drips at my toes. I'm lethargic to those around me. In a haze of wanting to be somewhere else. If it wasn't for the person holding me upright, I would fall to my knees.

A female's high pitched scream makes my heavy eyelids lift. My body goes stiff after being slack. The hate I felt just a second ago, it is now gone and replaced with something else I can't decipher when I connect eyes with the man in front of me. He sits on the ground with his inked hand now stained red from the blood I shed, covering the hole I put in his chest. Rivulets rush down his pristine white dress shirt, spreading like a spilled ink blot. The shirt I laid my palm against when I kissed him at the conclusion of our vows now ruined. The same shirt I buttoned up for him and ended the last closure with a kiss. His infuriated gaze is locked on me. So many emotions. So much anger.



Hate. Resentment. Revenge. All of it thick between us. Even sorrow is silently spoken between our connection. It's a foreign language being expressed between us. A wordless pull I can't deny. I step in his direction. The need to go to him is overwhelming, but the hand that has captured my arm moments ago is brutal and merciless in its demand of keeping me away from him. I'm jerked back with such brute force, my head snaps to the side.

"Give me that bitch." The enforcer I know as Giovanni rushes forward.

"Nah, G. I'll take care of this little slice of delight when this bullet she penetrated my fucking body with is removed," Demetri gruffly states, glaring at me as he tries to lift from the ground without hissing in pain.

His leer is held with the promise of retribution. It doesn't even flicker the slightest movement from me. His eyes are dead pools of emotion.

"I'll take care of her," my brother states to the man half-sitting in front of me on the ground with a bloody hole seeping through his fingers.

"I'll take her to the warehouse." The pressure on my arm tightens as my jailer states what he is going to do with me. It makes me turn to see my captor. Holding me prisoner is the underboss, the Don's son, Antonio. I should be beyond scared, but I'm not. I'm... numb to everyone but him, my husband.

"I don't fucking think so," Demetri says, grunting in pain as he moves to stand.

"Let her go!" Paisley yells, vigorously thrashing her body in my brother's restrictive hold. "Get your fucking hands off me." She flails around, slapping at him.

"I will take my wife. You gave her to me. Therefore, she is mine. Which means I get to take care of her as I see fit." The venom that snakes its way through Demetri's words is chilling. "She's fucking mine to deal with. It's time my wife learns what kind of man she's married to.

"I hate you, Demetri Carbone." My lip curls, my voice flat, distant. "I hate you with every fiber of my being."

He steps up to me, a hair's breadth away. His knuckles tenderly run down my face, leaving bloody streaks of red as his eyes become slits as if he is a venomous predator getting ready to strike. "There is a very fine line between love and hate, giovane cucciolo." His hand drops to my throat, lifting my chin with his thumb as he squeezes. "Your virgin blood slicked my cock. It was your signature of consent. Get used to it, wife. You are mine whether you love me or hate me."

"Yeah, stupidly this puppy is on the wrong side of the fence." I glare at him until he releases me. I drop my head, feeling so reckless for believing in him, in us, in my heart. Knowing what is going to happen to me and not caring. I know what I just did. I shot a made man. A man I just vowed my life to. My husband stands in front of me, bleeding. He holds his footing with his boss, the Godfather of this family, and four others across the state of New York at his back. Mr. Heart stands behind him like the pillar of power that he is. A blatant sign of strength in numbers.

The one thing I take notice is that I am not afraid. I should be. I should be terrified, but I'm not. I feel numb. Not even when he reaches around his back and pulls his gun from his lower back.

My gaze is locked with his as I take note of his actions.

"You want me dead, giovane cucciolo? You want retaliation, make me pay? I see it in your eyes, wife."

"Stop calling me that." I grit my teeth.

He grabs my hand and places his gun in it, wrapping my fingers around the metal when I don't. "Here's your chance. Fucking shoot me again. But, Haven, you better make sure it's through my heart and it kills me this time." Men holler, protesting his actions. He silences them with a stiff raised hand. "Let her go." He directs his leer to Antonio's callous grip on my arm.

A woman's shriek makes the entire group turn in its direction. Except for Demetri, he never wavers his sight from me. We are locked in on each other. I don't need to look anyway. I know exactly who it is. Tegan. She comes

rushing through the crowd, slapping her way with screeching demands as she pushes through to Demetri's side. She wraps her arms around his waist with an energy his body rejects and selfishly sobs incoherent words.

The scene is pathetic. Watching a woman run to your husband of only four hours, that you just passionately shot, is not something I saw in my childhood fairytales. Doesn't she know he cares only about himself? The child she is carrying will be his heir, but she will be nothing but a vessel to his legacy.

"She's fucking crazy! Oh, my God. She shot you!" Her hands frantically run over his body.

My lip curls and my brow lifts with a territorial twitch. The weight of the gun in my hand feels like revenge heavy. Her only saving grace is that she is pregnant, or I would shoot her too as I stand here in this unstable moment.

"Get her the fuck off me," Demetri bellows, wincing when he vigorously tries to shrug her away.

He has no care that I'm holding his gun between our bodies. The lethal energy in the crowd surrounding us could be felt as if it was a second skin.

"Haven, give me that gun," my brother orders over Tegan's wails.

"What the fuck? You're playing Russian roulette, and the odds are not in your favor since you are standing a foot in front of her and she's fully loaded with your gun, man. Thank fuck she missed the first time. What the fuck are you doing?" Giovanni harshly questions.

"Maybe I want to tap into the other half of my heritage." His gaze lowers, becoming slits as his head twists. "She won't shoot me again." A smiling sneer holds my attention with a vigilant eye, knowing he's correct. He knows me so well and I know nothing. "Isn't that right, firefly? You love me too much to shoot me again, right, giovane cucciolo? You would lose your free ticket if you did." His tongue runs over his bottom lip as I decipher his words.

I can't speak. Free ticket? It's almost as if I am catatonic. I want to. I want to yell and scream and fight. I want to hit him and shoot him again and

again, but my mind and my actions betray me. What does he mean, free ticket? I hold the gun up for him to take. The energy in the air deflates.

“Luca!” he thunders, calling his roommate, his comrade, his partner in crime. “Put her in my SUV and take me to the doc so I can get the bullet my wife pierced me with removed from my fucking chest.”

CHAPTER  
**THIRTY**

**D** EMETRI

HER TEARS ARE sharp shards of glass jabbing my bloody wound. Right before she pulled the trigger, I watched the pale green color of her eyes shatter like the diamonds I handle when they are under the highest pressure seconds before breaking from the stress. Her pain was disturbing to witness. I didn't think she would do it. Didn't think she had it in her. When that bullet pierced my skin and tore through my flesh, and the burning pain started to radiate across my chest, my only thought was *good girl*. She stood up for herself.

I stand here with the help of Antonio and Giovanni at my back. The blood loss and adrenaline from the situation are starting to diminish and my body is beginning to shut down from shock. My legs start to become weak as they guide me to the SUV. Panic starts to edge its way around me. I can see it on everyone's face as I take in the scene. I know what they're planning, what they will do to her for her actions. I'll be a widow by the time I wake up from the surgery to remove her wrath. My need to protect her from the men is palpable. As I feel myself fading away, I need to make sure my wishes are heard. My focus comes back to her.

"No one touches her."

I turn my attention to Antonio. Because I know he will give the orders to have her executed. Then I look to his father, the Don, the man everyone respects to cement my wishes and make sure no harm comes to her without my orders. His word is final, and no one will dare go against it. He asked me to sign this contract for her hand in marriage to further our business ventures in the first place and protect her from a future my innocent girl would not survive. I am her free ticket.

“Robert, no one touches her. No one. Guarantee me there will be no repercussions.”

He is contemplative a moment before giving his approval. “If that is your wish.”

“I will deal with my wife.”

His nod is my confirmation. “Go get patched up, son.” His words are the gavel closing the argument. “You’re going to need your strength. You got a tiger on your hands.”

“More like a wolf in sheep’s clothing.”

“Don’t get it twisted, G. She is a vixen in sheep’s clothing. One I am more than willing to shear for her actions.” I make myself clear to Giovanni. My balance falters, weakness taking control on my limbs, the adrenaline now just a simmer before being extinguished. “Get me in the SUV,” I order as I watch Luca hold Haven in his clutches on the other side of the vehicle, his body acting as a shield, protecting her from her brother as he berates her.

“Do you understand what you just did? Do you?” he yells, spit flying.

Haven stays silent. A blank look in her eyes as she watches me.

If I had the strength, I would shoot him point blank between the eyes myself for yelling at her like that.

“You just shot a capo, Haven. Do you know the punishment for that? It’s fucking death, Haven. Death.”

“What’s the difference?” Her voice low and level, void of any emotion. “You signed that certificate already, didn’t you?” Her pupils’ flair, slowly

coming back to life as her attention zeros in on me. “I shot my husband. There will be no punishment worse than the lies I have endured over the past few months. Or the torment he will cause me in the future. Whether he kills me or someone else does, in the end you signed my death certificate, dearest brother.”

“That’s what you think. Wait until he tortures you.”

“He already has.” Her voice is so disconnected. I watch a tear slip from the corner of her eye and hope it burns her cheek just as bad as the bullet in my chest. I want her to feel my pain as I feel hers.

We hold each other’s gaze. Mine heavy, hers fading into an oblivion of unknown. A blank stare taking over the light that was there just hours ago. “Luca, put her in the SUV.” My voice harsh and demanding. The lack of blood in my system is becoming a nuisance. I’m bleeding out and the stubborn side of me doesn’t care because I need to make sure she gets in the vehicle with me.

I lay my head back against the headrest. To my right, I see Luca forcefully shove Cillian back a few steps as he places Haven in the seat beside me. Liquid pools of sadness wash down her face from behind a blank stare. The shock of it all is hitting her system hard. Just as my gaze is becoming too heavy to keep open, I hear the squeak of leather. She’s adjusting her numb body in the seat while Luca latches the seatbelt around her. The door slams. Silence surrounds us for as long as it takes for Luca to sit behind the wheel. Her scent fills my senses with each shallow inhale. I hold my arm up, fighting against the pain as best I can to get Luca’s attention. “Unlatch her.” The leather from the front seat protests his rash movements. The click of her belt releasing sounds around the vehicle. I hold my arm up once again and wait. The warmth of her body curling into mine fuels me.

We’re silent a moment before she admits, “I hate you.”

“You going to try and kill me again, firefly?” I weakly grin as I glance down at her head resting on my bloody chest.

“I should.”

Her voice is sad, distant, but her eyes betray her soft voice. What was once the palest green eyes I have ever looked into are now vibrant green, glowing with the color only I’ve been privileged to see when I bring her to orgasm. My firefly. What am I to do? “Yeah, you should.”

Haven is the epitome of what I lost deep down in my soul throughout the years. She is wholesome and fresh, untarnished by scarred hands. She was a virgin in white with no blemishes to speak of until arrangements were made for her to come into my life. I don’t believe in fate. I don’t believe in signs either. What I do believe in is cold hard facts. I signed a contract to marry a girl who fits me perfectly. She is a submissive that flawlessly fits in my structured need to dominate.

Those are the last thoughts I have before the light inside me drastically dims. I close my eyes and squeeze her body into mine as I start to fade. A firm hand covers my chest wound, stopping more blood from being spilt. It’s a comforting blanket to my depleting body. The last thing I hear from the sweetest voice I’ve ever had the pleasure to listen to before I fully pass out is my wife saying...

“I’m sorry.”



CHAPTER  
**THIRTY-ONE**

**H**AVEN

I WAKE in a room that feels unfamiliar. Except for the small amount of moonlight shining through the partially open curtains, it's dark and mysterious. Though, somehow, I know I'm in Demetri's home.

I take a deep breath and roll onto my side, thinking about how I got here. I realize by the heaviness and the effort it's taking to open my eyelids as I repeatedly blink that I'm drained of energy. I feel almost as if I was drugged. I remember up until the point the adrenaline crashed and so did I on the drive to wherever Luca was taking us. I don't remember anything after that. I stare off at the sliver of light forcing its way through the crack in the drapes. It takes a few minutes for me to get to my unsteady feet. Movement next to me makes me freeze in my spot. I slowly turn back, adjusting my vision to the darkness on the opposite side of the bed. It's hard to see him, but Thor sits at attention waiting on my next move. His presence brings a sorrowful smile to my lips.

"Hey, buddy." I sit back down on the edge and wait for him to come to me. "Did they send you in here to keep an eye on me?" I run my hand over

his silk fur. “I almost killed your daddy last night, buddy.” I lean in and kiss his prickly cheek. He gives my face a lick and nuzzles my hand before his nose jabs at my chest. He sniffs me, poking his snout hard into my flesh and then forcefully breathes out a snort. I push him off and give him a kiss, but he is insistent and comes right back to my chest area. Panic sets in as I scratch Thor’s ear, trying to pacify him and myself as I collect my thoughts. Demetri may have died while I was asleep. Would Luca or someone let me know? Would they wake me if he was taking his last breath? No. Why would they? I am the one who would have caused his life to end. And even though he said he wanted to take care of me himself, and asked for leniency from Mr. Heart, if he has died, his request would be void and I would no longer be breathing.

I get to my feet and take small steps across the room, unfamiliar with the layout of furniture placement. I walk with unsteady strides. I open the door slowly, not knowing what to expect on the other side. I glance around and see it’s just a hallway. It’s quiet and dark, just like the room. Thor is right on my heels as I make my way to where I think Demetri’s room is located on the other side of his home. His place is vast, and I’ve never really explored it in the limited amount of time I’ve spent here. My progress halts when I hear voices. All men. I’m curious to know who they are, but more interested in what they are saying. I tip toe a little more, staying as quiet as best I can with a two-hundred-pound dog beside me. I can only make out a little of what they are saying.

*“She needs to be taken care of. No woman should be allowed to shoot her husband, a made man no less and get away with it. Why was she not taken to purgatory? You should have let her be given to the Russian. What I wouldn’t do to her before putting a bullet between her eyes.”*

When I have heard enough, and my heart can take no more, I turn away and continue my path toward Demetri’s room. My irrational thoughts have me packing a bag and making my way out through the basement. Even Demetri pulling me into his body last night in the car doesn’t make me feel

safe with these men around.

The door to his room is closed. I stand at the threshold a minute before slowly opening it, unsure of what I'll find inside. I make it a foot before I stop and take it all in. A soft light illuminates from the corner of the room. It's quiet, and the desperation I'm feeling is torturing me. My attention goes to the one thing that has me feeling disconcerted. Demetri. My husband. The man I pledged my life to. He lays in his bed, the same foundation he lays his head on at night to rest. The place he took my virginity in, is still and lying on his back. White bandages with red stains are patched over his upper chest holding him together. No movement from a man who I've only ever known too never be stagnant.

He is alive. I expel a deep, relieved breath.

I relax my weak body up against the frame of the door and watch his chest rise and fall with each healing breath I was so close to stealing from him.

How would I feel right now if I walked in here and his bed was empty?

What would I do if he hadn't lived?

The feelings that come with those thoughts snare the muscle in my chest, constricting my air and making me feel queasy. As I observe his silence, I can't help but notice how ruggedly handsome he is. He is so raw and intimidating even in stillness. Even with pale skin from the loss of blood and his hair mussed up along with the hole I put in his chest, Demetri is the sexiest man I have ever seen. I'm drawn to him, and I can't help but wish we met under different circumstances. Organically. Not arranged as I now know it to be. Now I have a husband that has the right to murder me with his bare hands if he so chooses. In the real world, that would be unacceptable, but in the world I was raised in, it's acceptable. Because in the eyes of *their* law, women are beneath them. Servants to their husbands and caregivers to their offspring. If I go by what Demetri said earlier in the alley when everyone expressed their desire to take care of me themselves, he said he wants to be

the one to handle me. As per the words of the men in the other room, he should torture me before doing so.

I don't know what I'm going to do. I just know that I am not going to be a victim in this fucked up lifestyle. My life is just that. Mine. I won't let anyone else take it from me.

"Come here, Haven."

His groggy voice startles me. I jump to both feet, now standing at attention and fully awake as I stare in his direction.

"Close the door and get over here."

My brain has a mind of its own. My feet shuffle inside and close the door. Just as it latches, he orders, "Lock it."

I don't though. I can't bring myself to turn the lock. I feel as if I do as he demands, I won't be able to escape. I walk to his side of the bed, knowing I must wait for his orders, aware it's essential for me to get out of here alive.

His eyes slowly open, still heavy I assume from the pain medication the doctor gave him. He holds them at half-mast. "Lose my shirt." His gaze falls over my length.

"What?" My question so quiet I barely heard myself.

"Get in the bed, Haven."

"I don't think—"

"No, you're not. Do as you're told."

"I—"

"You like wearing my blood?"

"What..." I glance down and notice the dark red stains on the shirt covering my body. Demetri's shirt. The one he wore for our union. The one I pierced a hole through. The one that is covered in his blood. How did it get on my body? Why is the hole so high? I strip from it with haste, whipping his shirt over my head and carelessly dropping it to the floor. No wonder why Thor was insistent on sniffing my chest, his owner was all over it. On the tips of my toes, I make my way to the other side of the bed with hurried steps. My

side. He watches me round his bed with an eye as sharp as a bird of prey. The groggy half-mast now gone. My breasts are bouncing with my rash movements. My naked body is feeling the chill in the room. I pull the covers up, climb in, lay on my back, and quickly hide my nude body beneath his sheets.

It isn't good enough for him.

With a strength I didn't know he could possess after being shot, he rolls to his side and pulls me under him in one swoop.

"Sir, you're in pain." I patronize him as if he doesn't know while using the name that makes his dick hard, hoping it will pacify him and help me out in this situation.

"Of course, I am. You fucking shot me," he retorts while holding back a wince as he moves. Then mutters, "Demetri," with a gruff raspy voice.

"What?" My brows furrow, confused at the use of his own name, thinking he may be starting to hallucinate from the loss of blood.

"Refer to me by my real name," he grinds out through clenched teeth, gazing down at me.

I blink up at him, a few dozen times, in confusion. He is now partially hovering over me. His good side bracing his torso. His bad side looming above me. I can smell the sterilization done to his skin to fight infection. It's a reminder of the unknown hours prior to finding myself at his door.

He pulls the sheet down, revealing the body I concealed. I watch him, not knowing what to do as I lay flat on my back. I can see he is in pain and a part of me wants to take that away and make it my pain. He stares at my chest. Two rebellious peaks waiting for his touch. With the arm connected to his injured shoulder he runs his index finger over my breastbone and down the valley between my breasts. I'm sure he is in agony. There is no way he can't be. Is touching my body worth the torture to him? My skin prickles with sensitivity and rises my flesh in a rush of exhilaration. He has always done this to me, to my body. He ignites it like a professionally prepared fire,

priming me for what is to come.

“You tried to kill me.”

I swallow, stay silent and still, and wait. He can have my body as long as I can get out of here alive.

“Do you know why my bloody shirt was placed on your body?”

I shake my head, waiting for the snake to bite and inject his venom.

“Because my blood is on your hands. It deserves to be on your body as does my semen.”

“Was I... Was I drugged?” The thought hits me. I don’t remember anything after curling up in his arms in the SUV. Why don’t I remember his shirt being put on my body or how I got to the spare room?

His chin dips, slowly, confidently. A grin starts to form at his devious ways, but quickly turns into a painful grimace. His index finger slides the sheet all the way down passed my pubic bone as he lifts his hips. He taps the meaty flesh four times. “This. Belongs. To. Me.” Each word a tap of ownership. He ends his declaration of possession by pushing his fingers through my slit and pinching my clit in a retaliating act that ignites my body with pain and lust. I jerk at his fierce touch. My fingers burrow into the sheets beneath me. My back arches as if a string is attached to my belly. A marionette being controlled by a ruthless man. My hips sink into the mattress, seeking refuge but yearning for more. The back of my head pushes into the pillow, forcing my chin to lift. A soft moan leaves my throat. He has this way... pleasure and pain, retaliation mixed with sorrowful pleasure. He keeps my emotions in constant limbo, but it’s nothing compared to the wound I put in his chest. Tears flood my eyes and seep into my hairline as the guilt I feel takes over.

“What’s my name?” He pinches harder, his teeth grinding together.

“S-S-Sir...” I cry out when he applies more pressure.

“I just told you to call me by my first name. Now say your husband’s name as he makes you come.”

“Demetri...” I breathe, flooded with a tearful cry.

“Are you coming? Because I know this body, wife. I know what makes this body drench itself in a silkiness that I want to bathe in. I know what turns you on. I know how to get you off faster than the bullet you pierced my chest with.”

“Demetri...” I can do nothing but cry his name. “Sir, please.”

“Haven. Who are you to me?”

“The woman you never wanted.”

“True.” He snarls, shifting, now resting his full weight on me. “Now tell me the answer I’m seeking.”

“Your wife,” I weep as he fumbles around my blood sucking nerves, torturing me.

His hand slides down between my legs, piercing my thighs with the tips of his fingers, and roughly spreads my thighs. “Open for your husband, firefly.”

“You’re bleeding.” I cry out, feeling warm droplets fall onto my breasts. His bandage is soaked through, hanging on by a thread. “Stop. You’re bleeding. Let me help you,” I plead before he slams himself inside me. He holds his hips with a bruising force as he pins me to the mattress. “Demetri!” I scream his name, sobbing.

“That’s fucking right. I’m bleeding because you, my dear wife, fucking shot me. Now we bleed together.” He savagely rips the bandage from his chest with a growl. He thrusts into me with cruel strength. Red liquid seeps from his body, dripping onto mine as he moves above me with a strength he shouldn’t have. His hips pound against my body. Sweat drips from his forehead. His movements are jagged and rough, not smooth like the times before. Demetri is excellent at making love and flawless at his special brand of revenge.

He grunts with power and groans through his pain.

I’m in a state of hysterics. My head is spinning, my heart is exploding,

and my body is about to ignite in a fire I'm not sure I'll be able to handle. My hand goes to his back, welcoming his wrath as I dig my nails into his flesh. He hisses in pain as my nails dig deep valleys into his skin. The hand holding the bloodied bandage lifts and shoves it inside my mouth. I gag and fight the intrusion until he pins me with his hips and leer and silently demands I accept it. He releases the soiled gauze and moves his hand to my chest. He begins to smear his dripping blood over my prickled skin. With a bloody palm, he encloses it around my full breast and squeezes so hard, I see stars. His body begins to rock me through my cries and then I feel his mouth on my nipple as his fingers wrap around my neck. His teeth pierce the tender skin while his fingers do the same.

He thrusts inside of me. Rocking my body with a fluid motion that controls every feeling he allows my body to experience. My body explodes. My cry muffled by the bloody bandage blocking my air. I grab at him, pulling him to me as if my life depends on it. And it does. I become as stiff as a board, unable to move while my retribution orgasm rips through my body. With my mouth unable to close, Demetri takes advantage. He rips the bandage out from between my teeth and crashes his bloody lips against mine. He consumes my air and injects my body with more of his DNA. My thoughts become vacant, vanished are the fears of danger. I gaze up into his eyes, seeing a man behind the glare I realize I haven't met before. He stops all movement and just hovers over me, rapidly breathing, inspecting me. His hand goes to my throat once again, his fingers curl around the tender skin. He slowly starts to rock my body as he holds my gaze. It's a warning. I can see he is spent, exhaustion taking its toll. We're locked into each other in a vulnerable moment. Tears slip from the corners of my eyes and form a river of sorrow for my actions.

"Demetri..." My body shakes, breaking down, squeezing his cock as I shatter again with regret.

"My firefly." He stares directly into my eyes.



His breath is heavy, viciously panting, barely holding himself up while my channel grips and drains his cock. He releases my neck and drops his full weight on top of me. The warmth of his blood between us, connecting us, feels oddly comforting. He lowers his head to the crook of my neck, resting his forehead on my shoulder as he tries to collect himself.

“Baby,” I mutter. “I need to take care of you.” I tap at his good shoulder, now realizing it wasn’t his chest but his shoulder where the bullet speared through his skin.

A deep growl rumbles in his chest. He rolls off me and pulls me to straddle him with a strength he should not have. “Ride me, baby.” I stare down at him, unsure, and insecure. “Just fucking move, firefly. You can’t do anything wrong. Move until my fucking cum is coating your insides again. Let me see those eyes of yours glow like your nickname and it won’t take long.”

In this moment, I realize one thing. We are lovers, man and wife, consummated in a bloody mess of dual possession.

He grabs himself and my hip and lowers me down onto his thick shaft. I can’t help noticing the coating of my arousal on his cock as it flows down and soaks into his obsidian hair. I look back up at him, and with the first twist of my hips, it sinks in that he just called me something other than young pup or firefly. He called me baby, and I’m not sure I like it. His eyes shine up at me with arousal and pain at the highest level. I see something in them I have never seen before. Adoration. Our bodies are covered in our bodily fluids, and with what I think is pride in his eyes, I bear down on him with devotion as I worship his body with my own.

I’m so lost in the rhythm we are making together that the click of the door latch is heard but goes unregistered until I feel a strong presence behind me.

“Don’t stop on my account,” Luca leans against the adjacent wall to the door, watching. His arms are crossed over his chest, and there is a gleam in his eye.

My body slows its ministrations on my husband, but I don't stop. I unhurriedly ride him as I watch Luca's relaxed position with curiosity. I turn back and look down at Demetri, shocked he hasn't said anything. Waiting for his territorial wrath and demanding Luca leave. Instead, he does the opposite. His hand comes to my breast and plays with my nipple before saying, "Your choice. His job is done. He can stay and watch, or I can send him away."

I look back over my shoulder, my chin brushing the rigid edge, watching Luca as my hips shift and grind down so far that the head of Demetri's cock hits my cervix, filling my core with an ache that has me squeezing my inner muscles. I cry out in pleasure and delicious pain, throbbing for more. Demetri's hands tighten on my hips when I turn back to him and start moving faster. I hold his gaze and shudder a question with a heavy breath. "You don't care if another man sees me like this with you?"

"No, firefly. I don't mind if *he* sees your beautiful body. I don't care if *he* touches your body, but *he* will never enter this part of your body." He jerks his hips. "And none of it will ever happen unless I permit it."

"What about my permission? It's my body," I whisper, so confused at the turn of events happening.

"A curious mind I'll allow to explore as your husband. Your curiosity is your blessing, and for me to protect that approval is with my permission." He thrusts his hips up, meeting mine. My eyes widen then quickly shut at the sharp pressure. I'm drenched. I can hear how wet I am by the moisture making sounds between us as our bodies meet. When I open my eyes to reconnect with him, he growls, "But, firefly, I will be the only man who will see your eyes light with fire when you come. Understood?" He grabs my hands and places them on his bloody chest to brace myself. "Now ride me and make me come."

"You're bleeding very badly."

"Then you better hurry the fuck up and ride me harder before I bleed out."

CHAPTER  
**THIRTY-TWO**

**D** EMETRI

HER HEAD RESTS on my bloody chest. My body is angry with discomfort, but I don't want to move her just yet. Her index finger lazily doodles in my chest hair, drawing invisible pictures. In the silence between just the two of us I feel her soft touch move over my skin to my torn open wound. With the tip of her finger, I watch her draw a heart around the crater she put in my shoulder. I grimace and grind my molars, but when she connects the two sides, I lock onto her.

I can see she wants to say something. Almost as if she is compelled to, but she doesn't want to ruin the moment. She turns slightly and seals the heart she just drew with a kiss. With her lips now painted red she looks me straight in the eyes and whispers, "I am so, so sorry."

I know her apology is sincere. Haven doesn't have it in her not to be. "I'm just glad you have bad aim."

"Not funny." She laughs but it's halfhearted. "I could have killed you," she whispers, seeming to be lost in thought. Then she takes a deep breath as she stares at my wound and professes, "I love you, Demetri Carbone. You are not the hero in my fantasy, but my villain. I think I've held love for you since

the moment we were introduced at Mr. Heart's party. There was something about you that drew me to you. I hated your cockiness, but I gravitated towards it. I felt like a directionless girl beneath the watchful eye of a powerful man. You were so sexy and intriguing standing there before me. A force all on your own. So much confidence. So comfortable reprimanding me in my brother's presence. I felt drawn to you in a way that was unfamiliar." She quiets a moment, huffing with a small smile. "Your arrogance, though..." Her lip quirks a bit as she wipes away what blood transferred from my chest to her lips with her kiss. "My only wish over this time we have spent together is that you felt the same. It was a daily guessing game inside my head. I think, deep down inside, I knew you didn't. There were many signs that I ignored. The devil in you is attractive to me. And that's sad that I let myself believe you did. The red flags were there. The bells of second guessing chimed, loudly, but I ignored them. Thank you for teaching me what I don't ever want."

I grab her face with one hand. "You say that as if you're going somewhere. As if I don't have feelings for you. As if I don't have love for you." I squeeze her jaw. "You are going nowhere, Mrs. Carbone. Nowhere," I repeat so she understands how serious I am. "Can I say I wanted this? No, Haven, I cannot. I was doing what was right for the business and what was asked of me. I never expected my dick to get as hard as it has for you."

"So romantic." She huffs, moving to pull away before I stop her.

"I'm not a romantic, Haven, but for you, I have a desire to be." I let that sink in. "Don't think it will be over the top with flowers and candy. That's not who I am. But do not get it twisted, baby. I do have love for you. I fought with myself over it. When we said our vows and I told you I loved you, I meant it."

"You are having a child with another woman, Demetri."

"She is not my wife. You are. I will handle that situation."

"What does that mean?"

“It means I’ll handle it.” I give her a stern look. She needs to know not to question me. I will always take care of things, and she needs to trust me. It’s the only reason why I give her this one concession of explanation. “I wrap, Haven. Yes, there is a chance. There always is. But I wrap my shit up.” She raises a brow. I know exactly what she is suggesting. “You were a virgin. If you think for one second, that I was going to sink into your innocent body with something blocking me from feeling all of you, my soon to be wife, while I broke through your tender skin making you mine, you couldn’t be more wrong.”

“And now?”

“And now you’re my wife, firefly.” I run my thumb over her bottom lip. “I will come on these lips.” I push her all the way up to a sitting position and lower my hand to her chest. “Spread my seed across these perfect tits.” I drop to her stomach. “Jerk myself to completion all over this stomach you hate and I find so damn sexy.” Then I drop my hand lower and slide a finger inside her. Her eyes close. I wait until they reopen. “And I will put my children in your womb when I think the time is right.”

“We haven’t used protection.”

“Deliberately,” I gruff, tapping her thigh. “Up. We need to shower. And I need to get glued back together, so I stop bleeding. Then I need to handle something with you at my side.” She doesn’t move, just sits her voluptuous nude body comfortably on my stomach, contemplating if my words are a lie or the truth. It’s something she will have to work out on her own. “We don’t have much time. Move your ass.” I tap her thigh once again.

CHAPTER  
**THIRTY-THREE**

**H**AVEN

OUR SHOWER IS QUICK. We both wash in comfortable silence. I make sure Demetri's wound is as clean as it can be without medical treatment. When we get out of the shower, Demetri immediately grabs his phone and demands someone come to his room. I thought it was going to be Luca, but it isn't. Within a few minutes, there is a knock at the door. An older man with a gentle face enters only after Demetri makes sure I am covered with my towel first. I am introduced to the man I now know as Dr. B. His full name isn't disclosed. I am okay with that. I know from Cillian and my father that all organizations have paid medical personnel at their disposal. With a directional point of his index finger at the closet, Demetri orders me to go get dressed while the doctor works on him. I was more than happy to. Just as I finished blow drying my hair, Demetri calls for me as he steps into the walk-in closet that he had filled with my clothes and clothes that he purchased for me.

"It's time to go."

Where? I don't know. I am just trusting him, following his lead, and

hoping now that my eyes are open that I don't fall into the naive pool of one again.

With unasked questions in my eyes, I follow him through the house to a grand living room. The room is set apart from his main living area. Men, the same voices I heard talking before, ordering my torture and death, sit around while some stand waiting. Most likely too eager to sit with the taste of revenge on the tip of their tongues, a beheading in wait for shooting a made man in their organization.

I stop in my tracks when every eye in the room flares at seeing me. Demetri squeezes the hand being held captive by him, a reassurance I do not feel. I'm ready to turn and run. Silk fur brushes against the palm of my free hand hanging at my side. Thor has sidled up next to me and stands at attention.

Demetri glances over, noticing him, mumbling, "Fuckin' traitor." He looks at me with a quirk of a grin. "I get it, boy. She has her claws in my skin too." He turns back to the room.

The bloodthirsty men wait with rapt attention.

Mr. Heart stands, giving Demetri the floor. "I assume your request from earlier this evening hasn't varied?"

"It has not," Demetri says with so much composure.

"Then your wishes need to be stated to the family." He waves his hand, giving him the floor to speak.

"It was requested of me to marry Haven McKittrick, as you all know. I accepted. It was an arranged marriage of protection. Ms. McKittrick, now Mrs. Carbone, had not a clue it was arranged. I pursued her as if it was a natural progression of meeting a beautiful woman. I'm sure you all could imagine her shock when she found out the truth. Her actions, even though harsh, will go unpunished. If I see that punishment is needed, then I will be the one to handle my wife."

"She could have killed you," an older man shouts.

“I took her virginity, and she consummated our marriage by riding my cock.” He ignores the man’s outburst. “If you don’t believe me, look to Luca for confirmation.” He nods in Luca’s direction.

My shocked gaze shifts to Luca. He leans casually against a decorative column, a relaxed position with one leg crossed over the other at his ankles. He nods in agreement.

Now I know why he came into the room and Demetri said, “*His job is done.*” He had to witness our union. I connect my eyes with Luca’s. The corner of his lips quirk and the recognition shines bright in his eyes. My attention is brought back to Demetri and the room full of old and young men when I hear Demetri say, “She is under this organization’s protection and now my protection, gentlemen. No one, and I mean no one, will touch my wife or cause her any harm. If she is in your presence and danger lurks, you best know that if you do not make the effort to protect her with *your* life, I will come for *yours.*”

“That’s a threat you shouldn’t make, boy,” an older, distinguished looking man remarks.

“Don’t ever disrespect me again by referring to me as a boy, Ricci. Boss or not, we will have an issue.”

“Gentlemen. Let’s keep this civil. You are here to show your respect to one of my men. Demetri has expressed his wishes. You will regard him and the choice he has made with the utmost respect. Anything less will not be tolerated,” Mr. Heart calmly says directing his statement to the old guy.

“And the sheets, the ones proving he took her virgin pussy?”

“You motherfucker!” Demetri lunges, my arm almost jerked from its socket before he thinks to let it go.

The room erupts. The young men who were standing around, looking bored at the discussion, now stand at attention, watching the older men in the room. Demetri rushes across the space and reaches for the guy he called Ricci. Giovanni blocks him before he gets to the old guy. He’s old-world



mafia. I can see it on his weathered face.

“It’s not worth it,” Giovanni growls next to Demetri’s ear.

A hand touches my arm, warning me when I take a step towards my husband. With a sharp twist of my head, I realize it’s Luca. He’s protecting me.

“Ricci, sit down,” Mr. Heart orders with a finality that is frightening.

“Heart, you allowed this. The old-world laws are there for a reason. It was written in her contract. If her blood was shed and she is now under his power where is the proof?”

“Pop, this isn’t the old-world. Fuck if you can find a virgin anymore.”

I’m assuming it’s his son who chimes in in what seems like he is trying to diffuse the situation.

“All whores. Every single one of them,” the man spews with venom, flipping his hand in the air with force. “And this new order ruling, letting a boss change his last name to some lovesick puppy name. The Commission should be ashamed for allowing it. It’s despicable.” The man spits, showing his disgust.

My eyes widen in shock when his saliva hits Demetri’s floor.

“Pop! What the fuck?” His son jumps up and heads in his direction. “You can’t do shit like that. It’s disrespectful as fuck, Dad.”

“Fuck him.” He points his attention to Demetri who is vibrating with anger against Giovanni’s broad chest.

Demetri’s sneer is lethal. It’s a promise. Giovanni’s harsh tone tries to calm him down as he fights against him. His wound opens once again.

“You motherfucker. You just disrespected me, my wife, my home, and the Don. You just punched a hole in your death ticket to hell.”

“Boy, death can’t come quick enough. Give it your best shot. Many have tried. You are all pussies. Every man here allows a woman to rule their dick. Especially the Godfather for allowing his woman to be on the board. Women don’t belong!” He slams his hand against the arm of the chair.

Antonio lunges for the man with a deadly speed. He wraps his hand around his throat and starts choking him. I gasp in shock as I'm pulled away and forced closer to the hallway as all hell breaks loose. "That's my mother you're speaking of, motherfucker. Keep her name out of your mouth," he thunders with venom.

Ricci sputters and chokes on his saliva, turning purple as Antonio chokes the life from his body. Mr. Heart grabs his son and yanks him back, demanding he let go. Giovanni lets Demetri go when Ricci's son lunges for Antonio. It's pure chaos until Mr. Heart pulls his gun and holds it against the old guy's temple.

You can hear a pin drop when Mr. Heart threatens, "Disrespect my wife one more time, Ricci. Go ahead, I dare you. Say it and I will fill your brain with lead."

"Fucking do it, Pop!" Antonio yells. "I'm sick of his shit."

"Go ahead, Robert. Killing me is signing your own death warrant. No boss can kill another without permission from the Commission. You know the rule. It was set in the old-world order. It's the one you all have seemed to disregard to suit your own needs."

Mr. Heart growls through clenched teeth with a voice so chilling it gives me goosebumps. "I. Am. The fucking Commission, Ricci. You would do well to remember that just as you have about me changing the spelling of my last name to be more suitable to my calling card. Would you like to see the infamous Bobby Two Times emerge right now? I'll pump two bullets in your heart and splatter your blood across my caporegime's floor. Then for the fuck of it, I'll put a bullet in your skull for being so stupid and questioning me."

"Robert." A guy I haven't noticed yet steps up to Mr. Heart. He's a large man. Unusually quiet. Very calm and very much in control when he places his hand on Mr. Heart's shoulder and informs him, "This is not in your best interest for the organization as a whole."

Mr. Heart stands straight, but not before roughly jamming the old guy's

temple with the butt of his gun and a sneer. He straightens his suit jacket with a jerk of anger. “Demetri will not be giving over the sheets. You will sit there quietly, or you will be dismissed from this meeting.”

“Listen, Pop. Just sit there and shut the fuck up before bullets start flying.”

“That’s right, Heart. Listen to your consigliere.” The old man stupidly taunts.

“Pop!” his son Rocco thunders, reprimanding him.

“And the other situation?” another older man asks, breaking through the tension, looking bored. “We have a Russian running around our city causing problems. She is the cause.” He points at me. “This is an arrangement you should not have made, Heart. It brings trouble to the organization we don’t need. You should have consulted.”

“You getting too old for some entertainment, Vinny? I’m sure your son Leo doesn’t mind. He has found himself entertainment that involved a bit of trouble many times. Situations I have gotten him out of, may I remind you. Do not disrespect me as the boss of this family.” Mr. Heart puts the old man in his place.

“My boy has nothing to do with this.”

“Sitting right here, old man.” A very attractive thirty-ish guy voices in a humorous tone. I can only assume he is Leo, the son they speak of. I now realize he is the guy who came to our table the night Demetri took me to club Abyss. He must have been the one to bring the contract to the club that Demetri had to sign.

“Disrespect me again and I’ll splatter your fucking brains across Carbone’s floor, boy.”

His son sits back in his chair, his jaw ticking with frustration.

The tension in the room is getting thicker. I find myself stepping up and into Demetri’s side, seeking his warmth and protection in a room full of cold, ruthless men. He glances down at me, his gaze grazing over mine. “Nothing

will happen to you,” he reassures me as he leans down and kisses my temple.

“How do you plan on handling this situation?” the older man they refer to as Vinny inquires while Ricci sits there, stewing.

“When the time comes, and if need be, that information will be fed to you. If it doesn’t concern you, then it won’t.”

“I think the information you so choose to hold is imperative. It was my club he trashed looking for her.” He nods in my direction.

“This meeting is over.” Mr. Heart cuts the man off. “Everyone except the underbosses from each family can leave. Rocco, Leo, Nico, and Cia wait for me in Demetri’s office. Antonio, Giovanni, show the rest out.”

“It’s like that, Heart?” Ricci snarls with venom, no longer able to hold his tongue. “Just hand the bitch over. I’ll make sure to take care of her. Then this will all be over.”

Demetri lunges, the broad muscles of his back expanding are the only thing I see as he charges forward with the intent to pulverize. Antonio jumps in his path. Demetri’s weight knocks Antonio back a few steps. Antonio’s back is to the room, to the men he is saving from Demetri’s wrath, but his eyes are peering at me from over Demetri’s shoulder. His whispered words are harsh when he growls, “Not fucking now. I get it. If it were Lilah, I would rip his fucking lungs out,” he snarls. “But we have to be fucking patient. And smart.” He slaps Demetri twice on his wounded shoulder, hard.

I gasp. The pain he must be feeling with the hit to his body holds my attention. I’m so focused on Demetri that I don’t realize Luca has stepped up next to me again.

“You disrespect my wife again and see what happens to you, Ricci,” he yells over Antonio’s shoulder as he holds him back. “You didn’t just disrespect a street runner. You just disrespected a made man.”

“And you just disrespected a senior boss. Watch yourself,” the old man threatens.

“Pop, let’s go,” Rocco urges with a tug on his arm.

“Get off me, boy.” He rips his arm away, shooting daggers at Demetri as Giovanni guides him past, showing him out of the room.

The room clears quickly as men disperse in all directions. I watch four underbosses walk down a hallway. I can only assume it’s where Demetri’s office is located. My heart is hammering in my chest, my ribs bruising with every hard thump. Luca grips my elbow with an assertive gentleness. He lifts his chin, telling me to follow him. I look to Demetri for reassurance. Antonio still has a hold of him, talking him off the ledge of no return. With a vicious twist of his head, like he knows I’m waiting for direction, he connects his eyes with mine. He nods, telling me it’s okay when he sees it’s Luca guiding me away. My nerves are so tightly wound I’m ready to throw up. Angry at the old man for being so vile and suggesting I die, and being in a room with men so ruthless had me at a disadvantage. Where was Cillian? Why wasn’t he there to protect me? Never in all my years would my brother and father allow me to stay within the same walls as these men. I can only wonder why Demetri didn’t send me back to his room once his statement was made.



IT SEEMS like hours have passed, but with my mind reeling with crazy thoughts, it was probably only an hour before Demetri walks through the bedroom door. I shift on the bed and wait, for anything. My mind had been

spinning as I lay here anticipating what to expect when he came back. What could they be talking about? Was it about me or someone else entirely? Was it about the old man who seemed to hit a nerve with everyone in the room, even his own son? Will Demetri still want to be in this marriage? A sad thought to think when you have been married less than a day.

Exhaustion is the first thing I notice about him. It resides in his eyes like a thick blanket. Then I notice his shoulders, how tight they are, and how his spine is ramrod straight. He looks ready to snap. Like any second he is going to lose control. Maybe he already has. I wouldn't know, because the direction I saw all the men walking in is a fair distance from his bedroom so I don't think I would hear the yelling or fighting.

He walks to his chest of drawers, his movements quick and harsh as he removes his watch. I shift to a sitting position and lean back against the headboard, observing him, the man I am married to. I notice his injured shoulder has been rewrapped with a clean bandage when he turns and walks right past the bed and into the bathroom. I hear the medicine cabinet door open and close. The sound of a pill bottle fills the room as I'm sure he is shaking a few into his palm. The sink water runs next. He exits the bathroom and walks right past the bed I'm still in and strides across the room to the closet with heavy steps. I can't help but notice how low his jeans hang on his hips when he disappears inside. I hear shuffling then a quick zip from a zipper. Fabric and hangers groan at the way I assume he is pulling them down from the rod they were hanging on. I glance over at the clock and see that it's just past four a.m. We should both be asleep after the day we had, but we're not. We should have been making love until we couldn't anymore in the privacy of his room. I guess I can refer to it as our room now. This should have happened after spending a few hours of celebration with family and friends.

I've laid here, alone, thinking about how Finn snatched me up, dragging me into a room as I was running away from seeing Demetri and Tegan, after

facing the nightmare of my new reality. How Finn was there as he has always been. I thought about Finn's lips on mine and how they felt nothing like Demetri's demanding, sensual ones. I thought about how a few years back, Finn would have been my dream man and now, even though the two men move in the same ruthless circle, they are the complete opposite of each other. I may have not been happy, feeling unfulfilled sexually now that I know I like more than the norm. Had I not met Demetri, I would have never experienced that type of sex. Maybe I would have just continued with life with my head in a bubble had Finn and I been married. But then I think about how much I love being under Demetri's thumb and I don't know if I would have found Finn boring after some time had passed. Demetri now makes me feel safe and cherished after feeling unsettled and unsure in the beginning. That night he brought me down to his dungeon, he broke me, but he also healed a part of me. It was as if he knew me more than I knew myself. I'll never know, but I don't think Finn could ever do that for me. Demetri pushed me where I know Finn wouldn't have. But then I think maybe he could. I don't know. My life, whether in the direction I wanted it to go or not, is right where I want it to be.

I slide out from under the covers, remove all my clothes, and ignore my inner thoughts about how I don't like my thighs or my stomach or the way my chest isn't as perky as I think it should be, and I wait as a distraction in the middle of the room for my new husband to exit the closet.

He didn't spare me a glance as I lay in his bed and watched him walk past me twice. So now I'll stand here and wait. A few minutes pass. I fidget in my spot, holding my ground. I want to go see what he is doing and if everything is okay, but I stop myself before taking the steps. Just as my thoughts are getting the best of me about how my body looks standing here, he exits the closet with a black bag. I can't help but admire his body. It's hard, solid with muscle, and every ripple in his stomach contracts with each breath he inhales and exhales. It takes a moment for him to notice me standing in the middle of

the room, totally naked and ready to jump out of my skin, but when he does, he stops on a dime, drops his packed bag, and scans my body before meeting my gaze.

His pupils dilate as he says, “You need to get some rest.” He leans over without breaking eye contact and flicks off the light closest to him. I watch him with a critical eye as he shifts and moves around the room to the freestanding light. My heart wants to plummet at what feels like a dismissal, but I stand my ground as the room goes dark. He walks closer to me. It’s sexy and slow like a sauntering black leopard. I can’t help but drop my gaze to see if seeing me like this, waiting for him, had any effect on him. Even soft, his cock is a sight to see. It hangs heavy with a thick girth and a pinkish virility to the skin that is drool worthy. But if he is hard from seeing me, I will definitely be able to see the outline.

He stops in front of me. “We fly out first thing. Keep staring at my dick like that and you won’t be getting any sleep.”

*Excuse me?*

“Make sure you pack enough for three days.” He draws in a deep breath as he runs his knuckles down my cheek.

His actions are soft, but his tone is clipped with a sharpness I don’t understand. I ignore his statement. “Are you in pain?”

“I’m fine.”

“You don’t look fine.”

“All in a day’s work.”

“Can I do something for you?” I reach forward and cup him gently.

“Is this you challenging me, or yourself?”

“I thought I could unwind my husband, that is if you haven’t changed your mind about us. That meeting was an hour long of agony for me. Not many are happy with me being your wife. I thought maybe things may have changed.”

He takes an unsettling deep breath and yanks me against his body. The air



wooshes from my lungs as I stare up into his deep dual colored eyes with uncertainty. “Did I not make myself clear about how I feel about you?”

“You said a lot of things. But after tonight, with everything that has happened with the men, I just wanted to make sure you didn’t want to back out.”

“So, you tempt me with your body?” His thumb runs over my bottom lip.

“Did it work?” I hold back my grin.

“Do you feel how hard my cock is against your stomach?”

“I do.”

“Good. Now get in bed and go to sleep. We have a long day ahead of us tomorrow.”

“I would rather do something for you. Will you allow me to do it, sir?”

“A warning. If you are suggesting that you want to suck my cock, it will be hard and fast.”

“It’s not.” I lean up and give him a chaste kiss.

“What do you have in mind?”

CHAPTER  
**THIRTY-FOUR**

**H**AVEN

IT TAKES A LITTLE DOING, but I manage to get Demetri into his soaking tub which I can bet he has never used. I knew he couldn't shower because of his fresh bandage so I thought the hot water from a bath would relax him and maybe get rid of some of his stress. I lean back against him and play with the sponge I found inside the vanity. Our position in the tub is his doing. I was going to sit across from him, but he demanded I sit between his legs. When I settled myself down, he pulled me back against his chest.

We're silent for a time before the questions bouncing around in my head start to overwhelm my thoughts. I play with the sponge, dipping it in the water and then listening to the drips fall as I squeeze it out. It's a repeated action while I get the courage up to ask him the questions burning inside me.

"Tell me about the sheets."

I watch his chest expand and release with a heavy breath.

"Why did that old man want them? You were so angry. Do you really have sheets with my blood on them?"

"Because he's a twisted fuck."

“That can’t be the only reason. Tell me.” I stare at the water falling from the sponge while I wait.

“In the old country when a bride is promised to a made man, she is to be a virgin, and her virgin blood is to be spilled onto the sheets at consummation. It’s proof. Proof that she now fully belongs to the man she was given to, her husband.”

“That sounds barbaric.”

“It’s life.”

“Was my blood on your sheets?”

“Some. I licked most of it off your pretty pink lips and thighs.”

I feel my cheeks blaze with heat. “Why wouldn’t you show him?” I ask out of curiosity.

“Because you are mine and what is mine is not his, nor anyone else’s.”

“And the arranged marriage? Why?” I dip the sponge and wait for it to swell with water. “Why would you agree to it?”

“I have a question for you instead.” His fingers play with the ends of my damp, curly hair.

I breathe an irritated breath at the fact he didn’t answer my question, but I figure if I answer his then maybe he will continue to answer mine in return. “Go ahead.” I drop the sponge into the water, drowning its dehydrated form, and then pick it back up and squeeze it out as I listen.

“Tell me, did your bodyguard put his lips on what’s mine before he gave you his gun? Knowing you would shoot me out of feeling desperate from distress?”

I can’t help but freeze my hand midair, the sponge dripping slowly without added pressure. It was only a split second of stillness, but he notices it immediately.

“Turn around, Haven. Look me in the eyes when you give me your answer.”

I slowly shift, the hot water whirling around me, hoping it will buy me

time. For what? I don't know. The way he asked the question tells me he already knows the answer. My waist is engulfed by his strong demanding hands with a force I have now come to crave. He lifts me and settles me over his straining erection. His passionate gaze penetrates mine with a wrathful intensity, swirling with a jealousy I've never experienced before.

"Wrap your legs around my waist," he voices with a gruff harshness.

My belly flutters with a deep-seated nervousness.

"Answer me." He runs his thumb over my bottom lip, pushing the tender skin to the side as if he is wiping off the germs of another man. "Did. He. Put. His. Lips. On. What. Is. Mine?" he repeats his question, his tone harder.

His words hold ownership in their weight and the threat behind it is a promise. He shifts my hips until the head of his cock is breaching my opening. When my mouth drops open in a gasp, he forces me down, inserting himself further inside me. I moan, closing my eyes at the sensation only he has made me feel. The stretch he brings to my body every time he passes my silken lips is a rush of electric currents that goes straight to my brain and short circuits my rational thoughts.

"Open your eyes." He jerks his hips up into me, the water sloshing. "Answer me, Haven. Did. He. Put. His lips. On. My wife?"

"How do you know?"

"No denial then?"

"No." I stare into his eyes, my muscles contracting around his length. "I don't want a marriage with secrets." A short gasp leaves me when he jerks his hips up, a stab of punishment I don't deserve.

He seethes, sucking in air through clenched teeth.

"I couldn't find my wife. I went to the security cameras and searched through the footage. I saw you standing at the door, listening to Tegan and I. Saw you run. Then you disappeared around the corner. There's a dead spot in that area. Paisley was there. You weren't. The next camera didn't pick you up either. So, I went to the camera in the only room between both spots."

“I didn’t kiss him back.”

“But you let another man touch you.”

“I didn’t let him do anything, sir. I pushed him away and demanded his gun.”

“To what? Kill me?”

“No! Yes! No. I don’t know.” I shake my head. “I was made a fool. Everyone knew we were a farce but me. Everyone, sir. I felt like a foolish girl. I married a man who didn’t want me. A man who had to sign a contract to take on a bride. Do you know how that makes me feel? What I felt was real pain and embarrassment. I beamed with happiness to be with someone like you. You opened my eyes to things and experiences, and while I was naive and stupid you just played out a role.”

“From now on, when not downstairs, you refer to me by my first name.”

“Why? I like calling you sir.”

“So does my dick.” I pump into her body a few times with a slow strength that sets my balls on fire. “We’re getting off track. That’s a discussion for another time. Now answer me. Has your bodyguard kissed you before?”

I swallow my moan when he strategically moves inside me, a Demetri Carbone truth serum. “It was a long time ago. He wasn’t into it.”

His fingers grip my hips with a pressure I know will leave his mark. The water sloshes around us as he moves my body up and down his shaft with vigor. Me testing the preferred word *sir* to see where we stand has made him swell inside me, but the fact that I confessed to kissing Finn has made his movements erratic. He thrusts into me and growls, “He gladly gave you the gun. Why do you think that is, Haven?” he rumbles, abruptly halting his fitful movements and holding me down on his manicured thick base, waiting on my truth.

“Because I demanded it.”

“Wrong. It was because he knew you were unstable. He knew you were so distraught that there was a chance you would shoot me, or possibly her if

you saw her again. He knew, Haven. Tell me why he did it?”

“Would it matter?”

“Would what matter?”

“If I shot her instead of you. Would that matter to you?”

“You wouldn’t have shot her. You were angry with me.”

“That’s the second question you refuse to answer, Demetri.”

“Refusal is harsh. I would say I’m skirting around it to save you from the answer hurting you more.”

“Good excuse,” I spit in frustration, shifting to move off his lap.

He jerks me back down. “Which one do you want first, the why of why I went along with the arranged marriage order or the answer to whether or not I would be mad that you potentially killed the mother of my child?” He pushes me back down his shaft refilling me with the few inches I separated between us.

“Ah,” I huff, looking away, only to turn back when he starts to answer.

“Because the truth is”—he lifts my chin to meet his gaze instead of me staring at his chest while ingesting his words— “I have no attachment to her unless she is carrying my child.”

“That’s callus.”

“Again, that’s life.”

“She is in love with you. I heard you and her. You didn’t deny how you felt about her.”

“About our arrangement. Which is over. I have taken a strong liking to a strawberry blonde with crazy curly hair who is riding my cock and challenging me at the moment.”

“A liking?” I twist my head and eyeball him with irritation.

He leans in with a smirk to kiss me, but I jerk back, pulling away as far as I can with him still inside me. His hand whips out with lightning speed and slices through my hair, jerking me back to him and crushing his lips to mine. When he ends the passionate kiss he pulls back, and growls, “As for the

marriage, I was asked by the Boss of our family to further the alliance between two families. One family needed to right a wrong, a business transaction that should have never been made in the first place. While the other paid back part of a vendetta while they capitalized on a new fruitful venture.”

“I’m the transaction,” I sadly whisper knowing it’s the truth.

“You’re my wife. Not a transaction.”

“He’s in love with me,” I breathe out with an intense weight to my confession as Demetri pushes me down on him fully.

“He can’t have you.” His glare is for Finn. The heat swirling in his eyes is for me. “Now, shift your feet and place them flat on the bottom of the tub, and lean back a bit.”

“Sir,” I cry out at the new sensation. I didn’t think he could get in any further, but the position has him buried deep inside me. He’s submerged to the hilt, almost to the point of pain, but then I feel my insides constrict, pulsate, and slicken around him. It sends chills up my spine while sitting in a warm bath.

“You love my cock. Don’t you, baby.” Not a question. A statement. He knows I do.

“I know no other.”

“And you never fucking will,” he growls, pushing me down on him as he thrusts up. “Now, ride me while I tell you the truth about your bodyguard.”

“He’s in love with me,” I repeat on a whisper as my body shudders over his.

“That’s right. He is. Understandably so. He wants what is mine. And you, my beautiful wife, belong to who?”

“You, sir.” I feel myself becoming malleable as he starts to move with intention, stroking my insides with slow deep thrusts. “Sir?” I mutter, getting ready to ask one last question that has been bothering me. “Who is looking for me? I heard what that old man you all referred to as Ricci said. And Leo’s

father said someone trashed his club looking for me. Why? Who is he?"

His body stills while holding my gaze. "I won't let him hurt you." His voice hard, with promised protection behind it.

"Who is he?"

"The man who was supposed to be your husband."

"Demetri," I gasp his first name with so much shocked confusion.

"I'll explain during our flight."

"I want to know now."

"Right now? You want to know right now when I'm about to release my children inside you?" His jaw muscles flex as he grinds his teeth.

"I don't want to be in a marriage with secrets, sir."

"Too late for that. There will be many secrets between us, but I promise you the ones I can tell you, I will. It's for your protection."

The fluid motions of our love making hasn't stopped. I breathlessly express my concerns, and he harshly huffs his answers all the while massaging our bodies against one another. His bite is not from annoyance at my short interrogation but of the tremendous strength he is giving by holding back his orgasm. When I get to the point I can no longer communicate, my orgasm ready to unleash its wrath from just him sitting inside me, my back snaps, arching, and I bear down on him with force. I drop my head back and wait for the onslaught of sensitivity as it takes over my body while thoughts of imminent danger surround me.

Though, Demetri doesn't let me get much private time behind my closed eyes when he demands, "Eye's on me, baby. I want to see them explode with fire when your pussy strangles the cum from me."

I lock eyes with his as I slide up and down his shaft. There was a hint of an accent behind his words. Something I know was not a mistake. "You're not just Italian, are you?" I breathe heavily, panting, while waiting on an answer.

He grins. "No, baby. I am a chameleon. Now make me come."



I see him text someone while I'm drying off. When I ask who he is messaging, as if I had the right, which I do, especially since it's so early in the morning, he shot me a look of proud annoyance. In my jealous thoughts, it is her. The woman that may be carrying his baby. He knows it is what I was thinking too. But it isn't her, or so he says. It was him instructing the pilot that we were not taking off as planned. A few more hours of sleep were needed by us both.

"Demetri?" I wait for a reply under the blanket of darkness. When it doesn't come, I ask, "Where are you taking me?"

"Get some sleep, Haven," is all he says.

"Demetri? I hear him breathe heavily with sleep. "Where has my brother been? Why hasn't he tried to protect me?"

"You'll see him tomorrow. Now go to sleep."

I lay there a few minutes, exhausted from the past twenty-four hours. So many questions not answered. I close my eyes and feel myself starting to drift. I don't know if I am actually smiling or just hallucinating in my dream like state, but I hope wherever he is taking me is a sandy beach with a warm sun.

CHAPTER  
**THIRTY-FIVE**

**H**AVEN

I WAKE WITH SLOW MOVEMENTS, my body deliciously sore. At some point, in the few hours we had been asleep, I felt Demetri glide inside me. His warm body sheathed mine on the outside while his glorious thick length massaged my insides. He rocked my sleepy body like a sweet lullaby, bringing me to an orgasm that made me cry out in a dreamlike state.

I roll to the edge of the bed and sit up, a wide grin I can't control pulls at my lips. Just the thought that he couldn't go long without wanting to be inside me again makes me feel off-balance, but in a valuable way, a confident, sexual awakening way.

I turn and look over my shoulder, searching for the man who left the ache, but the bed is empty along with the room. I notice two black leather bags sitting by the door when I grab for my robe to cover up. Demetri's deep voice carries through the space from inside the closet. Assuming he is on the phone, I pad my way to the bathroom and take care of business, giving him privacy to finish his call. When I exit, he is still talking, more like ordering. A sudden thought hits me, surprising me, but also terrifying the hell out of me,

but I decide to do it anyway. I untie my robe, let it drop to the floor, and start in his direction to say good morning in my birthday suit while the full morning sun shines bright through the large windows leaving no room for any cover.

“Good morning,” I slowly sing in a voice I believe is sexy.

To my surprise he is not on the phone but instead speaking to a small, very attractive woman who stands in front of him, overshadowed by his large size.

I gasp, shocked. My hands fly to my chest and privates, covering myself. Demetri slowly turns, looking over his shoulder. He scans my body then turns to face me with a cocky smile. My body flushes with embarrassment as he watches me with intent.

Turning he hums, “Good morning, Haven.” His deep voice full of mirth.

I quickly turn to leave, embarrassed, but he’s swift to snatch my wrist and pull me into his suited body. He’s already fully dressed in grey suit pants and a black dress shirt. The top two buttons of his shirt are open showcasing the lotus tattoo at the base of his neck. I feel even more naked, if that’s possible, as I stand here with two fully dressed people. I’m just thankful that the woman is now behind Demetri and can’t see me.

I’m wordless as he looks intently into my eyes. His hand slides around my waist and down my back, gripping one of my cheeks before following the valley to an opening he hasn’t touched before. I suck in a quick breath, stunned when the tip of his finger rims the tight bud. His other hand comes around and goes straight for my opening, feeling the wetness he left behind just hours ago. My palms lay on his chest, shaking from anxiety. As much as I want to run, I know I can’t under his thumb and that excites me even more. His fingers swirl, stimulating both areas but the one where his cum still resides from the past few hours is penetrated further and he collects what he left behind. His brings his hand up and slides his wet finger across my lip as his other one penetrates the tight ring of muscles.

Our eyes are locked and full of heat. “Suck,” he demands.

I open my mouth and take him in, wrapping my lips around his finger. I brush my tongue against his skin. His salty flavor from hours ago, while I was in my dreamlike state, coats my taste buds. My tongue massage on his finger freezes when his other finger pushes further into my bottom.

“Mary, this is Haven, my wife.”

My eyes widen in shock.

“Haven, the woman behind me is Mary, my housekeeper.”

“It’s nice to meet you, Mrs. Carbone.”

My eyes widen further.

“My wife would love to greet you face-to-face but currently she is sucking the cum off my finger that I left inside her an hour ago while a finger on my other hand is buried in her delectable ass.” My eyes couldn’t get any bigger. My jaw drops in disbelief. “Did I say you could stop?” he reprimands. I shake my head. He nods for me to continue. “That right, firefly. Do you know that even while floating through dreamland, you called me sir as you came?” A rumble leaves his chest. “Mary,” he summons, but his gaze doesn’t leave mine. “Unless you want to witness my wife coming, I suggest you leave. However, it is a beautiful sight to see.”

Mary, the not unattractive woman, scoots past us with a grin. “It was nice to finally meet you, Mrs. Carbone.”

“I can’t believe you just did that,” I gasp, mortified when Mary is finally out of the closet. His finger presses adamantly against my lower lip. The taste of myself mixed with him still lingers. I’m swiftly lifted then dropped on top of his dresser. He yanks my bottom to the edge. My thighs are spread so quickly, my muscles protest. A split-second later, heat rushes through my core. My clit from the tub earlier begs for mercy. The excessive amount of stimulation making it swollen and extremely sensitive. The pad of his tongue caresses every bit of my tender skin. When I feel his finger once again penetrating a spot so forbidden, I freeze and wait for what’s to come. He

glances up at me with a wickedly devilish grin and makes me a promise. “This hole, the one I am about to stimulate with my finger, the one that will make you cry out with an intense rush of sensation, will someday soon have my cock buried in it. There will be no part of you that I don’t own. That I haven’t claimed. That I haven’t possessed with the energy of the devil. Accept that fact now, firefly.”

“Do I own you?”

“Every part of me, Haven. Every. Fucking. Part.”



DEMETRI HAS BECOME... dare I say, lovingly mechanical since we left his house. I guess now, our house. His feelings stand out through his touch. His protectiveness comes out in spades. With his hand on the small of my back, he directs me out the front door to the waiting, open back door of the SUV while scanning the street for threats.

While Giovanni drives us across the city, Demetri holds my hand in the spare moments he isn’t returning messages or speaking on his phone. When we arrive at the private air strip, he moves to get out with orders for me to stay in my seat until he gives me his okay. He jumps out, scans the area, and when it is deemed safe by him, he holds out his hand for me to exit. I ask where he is taking me once again, but the answer I receive in return is vague.

Strangely, I find myself content with that.

I take in the elegant space once we are on board the plane. Noting that this is definitely not a commercial flight. The luxury of the cabin screams private aircraft. The leather seats are embroidered with the letters RCH stitched into the headrest. I make a mental note to ask Demetri who owns the plane.

With my hand in Demetri's, he leads me to a seat by a window with orders to "sit and stay" while he takes our luggage down the aisle a few feet away. It's then I notice the odd bag I saw him take out of the trunk. One he nor I had packed at the house.

He removes his jacket and lays it down on a seat directly across from me. He loosens his tie and unbuttons the first two buttons of his dress shirt. I watch on. Every move he makes I find to be an aphrodisiac. He has such a self-assured coolness about him that I envy. He turns towards me and takes the few steps to stand in front of me. He leans down, braces his hands on the armrests and proceeds to kiss me breathless. My hands immediately go to his abdomen. My fingers start to curl around the material as he deepens the kiss. Desire flairs in my belly. And when he pulls back, lust pools in his eyes like an angry body of water ready to rage. We hold each other's intense gaze a moment before he reaches for my seatbelt and buckles me in, all the while holding my attention captive. When he returns to his seat across from me, his attention doesn't waver. He relaxes back in his seat, widens his thighs, and makes himself comfortable, and me uncomfortable.

A woman, I'm assuming she is the stewardess, comes from the front of the plane with a clear liquid drink with three floating ice cubes in her hand. She lays a napkin down first then sets Demetri's drink on top of it. I watch their interaction and come to the realization that Demetri has used this aircraft a lot. Which means he flies a lot.

"Your drink, sir."

The reference has me raising a brow.

Without missing a beat Demetri introduces us. “Devani, this is Haven, my wife. You will refer to her as Mrs. Carbone. Haven, this is Devani. She is the planes personal stewardess, working for the Heart organization.”

She seems a bit taken back. Shocked even, at Demetri’s admittance of having a wife. Her crystal-clear citrine eyes widen slightly before she controls her emotions.

She turns her complete attention to me. “Pleased to meet you, Mrs. Carbone.” She nods respectfully.

“What would you like to drink, Haven?” Demetri takes a sip of his drink, watching me with interest over the rim of his glass. His interest on me doesn’t waver while waiting on my answer.

“I’m...” I look from him to her after a moment. “I’m okay for now. Thank you.” I pass on the offer, feeling a bit out of place.

“It’s a long flight, Mrs. Carbone. Whatever you need, just let me know.”

“I will. Thank you, Devani.”

“Bring her a bottle of water.”

I turn from her as she walks away and stare out the window, ignoring his demand I drink some water. The scenery around the plane is nothing but blacktop, but the few moments of gazing off allows me to quiet my inner thoughts.

Just as I am about to ask where he is taking me, Luca and another younger man enter the plane. I follow their movements with curiosity. The younger guy seems to be around my age. He’s well-built and very handsome. Both men say hello and drop into seats like they have done it a million times before. Demetri observes me watching them. I’m guessing the look on my face explains how confused I am. I foolishly thought he was taking me on a secret honeymoon, but unless he brings protection with him everywhere he goes, I can only assume we are not flying to an exotic beach.

I turn back to him. “This isn’t a honeymoon trip.” It’s not a question. I already know the answer. His answer is interrupted when the pilot comes

over the speaker and announces that we will begin to take off. Only a moment passes before the plane starts to move. I close my eyes as we descend, the pressure against my chest is heavy as we hurtle into the sky. I release a deep breath once we level out and take in the abyss of nothing.

“You haven’t flown much.” His deep voice states a fact he wasn’t aware of until now.

“No.”

“You okay?”

“Yeah. As long as we don’t crash.”

“Come here,” he demands in a softer than usual tone, tapping his thigh after unbuckling his seatbelt.

I don’t hesitate. I release my belt and make my way across to him. When I go to sit in the seat adjacent, he grabs my hand and pulls me down on his lap. I glance up at Luca and the other guy I believe is Joseph, who have taken up residence across the aisle, thankful that the two of them are a few seats back.

“His name is Joseph. He will be your shadow while we are away.”

“You say that as if you’re leaving me.”

“There will be a few hours I will be. I have to handle some business where we are going. Luca will be with me. Joseph will be with you.”

“You going to tell me where we are going?”

“Not yet.”

I smile and wrinkle my nose. “Are you holding back on me, sir?”

“Going forward, I will never hold back on you.”

“I don’t think you ever have.”

“Oh, I have, Haven. I most definitely have.” He runs his hand up my inner thigh. My reflexes are fast when I grab for his hand, stopping his upward slide. I glance back at Luca and Joseph.

“Playing shy? He’s already seen you riding my cock.”

I nod. “Yes, but the other one has not.”



“You find Luca attractive, but not Joseph?”

“This is a trick question.”

“It’s a simple question.”

“I find my husband very attractive.”

“I’m flattered. Now answer the question.”

“Have you slept with the stewardess?” I blurt the question I had no intention of asking.

“If I had? Do you really want to know the answer?”

“No.”

“Liar.”

“I think Joseph is good looking enough,” I quickly chirp trying to occupy my mind with something else other than visions of Demetri screwing the flight attendant. “He has a boyish charm to his looks, but no, I don’t think he is attractive in the sense I would hook up with him if I were single. I seem to like my men older, more distinguished.” I run my hand over the stubble of his jaw.

“Right answer.”

“It was a test.” I huff a laugh, stating the obvious.

He grins as he slides his hand up my body and wraps his fingers around my throat. Pulling me to him he discloses, “You passed.”

“Ass.” I playfully push at his chest. I lean in and place my lips on his. Out of the corner of my eye, as I’m pulling back, I see the weird bag Demetri brought in with our luggage. “That have anything to do with the business you need to deal with while we are wherever we are going?” I dip my head toward the bag.

He turns, looking at the bag then glances at Luca. “Haven wants to know what’s in the bag, Luca. Open the front zipper and toss me the contents.”

The sound of the zipper opening and closing fills the space. Luca holds a small velvet pouch in his hand. He tosses it to Demetri who then places it in my hand.

“Open it,” he orders with a jerk of his chin.

I pull the drawstring to loosen its hold and then pull the ruffled sides apart. I gasp at the beauty sparkling from inside the confines of the cloth. Diamonds. Lot and lots of diamonds. Demetri takes the bag from me and dumps them into his callused palm. He wiggles his fingers, moving the stones around so they catch the beam of light from overhead.

“They’re exquisite,” I say in awe.

He’s quiet a moment. “They remind me of how your eyes looked just before you shot me.” I take in a deep breath and wait for him to continue. “Beautifully broken to the point of shattering.” He rolls his fingers, watching the stones glisten. “I’ve never apologized to a single person in my life, Haven.” He looks at me. “Never had to. Don’t really care if someone is hurt by my actions. But you...” He trails off, running his knuckles on his free hand down my cheek. “It doesn’t sit right with me.” He lifts his hand with the diamonds. “Pick one.”

“What?”

“Pick a stone. Any stone. It’s yours. I’ll have it made into a wedding ring for you.”

“The simple band you gave me is enough.” I lift my hand to show him.

“It’s not. Never was.”

“I don’t need—”

“Pick one, Haven.”

“I don’t need a diamond as an apology, sir. What I want is a husband who is honest with me. Can you do that?”

“I can only be as honest as my lifestyle allows. I took an oath. The Omerta is a code of silence. My silence will keep you alive as well as myself and the others in our organization. Don’t ask me to betray it, because I won’t.”

“I would never. I may have never been involved in the business, but I know enough to know mobsters like you and my brother take it seriously.

You need that solidarity to survive. A common criminal, a street thief, they have no values. They don't care who they hurt, steal from, or violate." He raises his brow to dispute my portrayal of the common criminal to one of his stature. "You may not care but you hurt people who are like-minded, in the same business. They know what to expect. An innocent old lady on the street being robbed is way different than you selling diamonds to the highest bidder. As well as you taking an oath to protect others and yourself in a deadly business. You have men at your back. A common criminal doesn't repeat those words." I nod toward Luca and Joseph. "Would you die for them?"

"Without question."

"And me?"

His pupils flare. "I will gut a fucker from pelvis to sternum for hurting you."

I glance down at his hand. "I don't need diamonds. I just need us." I lean down, sealing my words with a chaste kiss, which he takes further. When we pull back from each other, I pick up one of the stones. "I'm assuming this is the reason for the trip."

"That and the fact that I need to dispose part of someone's remains."

Struck silent in confusion at his admission, I sit there frozen on his lap. "Excuse me?" I shake my head, sure of the fact that my ears were playing tricks on me.

"The bag that has caught your curiosity will be disposed of in the country we are flying to."

If I'm being honest with myself, I know he isn't lying. But in this moment, I want to pretend that he is. It's when reality really hits me, and I realize exactly what kind of man I am married to. "You... You..." I stare at the non-descript bag. It's smaller in size but big enough to bring a hefty lunch for an afternoon family picnic. Only now do I realize that the bag is a thermal bag to keep objects cool. "Demetri..."

“Yes, Haven?” He watches me closely.

A sinking feeling weighs heavy in my stomach. “Demetri, who’s in the bag?”

“The man who decided it was okay to put his lips on my woman.”

“Demetri!” I shout, jumping up from his lap.

He calmly puts the diamonds back in the bag before standing. He tosses the diamond bag to Luca then grabs my upper arm and pulls me flush against his chest. I yank at my arm, emotions I can’t explain filling my chest as I try to pull away.

“Stop.” His deep baritone stops me from struggling.

“You didn’t!”

“Firefly, I suggest you calm the fuck down or I may get jealous over a dead guy. And seeing that I can’t slit his throat again, I will have to resort to taking it out on your ass.

“You murdered my bodyguard!”

“Finn was no longer your bodyguard. And he knew the consequences when he tried to murder me.”

“Demetri!”

“Young pup, I suggest you calm down. Your concern for a dead man is pissing me off. You wanted transparency, you got it. That is, unless you need more and would like to open the bag and see for yourself.”

“Enough with the ‘young pup’ for Christ sakes.” I throw my hands in the air.

His grip becomes controlling. He walks me down the aisle past Luca and Joseph and through a door at the back of the plane. Just as the door slams shut, he crosses his arms over his chest and spreads his legs. Waiting on my fit of rage to land.

“You don’t want me to reference you as a naive girl, then I suggest you stop fucking acting like one. You may have not thought about it in the moments since you shot me, but deep down, you knew I was going to execute

Finn.”

Silently I stand there, staring at him. Because I knew Finn was in danger. He had to have known he would be marked for giving me his gun. “Demetri...” I breathe in sorrow.

“An eye for an eye, firefly. It’s the vicious circle I live in. And you now live in as well.”

I don’t know what to say. It’s as if I’m frozen and can’t move.

“Demetri, he was my friend,” I mutter the sentence.

“A friend would have never put you in that position, firefly.” He steps up to me. The heat of his hand at the base of my neck registers just as his lips press against mine. “A friend, the one who tried to save you, hide you from me, from the man who devoted his life to you is the annoying gnat that’s sucking your brother’s cock. She’s your friend.”

I gasp. “What? Paisley would never!”

He raises a brow at my denial. “He’s been bedding her for a while.” He leans in and kisses me again. I think it’s to calm me down from all the truths coming to light. “Now tell me, Haven, do you really want transparency or not? Because it seems to me everyone has kept a lot from you. You need to tell me which one you want, transparency or not.”

Now I know why Paisley was staring at him. She was dancing for him while we were on the dance floor the night we were married. “My best friend has been lying to me.”

“No, baby. She just kept your brother’s secret.”

“Fuck.” I swallow. “I need a minute. Alone.”

“No.” He pulls me into him. “Needing a minute would mean you are grieving for the son of bitch that handed you the gun to kill me. Which I will not accept. Needing a minute means, you are upset that your girl is fucking your brother when it’s none of your business.”

“The hell it isn’t.” I gasp at the memory that hits me. Paisley and I on the phone. Her telling me she gave away her virginity to a guy that lasted

seconds. Ew. I said he had a small pickle because she didn't enjoy it. That's why she asked if he had any women here. He must have used her and discarded her like he did all the others.

My head is spinning. But while I am out of sorts, Demetri leans in and kisses me. When he pulls back, he pulls me into his body. "Welcome to the world of transparency, wife. Where the lies feel better than the truths that are divulged."

CHAPTER  
THIRTY-SIX

H AVEN

DEMETRI HOLDS me in his arms. I know it's not to console me for the feeling of loss I'm experiencing, but to make sure I'm aware that he is the one front and center. I didn't have a minute to mourn the death of my friend before Demetri removed my top and handled my breasts with possession. I know I'm his. As he is mine. But he wants to make sure *I* know it.

I reach for his erection and moan a half-hearted release of gratitude for how hard he gets for me. In the back of my head, Finn is there. How could he not be? The man who was by my side three quarters of my life is now gone. Obliterated by the new man in my life. I can't help but wonder if Demetri tortured him. Did he make him suffer? I don't need to ask. I already know the answer.

His hand cups my pussy. The heat from his palm makes my insides contract. A shallow feeling of arousal simmering in my belly brings my full attention back to Demetri. My husband knows exactly what he is doing. He's making sure my thoughts of another man vanish quickly.

His fingers weave through my hair, knotting the strands at the base of my

skull. He pulls my head back and stares down at me. “Mrs. Carbone, I am going to fuck you here on this bed. I want to hear my name cross those lips when I make you come. If you are a good girl, I’ll allow you a present.” He leans down and devours my neck, bruising the sensitive skin. I welcome his harshness. Need it to keep my thoughts of Finn at bay.

He works his way down my body, stripping me of my clothing as he goes. I stand before him completely nude, my inner thighs slick with arousal. My insides tighten with excitement when he groans his appreciation for what he sees.

He lifts my leg and rests my thigh on his shoulder. His tongue surfs over my folds lightly before nipping at the plump skin. “Demetri,” I whisper his name, my fingers running through his hair. I pull at the strands with a force I know will get his attention. I want him to get mad so I can rage on him through our sex for killing Finn. I already know my voice will go unheard if I try to express the loss I’m feeling. The sad part is, I understand why. Demetri did what he had to do. Not killing Finn, in his world, would have been seen as soft. Retaliation was inevitable, and Finn knew that.

“You want to play rough, firefly? You’re mad at me? Okay, baby, let’s do this.” He stands to his full height, peering down at me. “A warning, Haven. Be very careful in what you wish for. What you are asking for is something I am more than willing to give.”

I push the two sides of his unbuttoned shirt apart. He hisses when I lean down and pierce his nipple with my teeth. The sound turns me on, so with heated eye contact, I lean in again and bite harder.

He grips the back of my hair and forces me to my knees. “Do your worst, baby. Just know, when your throat screams for mercy and your tonsils start to swell from being battered by my cock, I won’t stop. Remember you asked for this.”

I smirk, feeling confident, just before eagerly swallowing him. His length and girth are still challenging. I swallow as much of him as best I can. His



hand stays at the back of my head, guiding me with the roughness I seek. I jerk and fight with him still in my mouth as if I don't want it, but I do. It's the fight that's making him swell. It turns him on. It's turning me on. I moan loudly. Loud enough that I know Luca and Joseph hear me. I reach for the base of his cock but before I can grab hold of him, he slaps my hand away.

“Mouth only.”

I swallow him, taking him in as far as I can. His perfectly manicured nest of hair tickles my nose. On return as he pulls me back, I scrap my teeth up his shaft. He releases a hiss that makes me giddy. I know he's close. I can feel the thick vein on the bottom of his shaft pulse against my tongue. My plan is to take him to the edge, then pull away. Make him suffer. Just like I silently will.

His breathing starts to become broken. His thrusts harder, faster. And when he holds me down on him for longer than usual, I know he's about to come. When his hand twists in my hair and his thighs stiffen beneath my palms, I know it's time. I jerk my head back, proud of myself, only to be held in place at the very tip. He glares down at me as he squeezes the head of his erection. His nostrils flair. The skin of his cock purpling.

“I will always win,” he gruffly states as he jerks my head back farther and releases his cock. Coiled ropes of cum shoot out, landing right where he wanted it. My cheek heats with its warmth. There is only a moment of reprieve before he is lifting me to my feet and throwing me onto the bed. “Open your legs.”

“Demetri...” I pant, wanting him, but knowing I woke the beast within him.

“Sir,” he harshly corrects, glaring at me.

His cum drips down my cheek to my upper lip and jawline. Feeling sassy, I run my finger through it. With a confidence I have never felt before, I suck my finger into my mouth and swallow what I have captured.

“Did I say you could swallow my cum?”

“No, sir.”

“Bad girls don’t get presents, Haven. You thought you were going to bring me to the edge and stop, did you? How does it feel knowing you didn’t succeed?”

“Does it matter, sir?”

“It doesn’t. You’re angry with me. I accept that. I even understand it to some degree. But you are now mine and I will not tolerate you taking your anger out on my cock over another man.”

“Yes. Sir,” I snap like a teenage girl.

“Roll over and get on your knees, Haven. Now.”

As I shuffle on the bed to the position he ordered, I hear him move around. Just as I glance over my shoulder the first slap rings out. The surprising sting forces me to scream. It’s loud and long and filled with pain. Pain at losing a friend. A once upon a time wanted lover. A bodyguard who would lay down his life for me. A man that knew the consequences of his actions. A supposed friend who used my moment of weakness to manipulate me into killing his enemy.

“Sir,” I scream just as another slap rings out. My tears flow. Sad about the revelation of Finn but feeling unsettled because Demetri is angry with me. I’m confused and so aroused my womb aches. “Again, sir. Please.” I wiggle my behind. “Again. Harder.”

“Firefly, don’t you dare come.”

“Please, sir. I need more.”

My skin ignites with fire. The head of his cock bumps against my opening. The knock on the door has me moaning in distress.

“Enter.”

I shift, startled that he gave whoever it is permission to come in. I try to move away but my hips are grabbed, and I’m thrust back against his erection. When I hear Luca’s voice, I relax, but then wail with a painful wanting as the head of Demetri’s cock hits my cervix.

I'm sweating and crying and wanting more. I want to forget if only for a few moments.

"Beautiful, isn't she?"

"You're a lucky man."

"That I am." My husband thrusts into me. My body rocks forward while my eyes stay glued to Luca. "Yes or no, Haven?"

I know what he is asking. I'm not sure I can verbally give the answer. With my breasts swaying as Demetri rocks my body, I watch Luca with interest. He sits down on a chair in the corner. He leans back and spreads his legs. His erection evident in the outline of his dress pants. He reaches down and cups himself. Three quick jabs from Demetri's powerful hips have me closing my eyes. It's a warning not to stare too long. I whimper in need, wanting to come but also wanting this to last.

"Sir..." I breathe.

"Firefly, there are rules. I am a possessive man. My woman is mine. I don't share. But for you and your curiosity, I will allow it this one time. He knows what is allowed and what isn't." He pulls his engorged cock from my womb, resting it between my cheeks. His hand slithers up my body to my throat and he pulls me up until my back meets his chest. My chin is held captive and lifted until our eyes meet. "You want to feel what it's like to be wanted by two men?"

I pull my chin from his grip and glance over my shoulder at Luca.

"I will only allow it once." He pulls my chin back to him. "I will only be able to handle it once. You are not just a woman I have an understanding with. You are my wife. But you are also young, inexperienced, and curious. It's my job to make sure you explore that curiosity safely." He runs his thumb over his dried cum on my cheek. "Go clean yourself up, firefly. My man doesn't want to taste my cum when he sticks his tongue down your throat."

I rush to the bathroom and quickly close the door, needing a moment to collect myself. I stand before the mirror and wipe my flushed face clean then

brush my teeth with a new toothbrush I found in the drawer. When I finish, I grab one of the white towels and wrap it around my body. A sliver of side boob, waist, and hip peek out from where the towel is too small to meet at my side.

I stand there a few minutes contemplating whether I want to do this.

Then I open the door and enter the bedroom not knowing what to expect. Demetri stands right outside the door. His chest is bare and the button on his dress pants is open and void of his belt. I glance at his hand and see the black leather. I glance over at Luca. He's in the same position as before. My breathing picks up. My chin is gripped by Demetri's controlling hand and pulled back to him. Our eyes connect. He leans in and bruises my lips with his. When he pulls back, he holds up his belt in his hand.

"Turn around," he gruffly orders. My eyes dance over his in worried curiosity. "Don't question what I tell you."

I turn, giving him my back. The leather chair groans when Luca shifts to stand. He walks toward me with the sexiest swagger. He stops just a few inches away. Demetri lays one wrist over the other and begins to restrain my hands. As the leather from the belt is weaved around my wrists, Luca runs the back of his hand down my face.

"You looked beautiful with his cum coating your face." I close my eyes and take in his words. "She has no clue how beautiful she is."

"No, she doesn't," Demetri answers as he yanks at the belt, making sure it's secure.

"These curves." Luca runs his hand over the cotton material to the knot on the towel at my breast. With a sharp tug the towel drops to the floor. "Are deadly."

Demetri's hands grip my hips. He pulls me back against his chest. "To any man who dares to touch my wife." He slides his hand around the base of my neck and lifts my chin. He takes my mouth, slowly moving over my lips. I become pliable until I feel a simple touch on my nipple. I know it's not

Demetri because one hand is still wrapped around my neck while the other is wrapped around my waist. I am engulfed in him, secured to him, safe with him. I stiffen at Luca's touch. Demetri pulls back from my mouth and whispers next to my ear. "Relax, baby. I've got you."

He takes my mouth again just as Luca cups the underside of my breast and sucks my nipple into his mouth. I clench my stomach muscles and arch my back. With my hands tethered at the small of my back, I reach for Demetri's erection. As best I can, I wrap my fingers around it. The material prohibits me from fully holding him in my hand. I squeeze until I get a reaction. He pulls back and licks his lips. Luca's teeth scrape the tip of my nipple. I release a held moan as I turn and watch Luca massage my breast. With his eyes on me, he drops to his knees and smirks. His tongue runs over his bottom lip just before he leans in and runs it over my folds. Demetri's hand comes around and blankets each one of my breasts while Luca's tongue dances over my clit. I shiver in Demetri's arms.

"Fuck, she tastes so good. Fucking whiskey and honey on a summer day."

Demetri growls at his words and squeezes my breast. I wiggle my hands, wanting to be released. "They are bound so you don't feel obligated to touch him."

"I don't want to touch him. I want to touch you."

Demetri's groan and Luca's tongue ignite a flame in my belly. "Demetri..."

"Beg me."

"Please. Please free my hand so I can touch you."

"I don't know, D. If her touch is anything as sweet as her cunt, I would be releasing her."

The belt falls to the floor.

My arms instantly wrap around Demetri's neck. I pull him down to meet my mouth, wanting him to be inside me.

I pull away, panting as Luca brings me higher. Warmth pools between my

legs. I feel myself building. Demetri has given me enough orgasms to know that I'm close. When he pulls at my peaked nipples I cry out with desperate need.

"She's close. Get on the bed, firefly. Lie on your back and lay your head over the side."

I crawl across the bed, my ass in the air as I look over my shoulder at the two men watching me.

"Fuck me." Luca hums as he swipes his thumb across his bottom lip, watching me.

"You're welcome, motherfucker."

Demetri climbs on the bed and smacks my behind. "I told you to lay on your back."

"Yes, sir," I purr, watching Luca walk to the side of the bed that I lay my head over. I watch on as he unbuckles his belt, then the button of his pants. He holds the zipper between his fingers while holding my gaze. I look to my husband for reassurance.

"I'm going to fuck you while you suck his cock. If you don't want that, then say so now. It ends here and he can go finish himself off."

I hesitate, unsure but curious. I look to Luca. He gives me a soft smile. "It's up to you, gorgeous."

"Is he allowed to kiss me, sir?"

"It's allowed."

I glance back at Luca and give a slight nod. Demetri spreads my legs, leans over me, and takes my mouth with a possessive kiss. An imprint. His taste was there first. A reminder that I belong to him. As he's pulling back, his hooded gaze pinned on me, he slides into me. I watch his eyes close as the heat from my core sheaths him. Movement from behind me has me looking back at Luca. He leans down and runs the tip of his finger over my top lip. His hand wraps around my jaw and tilts my head back. He leans in and brushes his mouth over mine. His kiss is soft and sensual where Demetri's

was laced with ownership. My core contracts. Demetri hisses. Luca's gentle kiss turns urgent. His tongue slides past my lips and seeks mine. He's smooth and encouraging, sensual with each swipe of his tongue. Everywhere from my mouth, to my ear, to my throat is devoured by Luca. Squirming and moaning, I become delirious with an urgent need to release. I know Demetri can feel my insides fluttering. His covetous eyes are glued to us while he massages my inside with a slow tempo, holding back.

"Yes or no, gorgeous?" Luca's whispered words drift next to my ear.

"Yes." Quietly flows over my lips.

He stands above me. Pulls himself from his pants. Watches me watch him as he strokes his length. My body shakes, humming with an urgent need to be consumed by both. I call out Demetri's name because it's his stability I seek. My hips bear the pressure of his authoritative grip, letting me know he's there. My slick inner thighs slide over Demetri's hips with ease. My heart thunders in my chest. I swallow the saliva pooling in my mouth as I watch Luca stroke his impressive bulk. His tip glistens with a lustrous pearl of cum. We make eye contact. Then I clench my teeth, close my eyes, and open my mouth. Waiting for his flesh to pass over my lips.

The head of his cock presses against my tongue as he glides inside. I skim my tongue over the engorged ridges and close my lips around his thickness. The first thing I notice is that he tastes so different than Demetri. His thrusts start out slow as he holds the base of my chin steady. But then he picks up speed at my encouraging sounds. Demetri picks up his pace to match Luca. He grabs both my hands and slides his fingers through mine, interlocking them. He pushes them down to the mattresses edge by my hanging head and ruthlessly starts thrusting. My body rocks in timing with Luca sliding in and out of my mouth. Our movements become frenzied. Moaning, hissing, and whimpering fill the air. Flames ignites in my belly. My legs stiffen and a ball of fire erupts in my groin. I scream out my husband's name as Luca slides over my tongue, hitting the back of my throat and cutting off my call of need.

He pulls out just as Demetri releases my hands and grips the base of my throat, hoisting me up with a strength that slaps my chest against his.

“Fuck me,” Demetri hisses. “Open your fucking eyes, firefly.” With a flash of satisfying pain shooting through my core, I open my eyes and bathe in Demetri’s fiery gaze. “My good girl.”

I throw my weak arms around his strong neck to stabilize my drained body. A roar leaves his chest when my teeth sink into the red base of the lotus flower on his neck. My body is manipulated with each drive of Demetri’s powerful hips as streams of his cum coat my insides. His arms wrap around my waist and hold me down. His cock pulsating inside me makes me moan long and loud.

“Demetri...” My whisper fades to nothing as my forehead rests against his shoulder.

“I’ve got you, firefly. I’ve got you.”



CHAPTER  
**THIRTY-SEVEN**

**H**AVEN

I WAKE in a swath of heat. Disoriented, I fling the blankets off and search the room. I settle back down once I realize where I'm at. Taking in a deep breath, I release it with a smile. I'm still naked with a dried coating of my husband's fluids blanketing my upper thighs. I roll out of bed and make my way to the bathroom. Stepping in front of the vanity, I take in my disheveled appearance in the mirror. "Feck, I'm a wreck." I grin and crinkle my nose at the image reflecting.

I wash myself from head to toe with a washcloth I found. I use the toothbrush from before and dress. With a final fluff of my crazy, spiral curls that I know I will not fully tame until I can take a proper shower, I give myself a once over and head for the main cabin to find my husband. A sudden thought makes me stop just before opening the door. I'm not sure what to do, how to act. What if Luca is right outside the door? Do I say hello? Do I walk right by and ignore him? Now that it is all over, is Demetri mad? Is that why I was left alone in this bedroom? My bashfulness becomes nervousness.

I turn the handle slowly and pull the door open. As casually as I can, I peek around and check out the scene. The black hair on Demetri's head can be seen from where I stand. He's in the same seat he was prior to us entering the bedroom with Joseph and Luca sitting across from him. It appears Demetri is holding a meeting. I step out farther and close the door, noticing Demetri has his phone next to his ear. He seems to agree with whoever is on the other end. I take a step back thinking I should wait in the room until he finishes conducting business. I turn to leave but somehow Demetri knows I'm standing here and calls my name.

I take the tentative steps needed to get to him. With Demetri sitting in the middle chair, I stop at the empty row seat and brace myself against it. My sight is only on him. The blush hitting my cheeks is scorching. He pins me in my spot, surveying my blushing body. He taps his thigh, gesturing for me to sit. When I get close enough, he wraps his arm around my waist and pulls me down. I sheepishly look across at Luca not knowing what to expect. His smile is pacifying and warm. Not, *I just had my dick in your mouth.*

Demetri's tap on my hip has me bringing my attention back to him. "Water? Or something stronger?"

"Stronger would be good."

"Hold one second," he tells whoever is on the phone before placing it against his chest to cover the speaker. "Devani," he calls with a demanding tone.

"Yes, sir?"

"My wife would like a cocktail."

"Certainly. What would you like, Mrs. Carbone?"

I glance down at Demetri's drink of choice sitting on the tray next to us. "Same as his, please."

"I'll let you know how it goes." He returns to his conversation as he pulls me in closer to him. "Considering the circumstances, it may not be me who fills you in. Luca or Joseph will make the call. Understood. We'll meet when

we're back. We'll set up a dinner so Lilah and Haven can get to know each other better." He releases a half laugh. "Yeah, you're right. That could be trouble." He watches me as he pulls the phone from his ear, hits the end call button, and drops his phone on the tray next to his drink.

"No changes." He nods at the guys then jerks his head, gesturing for them to leave us alone.

"You washed?"

"Of course." My voice slightly higher as if stunned he is even asking. "How do you know?"

His fiery gaze dances over mine, appearing irritated. "I know your scent. I know our scent when mixed together. His scent is expected to be removed. Mine, is not."

"Here's your drink, Mrs. Carbone," Devani interrupts. The smell of vanilla vodka passing my nose reminds me of the time I asked if he was a hundred percent Italian.

He runs his thumb up and down my hip where his hand rests. Then he reaches for my drink and gives it a whirl while he ruminates over his next words. Before I can ask about his heritage, he takes a sip of my drink. I watch him seductively swirl it around in his mouth. The pressure of his hand at the back of my head has me moving towards him. He places his lips on mine then opens his mouth and lets the fiery liquid flow over his lips into my mouth. It's a shock at first but then I pull back and mirror what he just did and give it a swirl before swallowing it. He lifts my glass, rests it against my bottom lip and tips it until the liquid passes through. The act is simply erotic. His penetrating gaze is addicting. You would never think we just exhausted ourselves not too long ago.

I place my hand on his stomach to brace myself and hold his gaze.

"You okay?" Concern carries his deep voice.

"I am. Are you mad?" I play with the button on his shirt.

"It won't happen again," he states while playing with a rouge curl.

“I guess that gives me my answer.”

“Did you enjoy it?”

“I... enjoyed the experience. Do you want to know what the most erotic part for me was?”

A rumbled noise comes from his chest.

I give him a demure smile. “It was when you pulled me onto your lap at the end. When you smashed our chests together and held my body to yours while you fucked me.”

“Is that so?”

“It is.” I tilt my head and kiss the palm of his hand that is still playing with my curls. “Once was enough,” I whisper.

“Once was all you were getting.”

I notice something in his eyes that I have never seen before. “Are you jealous, Mr. Carbone?” I ask thinking back to the first night we went to dinner. The night he cut off a man’s finger for staring at me.

“Jealousy is for men who don’t own their women.”

I try to hide my grin but it’s short lived. “You are.”

“You think this unexpected emotion I find myself experiencing is amusing?”

“I find it sexy.”

“You wash my man from your mouth?”

“You know I did. You wouldn’t have kissed me if I hadn’t.”

His lips are on mine before I finish the sentence. When we break apart, he study’s every imperfection on my face with reverence.

I decide now is a good time to change the subject and alleviate what tension I do feel from him. I reach for his wrist and move it so that I can take a sip of my drink while he still holds the glass. I return to playing with the button on his shirt when I utter, “Can I ask you a question?”

“Go ahead.”

“You’re half Russian?”

He nods. "Correct."

"You're a made man in an Italian mafia, though."

"I am."

"How?"

"Long story." He glances over his shoulder.

"How much longer is this flight?"

"Not much longer. You've been asleep for a while. Instead of me explaining the history of how I met a man who gave me an opportunity and how I made him, myself, and the organization a lot of money, I need to talk to you about something."

"Oh?"

"As much as I would like to tell you this is our honeymoon, it is not. In the future we will take one. This trip is not going to be a pleasant one."

"You're making me nervous."

"Your father is not doing well. I am flying you home so you can say your goodbyes."

My whole body freezes on his lap. I feel as though my voice has been lost. The only thing I can mutter is, "Demetri?"

"I'm sorry, baby. I am hoping we make it there in time. Your brother left two days ago to assess the situation."

Now I know why he hasn't been around to protect me, to make sure I was okay. I swallow the saliva pooling in my mouth. "My da is dying?"

He nods as he gently runs his thumb back and forth over my cheek. "I'm sorry."

I twist in his lap, readying to get up, needing a moment to myself. But the thought is fruitless when he stops me from leaving. "Demetri... I need—"

"Whatever you are feeling, you feel with me."

"How long before we are there?"

"Less than an hour."

The weight in my chest hurts. My eyes begin to sting. And the carefree

moments from not too long ago are gone. This devastating pride stripping disease has finally worn down my father's body enough.

Demetri is taking me home to say goodbye.

CHAPTER  
**THIRTY-EIGHT**

**D** EMETRI

HAVEN RELEASES MY HAND, flings open the front door, and rushes inside, calling, “Ma! Cillian! Ciarán!” in hysterics before noticing her brother standing at the base of the steps. Cillian becomes a statue when he sees how distraught his little sister is. Anguish is at the forefront of his expression for the tears he can tell she shed. The sobbing I wasn’t sure she would expel were plenty. The unknown status of their father-daughter relationship had me holding back the information of her father’s impending death. It is the reason why I waited so long to tell her. I wasn’t sure the depth she would feel for him. I don’t have a reference to what it would feel like. Although, if it were my boss, I would seek revenge. Not only out of loyalty to the family but he is the closest thing to a father figure that I have ever known. My father, through years of artful lies, doesn’t even know I exist. As a young man when I did seek him out to see if my mother’s words were true, I chose to grind beneath a different ruthless man. One that at least had morals in a cold-blooded world. It wasn’t clear to me which relationship—whether father-daughter, or a true daddy’s girl—Haven and her father had. It became quite clear when I saw the sadness fill my wife’s eyes when I told her where we were going and why.

Haven's beautiful face is swollen with sadness for a man who made a terrible decision in her honor that was ultimately not in his control. My views vary greatly from the ones of his daughter that she holds dear to her. To her, he has always been a caring and loving father. A righteous father inside their home while working in an immoral world. A dad, by what she has told me, who would play dolls in the yard with her when she was a small girl or be front and center at every dance competition cheering her on. The information I know about him will never be divulged. I won't tarnish those memories for my firefly. I will let her say her goodbyes to a man she has only expressed good things about and let her grieve with good memories.

While Luca and Joseph follow their butler to their quarters, I stand behind my wife, giving her my strength as she hugs her brother.

"Has he passed? Am I too late?" she asks, her Irish accent so strong now that we are back in her country. Her accent is such a turn on for me but hearing it full of sorrow bothers me.

"You're not. Ma is in there with him now." He holds her tight.

I want to tell him to remove his hand from my wife, but I refrain, even I know that's unreasonable. This jealousy of mine has taken on a new level when it comes to her.

I can see the familial love between Cillian and Haven. He genuinely has his sister's best interest at heart. It's why he contacted Mr. Heart when he realized unsavory deals were made. Cillian did right by her, and I will always remember that.

"I'm sorry I wasn't there for you after you found out about the arrangement. Ma called, and I had to fly back home and take care of things for da. You know I would have never let anything happen to you, right? I had Demetri's word he would protect you with his life and I trusted he would."

"You could have put me on the plane and brought me back home with you."

He looks over her shoulder at me. "Haven, he would never allow that."



She looks over her shoulder at me. “You’re right. But you should have told me about everything.”

“I did what I had to do to protect you.”

“I know.” She gives him a hug.

She releases him and rushes to my open arms. My shoulder aches when she crashes against it, but I give her what she needs and hold her tight.

“I’m going to go see my da.”

“Do you want me to come with you?”

“I would like to be alone, sir.”

I give her a slight nod. “Go on. I’ll be here when you’re finished. Your brother and I have some business to discuss.”

She tries to leave me with what she thought would be a quick kiss, but I pull her into my space and place my lips next to her ear just as my hand goes to the thin column of her neck. It’s a possessive move, a grounding if you may. I am here. Cillian witnesses the connection with concerned interest. Respectfully, she lifts her somber eyes to mine, seeking direction. “I’m right here. If you need me, I’ll be right here.” When I feel her body relax against mine, I give her a kiss and reluctantly release her. The glow in my firefly’s eyes has dimmed with grief. It sobers me to the fact that I can’t take away the pain she will experience. I can’t control the roller coaster of emotions she will go through. I watch her walk down the long hallway until she turns down another and I can’t see her anymore. It’s a hard pill to swallow knowing I can’t make this better.

Cillian’s irritated interest is on me. “Join me for a drink?”

“Absolutely.”

The door closes behind me as I’m shown into his office. I walk to the wall of windows and survey the lush grounds while I wait for the questioning I know is to come. The decanter clanking against the first glass has my ear. The second one is soon to follow. I turn back as I hear his footsteps shuffling behind me. My preferred glass of drink is hanging in the air waiting.

Cillian gestures to a seat by the fireplace before he drops down with a small sigh of exhaustion across from me. He takes a sip of his drink while he blankly gazes at the fire. I take a sip of my own drink and relax back in my seat and wait.

Another minute or so passes before he mutters, "He was a very bad man." He becomes quiet while looking at the flames. "But he was a great father until the disease took him away from us. I don't want my sister to know about the deal, Carbone. She'll look at him differently. After years of being a good dad, it would be a shame to have her see him in a different light."

"I agree."

"You'll keep it buried then?"

"I won't lie to my wife. If she somehow catches wind of the contract, other than what she already knows, I will explain as best I can without making your father the villain in this almost tragic story."

"He's not. He's always wanted the best for her. Always had a special place in his heart for her. Our sister was a different story." He trails off, thinking, contemplating if he should say what he's thinking.

"No need to explain further."

"I think I do." He trails off once again, swirling his drink. "I remember the day my father brought her home. Ma was devastated."

*The fuck?*

"Our sister. She wasn't our full-blooded sister. She wasn't my mother's child."

*He's lucky he clarified. I was ready to go stuff a pillow over the mother's face and send her on her way with their father.*

"Ma tried to conceive. For a long time, they tried. One day, my father came home with a baby in his arms wrapped in a pink blanket. A little while after that, Haven was conceived."

"You're telling me this, because why?"

He leans up and places his elbows on his knees and looks me dead in the

eyes. “She fucking tormented Haven.”

“This isn’t news to me. You know that.”

“I saw the way you just handled her—”

“My wife isn’t your concern anymore.”

“She will always be my concern. I just hope I didn’t make a bad decision.”

“The bad decision would be you fucking her best friend.”

He holds my gaze.

*Yeah, McKittrick, I know. So does your sister.*

“Fucking touché.” He leans back against the seat again. “Girl drives me fucking crazy.”

“Not my business.”

“Haven, does she know?”

I give him a quick dip of my chin.

“You told her?”

I confirm with another nod.

He breathes a disbelieving huff. He’s shocked that I am as open with Haven as I am.

“The sir thing. The throat thing.” I let him simmer with his thoughts knowing something else is coming. “Not sure I’m comfortable with it.”

“You don’t need to be.” I raise a brow, warning him. He’s crossing a line. He knows it. But I understand it, it’s his little sister.

He shakes his head in disbelief. “My innocent little sister.” He sips his drink. “One last question, Carbone. To settle my nerves.”

“Was there ever a question?”

He gruffly gives a half laugh. “She’s okay with it?”

“If she wasn’t, our marriage would have a different dynamic.”

He gives my statement a second to process. “I’ve watched you. How you work. You’re meticulous, brutal, cunning even, and never careless. My wish is that Haven will only experience the part of you that hasn’t been infected by

the things you have seen and done.”

“Carelessness will get you killed.”

“Amen to that.” He raises his glass. “I only ask that you never become careless with her.”

“My wife will want for nothing.”

He nods in appreciation, lifting his glass. “To keeping ourselves and our loved ones safe.”

I hold my glass up and tip it towards him, returning his toast, then swallow the lot just as the door flies open and my firefly stands there in despair.

“Is it true?” she shouts in disbelief, her attention solely on me. “Demetri? Is it true?”

CHAPTER  
THIRTY-NINE

D EMETRI

“IS IT TRUE? TELL ME,” she demands, tears streaming down her face.

The unearthing of her once impending future glazes over her stunning eyes. It’s suffocating to watch her struggle with the truth she just received. How does she know? I want to know who told her so I can slit their throat. Her vulnerability is directed at me. She doesn’t care that her brother’s in the room. She wants answers and they’re not good enough unless they come from me.

“Fuck,” Cillian mutters behind me, his glass ringing out as he rashly drops it to the black marble coffee table.

“Leave,” I order, my sight never leaving my wife.

Without question, Cillian walks out, slamming the door as he goes.

“Is it true?” Her chin wrinkles from sadness.

“Yes.” I step to her and handle her with possession to ground her. “You were promised to someone else. That information is not new to you. Who told you?”

“My father.”

“The man is on his death bed, Haven.”

“Please don’t lie to me. Is he the one that set up the contract?”

“Indeed, he was. It was after his dementia started taking his memory. He wasn’t thinking clearly. He wanted to make sure you were taken care of after his death. The suitor he chose took advantage of his illness.”

“Why did I never ask this question before?”

“What question?”

“Who set up the contract. Why didn’t I ask who it was?”

“It doesn’t matter.”

“It does though, sir. It does.” She tries to take a step back. I won’t allow it. “How did I get to you? How did we become?”

“Your brother. Whether you believe it or not, he did the right thing by you.”

“Do you know who it was? The man my father signed the contract with.”

“I do.”

“Who?” she demands, grabbing my forearms as I hold her face steady in my hands. “Who was it supposed to be?”

“A very callous, conniving man. You would have lived a brutal life of misery, firefly.”

“Aren’t I now?” She lets go of my arms and raises her hand in the air. She carelessly lets them fall as if she is giving up. “You feckin drugged me.”

“I thought we were past that?”

“Maybe you are, but feckin hell. I’m getting passed around from one to another like I’m a lame farm animal. Give me a feckin break, sir.”

“Haven.” I stand back and pin her with a glare. “If you are going to refer to me by sir then you damn well better respect the word and use a tone that complements it. Otherwise, I will have you on your knees begging for mercy. You want to continue this conversation as Demetri and Haven, then so be it. Lose your shit. Have at it. I’ll allow it because you have been caught off guard. But what I won’t tolerate is you vilifying our relationship after I have expressed how I feel about you. I had you drugged to keep you safe. There

was a room full of men who wanted you dead. I couldn't be there to protect you because I had just had surgery to have a bullet removed that you fucking put in me." I give her a second to collect herself. "Now ask the questions you want answers to."

"Who was supposed to be my husband?" she steps towards me and asks.

"My brother."

CHAPTER  
**FORTY**

**H**AVEN

THE SOFT KNOCK on my bedroom door makes my sleepless body stiffen. A deep inhale, preparing myself, expands my chest. My exhale brings on the pain of loss. In my heart of hearts, when my mother insisted I get some rest, I knew it was because my father was going to pass over from darkness to the light. She was protecting me from the pain of watching him go.

With every fiber of my being, as I lay here with my mother on the opposite side of the door, waiting for me to wake from what she hopes is a peaceful sleep, I wish Demetri was here with me. I wish he was standing in front of me, demanding I kneel before him. I wish I was staring at the seam of his slacks waiting for him to unzip them and pull himself out. But he's not. Business doesn't wait. And neither did my father.

I said my goodbyes. I can't say there wasn't some form of bitterness behind my words as I said them, but I do forgive him for what he couldn't control. In the end, no matter how Demetri and I came to be, I am in love with that man.

I just wish he were here with me.



I rise from my bed and slowly pad across the floor. With my hand on the knob, I turn the cold metal to face my new reality. My ma's eyes are swollen and bloodshot from tears. She is the sweetest woman with a heart of gold, but underneath her small frame she is a tiger, a lioness who will now lead the household. I admire her more now than I did as a child. I guess that is to be expected. Maturity will always win over irrational teenage thoughts. When I was a younger, I thought she was old as the soft grey started framing her face. Our matching strawberry blonde hair became dull as life took its toll on her. I was critical of her and I have to wonder if it was because my sister was with me. As she stands on the opposite side of the threshold, I can't help but see how stunning she really is. Even in a time of sorrow taking over her features, I realize I am the spitting image of her.

"Mom," I whisper, opening my arms. "He's gone," I mutter, embracing her tired body. As much as I want to hold her, comfort her, she is the one holding me. "You didn't have to knock. You could have just come in."

"I wasn't sure if Demetri came back."

"He's still out."

She walks me to the door, gesturing for me to go. I follow her to their master where my father lays peacefully. She walks to the side of their bed and places his hand in hers. The sting of sadness hits the back of my eyes. Watching how she cares for him, even though he is gone, has me fighting for a deep breath.

"Was there ever a time you hated him?" I watch her run her hand back and forth over his.

She pats the seat next to her. "Of course. But I have never stopped loving him." She places her hand over the top of his while his palm lays on her other. "When I found out about the contract, I wanted to murder him. When I found out who the contract was with, I almost did." She leans forward and kisses the back of his hand. "I made him promise me he would fix it, find a way out. There was no way my baby girl was going to survive at the hand of

that man.”

“He is Demetri’s brother.”

“He is. It was the only way to break the contract. You had to marry someone with the same blood.”

“You’ve met him?”

“He came to the house a few times. The man gave me chills. Behind his handsome looks is pure evil. I told your father so. They had some business dealings. There was a middleman causing issues. Your brother warned your father. Cillian wanted him dead, but he couldn’t do anything until he found out who the broker was. Blood money exchanged hands, as it always does in their business, but something was different about this transaction. And with your father declining, things for Cillian became tougher to navigate.” She tenderly runs her fingers over the back of his hand. “You are in love with him.”

“I am.”

“He looks at you the same. You may not have found each other naturally but that doesn’t matter. You will be okay, Haven.”

“How did you do it?”

“Do what?”

“Raise a child that wasn’t yours?”

“She was innocent. Your father wasn’t.”

“Do you regret marrying Da?”

“I regret nothing, my dear. Nothing. Your father and I had some hiccups, but I would never change a thing. I love this man.” Her tears start to flow.

“And I will miss him every single day until I join him.”

Silent moments pass with grief weighing heavy in the air.

“Mom, will you be okay if I excuse myself?”

“Go on, sweet girl. Your studio is calling you.”



THE ENERGY CHARGED music plays softly. A song so fitting in the moment. *All I Feel Is You* by The Broken View moves with me across the floor. A far cry from the decimal level I would normally dance to. It seems wrong to twirl around when my father's life has just been lost. But dancing has always been my outlet. Even when I used to stand on the tops of my father's feet as a toddler. It brought me happiness. I'll deal with my pain in the only way I've known how.

Demetri has become my newest source of grounding. When I am in his arms, under his direction, I experience a stillness inside. It's a calm I've only felt when my feet are gliding across the floor. It's been there the whole time with Demetri. Right from the beginning when he first drew me in. Even when times were uncertain between us, it was still there. Playing this song makes me feel as though he has his protective arms around me as I move.

Soaring into the air and landing with a move that is not as delicate as it should be has me frustrated. I leap from the floor and reposition, waiting for the count to begin again. It's been so long since I have been in my studio that home doesn't feel so much like home anymore. Sadness has my nimble body stiff. Grief has my carefree movements from weeks ago gone. Every mirror surrounding the room shows every angle of my inconsistencies.

It's a reflection of failure.

I tumble to the floor, sweating a blanket of sloppy work from my

underworked body. I jump up in haste, upset with myself. Wishing Demetri were here to hold me. To cheer me on. To just be here. With me.

I lay flat on my back in my sweat-soaked leotard. The thin pale pink shoulder strap askew. My chest and stomach rise and fall with each exhausting breath I take. I stare at the lackluster ceiling tile, internally chastising myself. With a deep breath and a shove off the floor, I rise to the tips of my sore toes and get into position once again. I inhale on count one and exhale on seven. On count eight, I push off and put every bit of energy I have left into my movements, only to fall flat on my face from emotional and physical exhaustion. With my knees pressed into the wood floor, my back hunched in a gut-wrenching arch, and my forehead resting on my arms, I break. The howl of grief I release sounds like an injured animal. It's all too much. The past few months have been more than I can handle. And now, the life I once knew, is gone.

A memory.

I will no longer live in my home with my parents, brother, and cousin. The pillar of our home is now absent. My father has become a memory we will share with each other. My bodyguard, *my* friend, a pillar of our security, *my* security in and outside of the walls of our home is dead. Murdered viciously by my husband who I have fallen madly in love with. It's all just too much. I rock back and forth, hoping the pain I'm experiencing, the grief that has me shaking on the floor, dulls.

Black leather captures my blurry vision as I rock forward. I still, my hair brushing over the tips of his expensive dress shoes. My gut-wrenching cries become whimpers as I slowly raise my teary gaze to meet my husband's. My chin quivers as he holds me prisoner with just a look.

"Sir." One word said so quietly with awe.

He's silent, menacing almost with his stern features. Moments pass as we wordlessly speak to each other.

"Get up," he demands from his full height with a slow flick of his first

two fingers.

On shaky legs, I stand before him, my arms heavy, hanging by my sides.

“Do it again.” He nods to the center of the floor.

“Sir?” My brows dip in confusion.

“You will redo your routine. You will not falter. When you finish, I will fuck your sweaty body right here on this floor and make you forget all if it.”

I stand before him. Then I turn and walk to the center of the floor. Demetri’s steps carry him across the room. I wait with my chin held high for the song to start over. The lights dim around my body on count four. Five is when I blink away the tears. Six is a deep breath garnering energy I don’t feel. Seven is a wish and a prayer. On eight, a newfound strength surges, lifting me off the flat of my feet to the point of my toes and moves me across the floor. My arms sway as if a light breeze is blowing string in the wind. Refined, carefree, but in control movements drive me. My breathing is heavy. My toes plead to be released of their duty. My arms ache with the strength it takes to look flawless. My head screams for something more. Something so much more as I move across the floor in a fast sequence. I listen to the lyrics, a song singing about wanting no one else. I finish with a burst of energy and land my jump perfectly.

My head hangs, my chin presses into my rising and falling chest.

My knees push into the hardwood while I wait.

The song changes to something dark. Something deep and emotional. A woman is begging for it all.

I wait, knowing not to move. Waiting for direction as I listen to the lyrics.

Demetri’s heavy steps circle around me. The tip of his finger runs over my skin as he rounds my body.

I become a pool of want, drowning in his sexual prowess.

I was once so fearful of his intensity. Now, I crave it. Thirsty for whatever he desires from me, from my body, from my soul.

His fingers pass over my bare back, stopping at the curve of my spin

before drifting to my shoulder where he crooks his finger under the thin strap of my leotard. He slides it over the edge until it carelessly falls down my arm. He stands at my back. The fabric of his dress pants brush against my spine. With both hands he reaches down and cups my jaw, lifting my head back until our eyes connect.

“So very beautiful.” He runs his thumb over my bottom lip, pushing the tender skin to the side. Releasing my lip, he repositions his hands and holds my face in his palms at an angle that he desires. He leans down from hovering above me and places his lips at my hairline. I feel the wet heat of his tongue touch my skin. My eyes close, letting myself feel him. Slowly, he licks away a line of sweat from my forehead, down between my brows over the bridge of my nose to the tip and then sucks my upper lip into his mouth. Releasing my lip, he walks around and stands directly in front of me. With the pad of his finger, he lifts my chin.

Taking a deep breath, I gaze up at him in awe. “How did you know where to find me?”

“I will always find you.” He watches me a moment, caressing my chin with his thumb before saying, “I’m sorry I wasn’t here when your father passed.”

“You disliked him.”

“I didn’t know him. So he is no loss to me. I am sorry I wasn’t here for *you*, firefly.”

His words bring on the stream of tears.

“What do you need from me?” His thumb brushes back and forth over my chin.

I close my eyes and inhale his masculine scent while feeling the erogenous beat of the music in my belly. “You,” I breathe.

“Do you want your husband or your Dom?”

“I want it all.” I raise my sight to meet his, pleading for it.

To be on your knees in front of a man like Demetri, and cherish him the

same way I'm witnessing him treasuring me in the hard gaze of his magnetic eyes is a privilege. I feel powerful. He makes me feel strong when he is the one with all the physical strength.

"You sure?"

"I want your colorful body lying on top of mine, bruising my fair skin with domineering pressure. I want you. All of you, every bit of you. I want you to seep into my pores and become physically one with my body."

"Not your body, firefly. You."

His gaze becomes feral, a devouring energy that has me gravitating towards him. But there is also something else hedging behind his desire as his thumb runs back and forth over my jawline.

It's apprehension.

"I'm fine," I whisper.

He tilts my chin up further, my neck stretched to its limits. A controlling position to study my emotional state. "You are not fine, but trust me, firefly, I will make sure that you are." He releases my chin, watching me as he starts to roll up his sleeves. "You're as fragile as glass. And it's my job to pierce my skin with every broken piece. It's my right. My privilege. My honor. I own you, wife. And if you think I'm giving up my key to that ownership, you're dead fucking wrong. You are mine until we both fucking die."

It's unnerving the way he looks at me. It's piercing, disturbing even, yet a piece of me yearns for the heaviness that his eyes weigh me down with. His desire for me is that of a starved savage. His intensity that of a thief stealing my breath.

The thin pink material of my leotard darkens between my thighs as my arousal slips from my body, readying myself for him. I welcome his arms as my prison. His lips as my jail cell. And his heart... as my life sentence.

He is mine.

I am his.

CHAPTER  
**FORTY-ONE**

**D** EMETRI

HER MOUTH FORMS A PERFECT CIRCLE. Aroused by my promises. The inner tissue of her lips glisten. It's so fucking erotic. And very dangerous. *For her.*

While *I Want it All* by Cameron Grey plays, I groan at just the thought of how badly I am going to devastate her mind and body.

“I will fuck this mouth, Haven.” I roughly run my thumb over her lips. “Fuck it so hard your lips will swell and the tears my intrusion will force from your eyes will rush down your cheeks and stain your full breasts as if you were just blessed.”

“Bring it on, sir.”

I give her a small grin. Proud of her for not fearing what is to come.

“Remove one of your leg warmers and hand it to me.”

She seems confused but she does what I ask. She holds it up to me. Taking it from her, I instruct her to bow her head. Placing the material over the crown, I pull her hair back and slide the cylinder material over her face, stopping when she is fully blind to her surroundings but leaving her mouth exposed to me.

“Offer me your hands.”



Her breath hitches right before lifting her hands blindly in the air.

I grip her wrists and place her palms on my groin. "Take my cock out."

While she blindly fumbles with my button and zipper, I remove my tie. My cock springs free. I'm harder than I've ever been. The sight of my wife in this state forms knots in my groin. She has done what no other woman has accomplished. She has made me hers. I glance down, admiring her. Her nipples have pierced her outfit, growing larger each time her chest heaves with anticipation.

"Fuck, you are stunning."

Her fingers wrap around my engorged length. I let her pump me twice before removing her hand. She releases a breath of disappointment that makes me grin.

I step around her, tuck myself back in and bend at the knee. I pull her arms behind her back and weave my tie around her wrists, whispering, "I'm going to fuck you senseless, my beautiful girl. I'm going to ruthlessly thrust my dick in every single one of your holes. I'm going to come all over you, marking you, marking your skin so your scent will no longer be yours but mine." She releases a low toned moan. "Now ask me why?"

"Why?"

"Because you're fucking mine."

Her whimper makes me say my next sentence as I jerk the knot tight around her wrists with a tug.

"You just released the beast in me, baby. I hope you're ready for his ownership."

CHAPTER  
**FORTY-TWO**

**H**AVEN

HE PLUNDERS every morsel of tender tissue in my mouth. With my hands tied behind my back and my eyes covered over with my leg warmers, I am at his mercy. Right where I want to be. His hips move with fluidity. His groans, growls, and grunts with each one of his thrusts is erotic. It's a tense sensual dance from powerful hips.

Soaked through to the tops of my thighs, I gag and choke, saliva flowing over the curve of my chin. His heavy hand grips the back of my head while the other holds my chin with controlling pressure. I moan with deep, long cries of muffled pleasure. Blind behind the makeshift blindfold, I envision the blue and green color of his eyes smoldering like a storm.

“That’s my girl.” His gruff approval brings my heart rate to a bruising beat.

When Demetri speaks, it’s liquid sex. His voice wraps around your limbs and holds you captive. He’s demanding in tone but effortlessly praising in nature.

His fingers twist in the material at the base of my skull. He withdraws

himself from my mouth. I feel both of his hands at the base of my throat. With a jerk, my leotard is ripped down the middle and tugged down to my waist, leaving my chest exposed to the cool air and Demetri.

Heavy pants of breath escape his lungs in a ravenous growl. “Open,” he gruffly voices, reinserting himself, thrusting twice before pulling back out. My lips slide over his ridged edge, the hint of salt lingers on the tip of my tongue. My hearing has become heightened with the loss of my sight. My head is jerked back. Two wet slaps sound before heat sears my chest. There’s a moment of silence, just breathing between the two of us until I feel his touch. He collects his cum and swirls his fingers over my prickled skin. He spreads it around my nipple then squeezes the peak between the pads of his two fingers, sliding them back and forth as if he is holding himself in his hand. I release a moan from deep within. The sensation so stimulating my core tightens, seeking him. My chest swells. My breath hitches. I call out his given name, pleading for more. He corrects me in a way that makes me tremble. He pinches my peaked nub, ordering me to refer to him properly.

“Sir...” I ardently moan.

He catches my whimper with his tongue, his kiss harsh and demanding, sloppy and raw.

“Sir, I want to see you, need to,” I breathlessly plead, craving the sight of his carnal aura.

“No.”

I release a frustrated moan at his blatant refusal.

“You need to feel me, firefly.” His fingers wrap around the base of my neck. “That ache you feel between your legs, the one that is becoming too much for you to bear, I feel it too. You need to feel me. Know that I’m not going anywhere. And baby, trust me, you’re gonna feel me.” He applies pressure to my shoulder and pushes me back until I’m lying on top of my hands on the floor. My body jerks when he rips my leotard down the rest of the way. He kisses his way down my stomach until her reaches the band of

my tights. I hear him shifting, then I feel something cold against my skin. “Don’t move, Haven. If you do, I’ll nick your pretty little pussy with my blade.”

I immediately stiffen now knowing what’s pressed against my skin. I hear everything surrounding me like it’s coming through a megaphone. His labored breathing. My breathing. The static of the speakers behind the melodic music still playing. The creak of the house. The shifting of his clothes being removed. His deep chuckle of satisfaction. The rip and release of material covering my soaked opening. It all filters in like a sonic boom, detonating something inside of me. Breaking me open and bringing me to a place I’ve never felt before. I feel like I’m floating, detached, but also in a way so very present.

“Just feel me.” His rasping statement has me mewling. “Fuck, firefly. If you could see yourself the way I see you.”

The back of my thighs are gripped with unforgiving hands. My legs are shoved up until my knees are pressed to my chest. My arms scream from where they are pinned between my back and the floor. The frayed material of my tights tickles the inside of my thighs. The clank of metal hitting the floor is piercing. The swoosh of his clothes being removed fuels my desire. The tip of his erection kindling to the fire at my opening and then... the sting of his intrusion blazing the simmering fire. I shiver and wail, shifting my bottom to accommodate his size. I bear down on him, needing, wanting more of him, of us. My arms scream from the bruising movement until he maneuvers my body so my arms come under my bottom and up the back of my thighs to the crease behind my knees. He effectively has my body pinned and open to him. He slides my ass up his thighs and slowly slides back inside me. He leisurely rocks his hips. The pressure has me straining for release, chasing the waves my body and I crave. But also knowing I won’t be able to capture it until he allows it.

He pulls back teasing me. A frustrated moan from deep inside my chest

lets loose. Then my body starts to rock faster and faster as he unforgivingly fucks me. This man. This beast of a man is mine. He knew exactly what I needed. A place to go to, to forget, and to forgive. To be thankful for the man who has inadvertently been set in my path. My husband has taken me there with his touch, his words, his need to dominate, and mine to submit. He has given me his promise with the swoop and pull of his hips, the pads of his fingers, and the swipe of his tongue. The way he moves, angling his body, rubbing against the part of me that takes me to a glorious place only he has brought me, is beautifully terrifying.

Everything disappears as he continues to batter my insides. I feel myself slipping into something I can only describe as a protective bubble. Extreme euphoric sensations overwhelm me and take me to a place of comfort. A high I've never experienced before. My body hums with an impending orgasm that makes my limbs convulse while I call out my protector's name and plead for relief. "Sir!"

"Let go, firefly."

CHAPTER  
**FORTY-THREE**

**D** EMETRI

JESUS. Her cunt weeps for me. She's open to me like a dehydrated flower in the middle of a wicked storm. I am her storm. The thunder that will clap against her full-figured body. The lightening that will strike, thickening the blood in her veins. The rain that will wash away years of self-proclaimed faults and failures. I am her motherfucking storm.

I swallow every moan and whimper. Kiss and bite the tremor of her lips. Ingest her sweet nectar. She is at the height of her desire and nothing I have ever seen before has been more beautiful.

"Ah, the sweet, musky smell of my woman. My one and only addiction," I gruffly voice while watching her pussy tighten and release around my cock as she mewls to the heaven she is torturously floating around in. The sight of her squeezing me becomes too much. I pull out of her body, lean down, and press the flat of my tongue against her pulsating lips, tasting her, ingesting her, savoring her. "You taste like fucking honeysuckle on a warm summer day, firefly."

"Demetri!" she cries.

"Not yet, firefly. We're not done. I'm going to fuck you until I've filled

you twice with my cum. Then I am going to carry you upstairs and make love to my beautiful wife.”

CHAPTER  
**FORTY-FOUR**

**H**AVEN

LAZILY, my fingers play in his dark chest hair. Shadows dance along the wall as the trees sway outside from a brewing storm. The moment is perfect, dare I say, serene. As if the world outside may be callus but in here with him, I will never have to worry.

Demetri kept his promise. My body, inside and out, was coated with him. He owned every part of me. When he finally released the tie from my wrists and gave me my sight back, I was a mess. I flew into his arms. He held me tight and let me cry. My head spun and I felt lost, but also found, and I knew I was safe. When he wrapped his suit jacket around my body with instruction to wrap my arms around his neck when he lifted me, I never once worried about my weight. I did as I was told and wrapped my arms around his neck and buried my face into his chest, letting him carry me to my second-floor bedroom. He showered both of us and then dried me off. When I went to step from the bathroom as he was toweling his skin dry, I was quickly ordered to stay put.

Here we lay, my leg draped over his thighs and my breasts stuck to the



side of his chest as I draw circles in his obsidian hair. We've been quiet. Just enjoying the quiet time and thinking about the day. It's a day I wish I could change as much as I wouldn't want to. My father is free from the confusion and that is all I need to know to be okay. I'm still sad, but I'm at peace with it.

I feel the sting of tears come with my thoughts and decide to break our silence with a question I know he won't answer. "How did your meeting go?"

There is a short blip of silence before he says, "Unsatisfactory. The guy never showed."

I am so shocked he answered it takes me a minute to ask my next question. "Do you know why?"

"No." I think that is all I'm going to get from him until he speaks again. "I don't normally deal with a middle man, a broker. It's not how I work. But the diamonds you saw on the plane are very rare, and very desired by a lot of wealthy people. I would normally make the deal and bring them back to the states and either sell them to the highest bidder or have Domenico set and sell them in the store. But these diamonds, they mean something to someone. I just don't know who that someone is."

"So, this deal..." I stop the movement of my fingers thinking about the danger. "It was through someone, a broker you don't know? With a buyer you don't know? You went into this blind?"

"Sort of."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning, I have a feeling."

"And that is?" I wait in silence, getting ready to demand he tell me because now I'm invested. "Demetri."

"I believe the broker was your now dead bodyguard."

I gasp.

*No.*

"No." I start to defend Finn. "Demetri, I don't think—"

“If you defend that motherfucker right now, I will go unbury his head and cut out his eyes.”

“That’s... That’s so...” I clear my throat. “I wasn’t going to—”

“You were. Now stop.”

I clear my throat again before I begin to hedge slowly. “So... who do you believe the buyer is?”

“My brother.”

I suck so much air into my lungs, I cough. “You think Finn knew your brother?” I shake my head. I don’t believe it. “I don’t know when he would have had the time to meet someone like him. He was always at my beck and call. When I woke in the morning, he was waiting for me. When I retired at night, he retired. There were only a few times I can remember him leaving me to go with Cillian until Ciarán became my brother’s right-hand man.”

“Where there is a desire to become rich, there will always be a will to follow an unrighteous path.”

“It doesn’t make any sense though. Not to me, at least.”

“He wanted you, Haven. He was a bodyguard. A paid hire. Not worthy. Not fit for the daughter of a mob boss. Money would have made him have more clout, more leg to stand on. The business end of it would have made your father see him in a different light.”

“Does your brother know it was you? Do you know if he knows who he was dealing with?”

“Oh, I’m quite sure he does now.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means, my father doesn’t know, or didn’t know he had a second son. In turn, that means my brother didn’t know he had a sibling. My mother was his goomah. His chosen bedmate that he paid high dollar for prior to giving her what she thought was the dream. He moved her in with him but not the main estate, but to the carriage house. From what she told me, she was upset about it and confronted him. It turned physical. She realized then she made a

big mistake. She thought they were going to be a true couple. She had already had his first-born son. After weeks of living in the carriage house, Nick was moved into the main house and my mother was to stay in the carriage house. That's when she realized she was just a vessel. It was soon after that that she fled Russia."

"You lived in Russia?"

"No. She was a few months pregnant with me when she left. Nick was three, I think she said. My father married another woman. Even though she knew where she stood with him, she was still hurt by his actions. When she wanted to leave, he refused. They argued. It became physical. She was near death when his wife found her. She was unconscious. The wife didn't know my mother lived on the property. She had been out for a walk, saw the cottage with the light on. She nursed her back to a health that would allow her to travel. Then she helped her get away. She even offered to give my mother money, but she refused. She had money saved. Lots of it. She was smart. She paid for nothing while living in the carriage house. Every dime she made above her daily needs to feed herself and Nick she saved prior to my father moving them. It was all tucked away safely for a rainy day."

"How did you wind up here?"

"My mother already knew she was pregnant with me. She thought she'd miscarry because of the beating. His wife suspected my mother was pregnant. She worried that there was another heir to take the fortune from her own children. So, she made it happen without him knowing. We moved to the States. Lived in a rundown apartment complex for a bit while mom went back to what she knew. Then just like in Russia, she moved her way up the ladder. She met a man at a party one night that helped her get off the streets and into a nice place. He gave her a job at an upscale restaurant and the rest is history."

"Where is your mom now?"

"She passed while I was in prison."

“You were in prison?”

“You know I was.”

“Not true.”

“Haven.”

“Okay, maybe, but not one hundred percent sure. That night was crazy scary. You were chopping up my dress like a madman when you referred to being locked up.”

“And you thought what, that I was your knight in shining armor getting ready to take you to a fucking polo game?”

I pat his chest where my hand lays as I chuckle. Demetri and polo do not belong in the same sentence. Unless he’s using the mallet to maim someone.

“You are definitely not a polo kind of guy.”

“No shit, baby.”

I gaze up at him in the dark, my finger grazing through the coarse hairs of his beard. “Why do you have such a deep red color at the base of the lotus flower on your neck and all your other tattoos are more subdued in color?” I trace my finger over the lines.

“Because the roots in which I come from are bloody.”

“Isn’t it still? The life you live is dangerous.”

“The difference is I now choose the blood I spill.”

“What about this?” I run my fingers over the ridged skin I have felt every time I caress his skin when we are together.

“Bullet. A few years back. Long story short, I survived.”

“Not funny.”

“No, it wasn’t. It was either her or me. It’s my job to protect the family.”

“You got shot because of a woman?” I feel a bit of jealousy at an unknown female.

“Not any woman. I took a bullet for Antonio’s wife.”

“Lilah?”

“The one and only.”

“She’s fun.” I reminisce about our wedding night, dancing with her before it all went to hell.

“Stay away from her. She’s fucking trouble,” he grumbles but there’s a hint of mirth behind his tone.

I laugh, shifting against him, readjusting my body. When I settle back into our comfortable silence, a question I have been wanting to ask has me on edge. And he knows it.

“What is it?”

“Nothing.”

“Haven.”

“What were his last words?” I ask the question so quietly I barely heard myself. You would think I would feel his body stiffen at the question. But no, not Demetri. He’s too confident in himself. His body stays relaxed, holding me to him.

“Why do you want to know?”

“I don’t really know. Curiosity, I guess. I mean, I didn’t see Finn the way you did. I guess I was just wondering if he was real with me or if all those years were an act.”

“You have feelings for him?”

“No. No.” I shake my head. “I thought at one time, yes. But after being with you, what I felt for him I realized was just infatuation.”

“Hmm.” He starts playing with my hair.

“You’re not going to tell me, are you?”

“Your mind will always wonder if I don’t. But if I do, I know you will always carry a bit of resentment towards me.”

“I won’t.”

“You will. But I will make sure you remember who you belong to.”

“I don’t want to know.” I shift to move just as my phone vibrates for the tenth time tonight. Paisley hasn’t stopped. I quickly sent her a message back when her SOS came through, but she called again. I answered. She was

checking to make sure I was okay. When she started asking about my brother, I explain that Demetri and I were talking and that we could speak in the morning.

Demetri shifts his weight and pulls me under him. “Tell your friend, your days—and especially your nights—belong to me. If she is in feckin bits, as you call it, she can call someone else and complain about your brother.”

“I don’t even want to think about her and my brother together.”

His focus pins on me, searching, when he says, “He does care about you, Haven. After you shot me, he called Luca every few hours to make sure you were okay. Even showed up at the house. Was livid that I had you drugged. But then he had to return home for your dad.”

“Speaking of, don’t ever do that again.”

“Your safety will always be my priority.”

“I’m going to ignore that.” I lean down and place my lips on the black lined tattoo. There’s a lot I don’t know. “To a certain degree, I feel betrayed by Cillian. It’s unsettling to think I knew who my brother was, but now I realize I don’t know. When I came home from school, I noticed the change in him.”

“Prison will do that to a man.”

“Excuse me?”

“Cillian went on vacation when you were away at boarding school. It’s the reason why he had Finn so close to you. Enemies, baby. They are everywhere in this business. He needed to make sure that you were safe while he was away.”

“Some vacation.”

“We don’t speak of the P-word.” He kisses me. “We refer to it as a vacation.”

I can’t help but wonder about his mother, losing her life while her son was behind bars. Not being able to say goodbye. It’s so sad. How hard it must have been for her to leave her first born child to a devious man and then leave

her second born without being able to say a proper goodbye. He has known pain like I have. Only he has dealt with it differently.

“Are you okay?” He waits a beat before addressing the elephant in the room. “You have now lost two people in your immediate family.”

“I will be.”

Quietness has fallen between us. It is peaceful just laying here in his arms. I take a deep breath and snuggle down into his body.

“Sleep.” He runs his fingers back and forth over my lower back. “We have a long day tomorrow.”

“Demetri.” I tilt my head up to meet his relaxed but intoxicating gaze. “I love you.”

His arm tightens around me. “I bleed for you, firefly.”

CHAPTER  
**FORTY-FIVE**

**H**AVEN

IT IS the smell that twists my stomach. The old wood that has participated in life and death surrounds us.

It's overwhelming.

In Demetri's clutch, we stand next to each other at the front of the church. We light our candle and say our prayer before turning to view the rows of people waiting for the service to begin.

The view of my mother's tentative steps walking down the aisle, clutched to my brother, is heartbreaking. She weeps into one of my father's favorite handkerchiefs. The blood she has washed from the worn cloth over the years is plenty. My heart feels such pain for her. I now understand her devotion. Although hers was years of building while mine is so new, I get it. But now she is alone. One half of the life she knew is gone. While mine is just beginning. I can't help but silently thank my brother for the shift in events that led me to Demetri.

It doesn't matter how Demetri and I came together. On our own, we found each other through the thick of a life most don't understand. Our



marriage may have been arranged and bumpy at best, but we built us to where we are now.

With his devoted, *I will bleed for you* statement, I know our life together will be one of fiery commitment.

At our backs are Luca and Joseph, standing at attention. There is a group of men on the opposite side of the vestibule participating in a conversation that grew quiet when Demetri and I entered the church.

Their attention comes to us as we turn away from the lighting. One of the men addresses Demetri. They partake in small talk before the man's attention moves to me. With a nod, his condolences follow. Behind him is a man sitting in a chair. His interest goes directly to me, ignoring Demetri. He calls me by my first name and lifts his hand in greeting. When I go to return his gesture, Demetri quickly shifts his weight and lowers my hand. The man observes him with a smile that is contrived to be easygoing, but it is anything but. Luca takes a step closer to my exposed side and out of the corner of my eye, I notice Joseph turning his back to us to watch the crowd entering the church.

The tension becomes thick. I feel myself tense next to Demetri's relaxed one.

"You will address her by her married name."

"Ah, the new bride." The man looks at me and then at my finger. "I trust your brother has made the right decision for you. Please"—he brushes nonexistent lint from his slacks—"excuse my ignorance. I didn't realize you had already committed to the ceremony."

I don't respond. Something tells me to stay quiet.

Demetri excuses us and turns towards the inside of the church. Once we pass over the threshold and start walking past the pews with Luca and Joseph at our backs, Demetri wraps his arm around my waist and leans in. "A man sitting down while offering his hand should never be trusted, Haven."

I take in his words as he continues to walk me to the front of the church.

“Do you know him?”

“He is an associate of your fathers.”

“Demetri... I...” I stumble over my words feeling out of my element. I may be the daughter of a Don, but I was never allowed to be involved or participate in any events my parents may have held.

“I’ve got you.” He lifts his hand in a gesture for me to enter the pew directly behind my mother and brother.

I sit, falling back into the seat, noticing that Luca and Joseph are not sitting with us. I have yet to glance at my father’s coffin. Just as I’m raising my sight I realize that this will be the last day I will see my father in a physical form.

Paisley slips in beside me with Ciarán at her side. “Cuz,” he greets with a somber tone as he leans over Paisley to give me a kiss. “You doing okay?”

“I’m doing okay,” I say, simultaneously squeezing Demetri’s hand. Ciarán notices our joined hands and the gesture and gives me a soft smile.

“Cool. I’m here for you, cuz.”

“If she needs anyone, it will be me she turns to.”

Demetri’s harsh tone shocks me. I quickly look his way. “Demetri,” I whisper. “That’s my cousin.”

“That cousin put you in danger when he took you to a rave without protection.”

My lips part to argue, but the words are cut short when my brother turns around and says, “Your husband is correct. Ciarán put you in danger.”

With a quick look of disapproval at Ciarán, I watch Cillian’s eyes pass over Paisley. She quickly turns away and pretends to be admiring the stained-glass window, ignoring my brother. Once he turns back around Paisley laces her hand through mine.

The service begins with a clearing of the priest’s throat and the static from the microphone being adjusted.

The sounds trigger my emotions and the first tear of many fall over my

waterline.



FAMILY AND FRIENDS in attendance make their way out of the church after the priest's final words. As the pews empty, and Demetri goes to stand, I gently tug on his arm, stopping him. I don't want to move just yet. I have my husband and my best friend sitting next to me. A small reprieve before facing everyone outside. The heaviness inside our family church is suffocating. It isn't just filled with sorrow for the loss of a man, but also his extended life as well. Some may be here to mourn my father's death, but others are here because they are next in line to wear the crown, only here to witness the finality of his coffin being set in the ground.

The pew in front of us with my mother and brother rise. My brother holds my mother's trembling body with a firm arm. With a quick glance over his shoulder, he gives Demetri a quick jerk of his chin then glares at Paisley. Ciarán stands and offers his hand to Paisley. She shakes her head no, dismissing him. I can tell she just wants some time alone with me. After cutting her short the night before, I asked Demetri to wait for me outside. He refused to leave me alone inside the church. His only compromise is to wait at the back of the church where I will still be within his sight.

"I'm sorry about your father." She stares straight ahead at the front of the

church.

“Me too.” My blank gaze drifts off to his black coffin. There’s a heaviness hanging between us, and I know it’s me who is causing the weight. “Patches, you’re sleeping with my brother.”

“Was.”

“Was? It doesn’t seem like my brother is done with you by the way he looked at you before.”

“I’ve moved on.” She huffs with such exaggeration I know it’s a lie. “I met someone. He was at the club I went to with Lea. You remember her, right?” She babbles on. “He’s nice. That’s why I called you. I wanted to tell you about him.”

“Patches? I’m sorry I am not around anymore.”

“It’s okay. You have a hot husband now. It’s to be expected.”

I let that go. Knowing in the future I will have to make sure to fly back home or have her flown to me in the city so we can spend time together.

“This thing with my brother?”

“Is over.”

“How long?”

“Short enough to know it was a big mistake.”

I release a bit of a chuckle. “This is so inappropriate. Only you and I could speak of something like this while sitting in a church at a funeral.”

She squeezes my hand. “That’s why we became friends all those years ago. Two peas in a pod, my girl.” She smiles at me. “I have to pee. Do you think your bulldog will allow you out of his sight?”

I glance over my shoulder as I stand. “I think he will be right behind us or have Joseph right behind us.”

“Under the circumstances, it is good to see you here, at home, Haven.” She opens her arms for a hug that I reciprocate.

“You’ll have to introduce me to this new man of yours.” I start to walk towards the exit. “Tell me about him.” I glance over my shoulder making

small talk and to make sure Demetri knows I'm exiting the inside of the church to the hallway. It's then I notice that more men from New York have arrived. I stop mid-stride and with a curious brow, I watch on.

Mr. Heart, Antonio, and Giovanni stand by Demetri. Mr. Heart is speaking with the man Demetri corrected earlier in the foyer. The conversation looks intense. With one more glance over my shoulder and a nod of confirmation from Demetri, I make my way into the hallway with Paisley at my back.

The hallway is empty and quiet except for the clack of our heels against the tile and the shoes behind us that I knew would be coming. We make small talk as we head in the direction of the restroom. Paisley tells me about this mysterious man she is dating. From what I understand it's new. Two dates are what she claims. Though I feel like there is more to it. I asked the usual questions like, where did you meet him? What does he do for a living? Is he a good kisser? Although the conversation is light between us, there is still a heaviness with my father's passing looming, but it's good to be able to just talk to a friend. We both use the restroom and while washing our hands, she tells me about their first date. I'm genuinely happy for her, as long as she is happy.

We exit the bathroom and are greeted by Joseph and a new guy standing across the hall. I say hello and wait for Paisley to come up beside me. I reintroduce her to Joseph then he introduces me to the new guy, Drago. With an almost noiseless hello in return, Paisley and I head down the hallway with Joseph and Drago tailing us.

The front on the church is empty. A few stragglers stand outside on the steps, smoking. Demetri is one of them with Giovanni and Antonio flanking his sides. I watch him inhale and release the smoke in a slow curling wave as he watches me walk through the doors and straight to him. In return, I can't help but examine him with each one of my steps. He surveys me with heat as he watches me get closer. With each step I take, I notice his demeanor.

Something is off. He's not his confident relaxed self. His shoulders are stiff.

Something is wrong.

His shoes scuffle against the ground as he steps away from them and greets me with his outstretched hand. He laces his fingers in between mine and gives it a squeeze.

"You ready?"

"Not really." I feel the sting at the back of my eyes. I'll never be ready to watch a loved one be put in the ground. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing for you to worry about." He watches Paisley walk passed us and wait at the bottom of the steps.

"Demetri?"

"Come." He gives my hand a shake. "We're riding with your mother and brother."

"Okay," I whisper, knowing it's not a good time to pursue answers. We hold each other's gaze, speaking silently to each other before he leans down and gives my forehead a chaste kiss.

Pulling back, he instructs, "Paisley, you're riding with us." He nods towards the black limo at the curb with the undertone of an order not to question it.

She looks at the car. Then to me. Then to Demetri. "I'd rather not. I'll jump in with Ciarán if that's okay." She starts to step toward the parking lot.

"It's not. Get in the limo."

Just as Demetri leans down to open the door to my brother's limo, I realize I forgot my purse. "Demetri, I left my purse inside." I don't remember having it in the bathroom. I must have left it in the church.

"Where'd you leave it?"

"The church."

"Get in the car. I'll grab it."

"D, you want me to grab it?" Luca yells from the other side of the car.

"I'll go. You go with Antonio and Gio. Stay with Boss." He grabs the

door handle and jerks it open then gestures for me to get in before he strides away with some heat in his steps towards the church.

Paisley jumps in first. I'm right behind her when I hear her say, "Hey, what are you doing here? Where's—" The next thing I know, my arm is jerked so hard it feels like it's been pulled from its socket. Then a strong smell filters as I try to breath in. A sweet taste hits my mouth. Dizziness hits me hard, and the last thing I remember is the jerk of the limo starting to move.

CHAPTER  
**FORTY-SIX**

**D** EMETRI

“WHERE THE FUCK IS MY PLANE?” I dig the tip of my gun into his temple.

“Sir. I don’t know what you’re asking.”

“I have a gun pressed into your temple. I’m going to put a bullet in your fucking brain. Do you think it wise to play games with me? Do I look like a man you should play games with?” I pull back and bash the side of his head with the butt of my gun. Then I pump two rounds into his chest before jumping to my feet and charging at the guy Giovanni is holding. “Where the fuck is my wife?” I snarl. “Where did he take her?”

“He’ll kill me if I tell you.”

“I’m going to kill you.” I speak with a sinister tone, looking him dead in the eyes. “Who alerted me about my plane being taken?”

There is only one reason why I was alerted. He wants me to find them. It’s a game. I took what he wanted and now it’s payback.

“Where is the organizations pilot and flight attendant?”

“Dead, sir.” His chin trembles knowing his minutes are quickly becoming seconds before I put a bullet in his head.

“Where. Did. He. Take. My. Wife?”



“States.”

*Bang.*

CHAPTER  
**FORTY-SEVEN**

**D** EMETRI

I LEFT SIX men with no pulse on the airport grounds of my wife's homeland. I'll put a bullet in ten more if I have to in order to get to her. I may have had men at my back, but this is all me. That son of a bitch took her from me, and I want her back.

When Antonio called me and told me they were flying in to pay their respects, I knew something was wrong. In his next breath, he told me that Talia, his manager, and Tegan's best friend, had come to him in confidence. Tegan was in fact pregnant, but it wasn't my child she was carrying. It was the man who shared blood with me. My brother, Nikolai. She didn't know he was my brother when she started seeing him. We may have the same DNA and look a lot alike, but we are not the same. As ruthless as we both can be, I was raised by our mother, a decent human, whereas he was raised by our father, a psychopath.

I have had private security following Nikolai since the night Haven watched the tapes at the jewelry store. I had a gut feeling when I saw her studying the security footage. His voice pulled her across the room to the CCTV screen. She recognized him but couldn't place where she knew him. I

knew exactly who he was. I went back to the building the rave was held in. Then I had our tech guy, Freddy, pull all the footage he could find from inside the building and up to two miles out around the building. With facial recognition from a shitty image I had acquired of Nikolai, it took some time to go through all the footage, but I got him. It burned my insides when I saw him approach Haven. I watched her innocent eagerness hesitate for only a moment, the drugs and alcohol in her system compromised her judgement. When I saw Nikolai's hands on her body, I lost my shit and smashed one of Freddy's monitors. I was two seconds away from seeing them together that night. As I approached her from the front of the building, he was exiting through the back, his henchman right behind him. If I hadn't shown up, she would have been taken right out from under Ciarán's nose.

The gun clenched in my hand lays on my thigh. My fingers twitch with a need to squeeze the trigger and end my brother's life. The sick bastard knew exactly how to get me worked up. Just after we landed and piled into the waiting SUV, a message chimed on my phone. It's an image of my beautiful wife. She is strapped up, naked and bleeding, while bound to my St. Andrew's cross in my dungeon.

In my home.

In our home.

That motherfucker brought my wife back to our home. A place she is supposed to be safe. A place she should never have to worry about her security. He wanted me to know he could infiltrate every facet.

My life.

My wife.

Our home.

But how?

"How did he get the codes to my house?" I think out loud, shifting in my seat.

"What?" Antonio turns from the front passenger seat and asks.

“He’s holding her captive in my house.” I hold up my phone. “Our house. He has her in my dungeon.”

Antonio holds out his hand for my phone. I deny it with a shake of my head. I refuse to let him see her like that.

“D? She good?” the concern in Luca’s voice is genuine.

I illuminate my screen and show him.

His jaw pulses. “How the fuck did he get in? Too many security measures have been put in place. It’s like Fort Knox, D,” Luca growls with an eagerness to pulverize Nikolai. “Who?” he grits out.

“A rat,” Giovanni mumbles.

I crash my fist against the driver’s headrest, ordering our footman to drive faster.

Antonio twists in his seat to make sure the car following us with Mr. Heart, his consigliere as well as bodyguard, Lorenzo, and Joseph stays with us as we race through the city streets. “Don’t lose that car,” he instructs Drago with a pointed finger.

Precious minutes pass while my girl hangs from the cross I seek pleasure with. I open the image again. My thumb tenderly grazing over her limp body. A swarm of emotions fill my chest with a pain I’ve never experienced before. The blood trickling from her mouth has me seeing red. I will bludgeon my brother until his last breath has been expelled from his body for doing this to her.

I’m jumping out curbside before the car comes to a full stop. I hear everyone yelling for me to wait but I pay no mind to their concern. I need to get to her. To my wife. I told her I would bleed for her. I wasn’t lying when I said it. I will shed blood for her until the day of my death.

I go straight through the back entrance where we hold all the fights in the basement. The smell of dried blood lingers from the fights that have ensued down here. I cautiously make my way through the tunnels, my shoes scuffing the cement with my eager steps. I get to the corner right before the open area

where the fights are held and stop, listening for any noise. A tap on my shoulder from behind makes me turn abruptly.

“I’ve got your back. Let’s go get our girl.”

“My girl.”

Luca ignores my correction, telling me, “Gio and Antonio went inside through the front door. Joseph is standing guard at the back entrance.”

“Mr. Heart?”

“Upstairs. Leading the pack.”

I edge our way down the tunnels until I get to the break off. The tunnel to her dance studio and my dungeon is on the other side of the open room. My chest tightens when I think back to how her face lit up when she saw the studio I had done for her.

“What’s the plan?”

“Murder him.”

“Yeah, D. I know. How are we going about this?”

“Shh.” I quickly hold my hand up, hearing a noise echo down the tunnel behind us. I motion for Luca to go to the opposite side. The footsteps get louder as they get closer. The tip of his shoe breaches the mouth of the tunnel. Before Nikolai’s man knows what’s happening, I’m slicing the rough skin of his weathered throat.

There will be no survivors today.

Luca swiftly pulls his limp bleeding body to the side and drops him out of sight.

“We both know he isn’t the only one. Keep your ears and eyes open.” A flash catches my eye. I jerk my chin in its direction. “Someone’s in my office.”

The light flashes once again. “I’ll go. You go to Haven.”

I hold up my hand for Luca to wait. I need to know how many men they found upstairs. I dial Giovanni’s number, knowing he always has his phone on silent. I wait, tensing further with each ring that goes unanswered, hoping

he will feel the vibration.

“Yeah?” Giovanni’s husky voice whispers.

“How many?”

“Two as far as we can tell from the bloodbath we walked in on. We’re coming down now.”

“What?”

“Thor got to them first.”

*My boy.*

“You know his commands?”

“Yeah.”

“Bring him with you. Keep him silent,” I order before hanging up and nodding at Luca while taking the steps toward my office. Luca stands on one side of the closed door while I stand on the other. A pair of boxing gloves lay by the ring. I grab them and toss them at the door and wait as they slide down the wood to the floor. I watch the knob turn, the door crack open, and the top of his head peek out to see what the noise was before I grab hold of his hair, jerk him forward, and break his neck in one swift crack. I kick his body back into the office and close the door, hiding his body from any more of his men that may be down here.

“That’s four. Antonio and Giovanni are on their way down with Thor,” I inform him. “Kill the lights.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I’m going to get my girl.”

“Demetri, you’ll be going in blind.”

“I know my way around my room. He doesn’t.”

“I’m not letting you go in alone.”

“I’m not letting her hang there for a minute longer than she has to.”

I’m already walking down the tunnel before he finishes his sentence. The thought of her, vulnerable like that, makes me want to burn the world down.

I reach the closed door to my playroom. I can hear Nikolai talking but I

can't make out what he is saying. Just as the tunnel goes black, I open the door just a crack, hoping his senses are off from the sudden darkness and he doesn't hear it.

"Looks like your husband has joined the party." He clears his throat. "Excuse me. Your soon to be dead husband."

When I hear Haven whimper, I stop myself from carelessly running into the room.

"You know you're a dead man, right?" She huffs a painful laugh at him while catching her breath.

"Your husband is a weak man."

"Then you know nothing about your brother, Nick."

"Ah, yes. The night of the rave. You asked what my name was. You were so willing to dance with me. I could have bedded you that night if I had more time."

"Never."

"You were aroused."

"It wasn't because of you."

"So fresh, moya krasota."

"What does that mean?"

"Are you referring to, krasota?"

"Yes."

"You like, my beauty?" he asks, stepping closer to her.

I slowly push the door open further.

"Yes, I do. Do you want to know why?"

"Tell me," he purrs, stepping closer to her.

"Because my husband will make sure you die slowly for disrespecting me by calling me anything other than Mrs. Demetri Carbone."

*My girl.*

He jerks back with a raised hand ready to hit her. "Touch her and I will slaughter you where you stand." I step into the room, flicking the switch that

lights only two gas powered candelabras. The room gives off a soft ominous glow.

He turns on a dime. “Little brother,” he greets me with a sinister grin. “It’s so nice of you to finally join us.”

I glance at Haven, but my full attention is on my brother. “Hi, firefly.”

“’Bout time,” she sarcastically jokes, but I can feel her terror as if it was my own. But she should not fear him with me standing here because I am going to end him.

I give her a soft grin. I’m proud of her. She is holding it together. “Had you thought better of your well-being, Nikolai, you would have never considered abducting my wife.”

“It’s so nice to come face-to-face with a sibling that shares my full blood.”

“Can’t say I feel the same. I’m going to drain you of yours in a minute.”

“Ah.” He bobs his head. “Raised by two different parents yet both ruthless in dealings.” He shifts towards Haven. “I would not be here had you not stolen my wife out from under me.”

“My. Wife.” I step towards him.

“Yes,” he muses. “On paper. You are correct. You acquired her underhandedly. I commend you on that. Though, no self-respecting crime lord could let that go unpunished.” He jerks his shoulder. “No matter. I will bed down your widow upon your death. Right next to your dead body so she knows who owns her. I will make her the mother of my children as she was promised to me. Once satisfied, I will disregard her to the east quarters of my estate to raise my sons, only sons, and I will bed down fresh young whores. A man’s dream, yes?” He turns to Haven and runs the knuckle of his index finger down the center line of Haven’s breastbone.

My heart stops. I try to stay calm watching him, knowing I have to keep it together. He’s aware of what he’s doing. He wants me to react.

“This is between you and I, Nikolai,” I ground out, wanting to take his



attention off her. My heart begins to race watching him interact with her.

“Yes, it is. Isn’t it.” He turns his attention back to me. “She’s just collateral damage.”

“There’s no way out of here.”

“But you see, that is where you are wrong.” He nods behind me. “I am not so naïve to corner myself, brother.”

“Demetri,” Haven whimpers. “Behind you.”

“Ah, and she protects her spouse as well. Good qualities when breeding females.”

“You’re a sick bitch,” I state, knowing the threat behind my back is my father. But I won’t turn around. I won’t give him the satisfaction. The emergency lights will kick on in a few minutes. The sudden change will hopefully distract him.

“Demetri.”

“It’s okay, firefly.”

“But...”

“Baby, listen to me.” I connect eyes with her. “It will be okay. I promise.”

“You should not make those kinds of statements. Isn’t that right, Father?”

“What kind is that?” I remain facing my brother, hoping the disrespect will infuriate the man who supplied his sperm.

“False ones.”

I hear the slightest clip of nails against concrete. I shift in my spot, not because my father is still silently standing at my back, but because I need to distract them both from the incoming pain they are about to receive.

“You suggesting I will *not* inflict pain and suffering upon your death, is false.”

Haven whimpers again. Her eyes shooting back and forth between Nikolai and me. I raise my hand and place my index finger over my lips, telling her to be quiet. When Nikolai looks at her, I close my eyes, hoping she will understand my instructions. I take a step to my right and give her a slight

nod. When her eyes close, blocking out what is about to transpire, I boom with an order for Thor.

“Fass!”

I hear his nails dig into the cement. Before my father knows what’s happening, he is pummeled by a hundred-and-sixty-pound beast who has been trained to protect our queen. Thor sinks his teeth into his arm and whips him to the ground like he weighs nothing. My father screams in agony. Nikolai sets his sights on Haven, now thinking that is the only way he will get out of the room. He pulls a knife from inside his suit jacket and within seconds, he slices through two of the restraints holding Haven to my cross.

I tackle him to the ground. We roll around and while I am getting the best of him, I can hear the chaos on the other side of the room. Luca is giving Thor orders in German, while Giovanni is yelling, “I need him to unlatch before he kills him.”

“Fuss!” Luca yells. “Fuss!”

Nikolai gets the best of me while I’m listening to them. The slice from his blade isn’t deep but the sting from the broken skin is real. He snarls in demonic nature, pleased with himself for cutting me.

“You ready to die, little brother?”

My last bit of distraction goes to Thor. I need to make sure no one gets by Haven. “Thor, pass auf, Haven. Pass auf!” He will guard her.

My father’s yelling stops, but his labored breathing continues. I can hear Thor crossing the room. I fight for the knife my brother has partial control of now that I know Haven will be safe. Thor will not let anyone near her. My full attention goes into fighting my brother. We struggle with each other, rolling around on the floor until I flip him and shank the knife into his side, effectively piercing his lung. He gasps for air. I pop up to my feet and cross the room. Thor lifts his bloody lip. “Fuss,” I command him to stand down. I am the one who trained him to protect her after I saw his loyalty to her. Giovanni rushes over to my dying brother. Antonio holds my father in place

as he sits in the corner wheezing for breath while blood pours from his body.

I unbutton and shrug from my dress shirt as fast as I can. Luca is on his knees cutting the rope from Haven's ankles. Once free she springs into my arms, latching her legs and around me. I try to shift the shirt over her body. The blood from her lip and chin smears across my chest.

"It's okay. I've got you, firefly."

Frantically, she helps me cover herself with my shirt. She pushes away from me when fully covered and runs across the room and slams her foot into Nikolai's gut. When he curls in a ball and starts rocking, she kicks him again. When he straightens out, lying flat on his back gasping for air, begging for help, she spits on him and kicks him right in his groin.

*My girl.*

"Haven," I call to her while she hovers over his dying body.

"Where's the knife?" She frantically looks around. "Where is it?"

I just hold her frantic gaze when I finally capture it. There is no way I am taking the knife out of my pocket and giving it to her. Killing someone makes you hard inside. One of the reasons why I fell in love with Haven is because she is softhearted to my remorseless thick skin. I want so badly to be able to give this to her, but selfishly, when this day is done, I want the same girl back in my arms, in my bed.

"Haven, come here." I step to her but don't walk all the way. I want her away from my brother. Dying or not, he is still a viable threat.

"You killed my son!" My father jerks in Antonio's arms.

"He's not dead yet," I snarl. "Look at him. Watch his chest. He's struggling for air. Think about how he feels right now. He's slowly dying in a torturous death. Something I promised him I would do." I smile watching my father watch his oldest son. "Keep watching, old man. His last breath with come soon."

"He will haunt you."

"I welcome it."

Mr. Heart chimes in from a few feet away. I didn't even notice him in the room. He stands there with his hands in his pockets as if blood hasn't just been shed and dead bodies aren't lying all over the basement.

"Your son is a vile piece of shit. Just like you. By day's end, the world will be a better place without your existence."

"Fuck you, Heart."

Mr. Heart's lip curls. "You remember all those years ago, that night at the club, when I promised you that I would retaliate on her behalf?" He watches the recognition hit home on my father's face. "Today is that day. Although, it is a shame she is not here to see it happen in person. What I am sure about is that she is still here in spirit, though. Because there is no way that woman would leave her son's side. I'm sure she will have no problem showing you where to enter the gates of hell."

"Like you're a better man," he spits. "I'll see you there, Heart."

"In business, no. I am just as ruthless, if not more." He stands before him, looking down on him, relaxed. "When it comes to women and children, I am. They're off-limits. It's a rule most follow. You never got the memo." He kicks his leg to wake him, the loss of blood has him losing consciousness from Thor's bites. "Your death is for her." He points to the ceiling. "His death is for Haven." He jerks his chin at Nikolai. "You took advantage of her father, a sick man. You should have tucked your tail and taken your losses. If you had, you would have been able to see the sun rise tomorrow."

"Heart!" My father jerks in Antonio's arms, fighting for freedom when Mr. Heart turns towards me.

"Demetri?" he questions, giving me the respect of asking how we are going to end them since they are my blood.

"Not in here. The holding room." I turn to Haven. "Luca and Joseph are going to walk you upstairs and stay with you."

"No!" She shakes her head. "I want to stay here with you."

"Haven. Do not fight me on this." I step up to her and hold her face in my

hands. “Now is one of those times you need to listen to my orders.”

“Demetri... Please.”

“Now, Haven. I promise you, firefly. I won’t be long.”

She reluctantly pulls away from me and walks to Luca. With Joseph at their backs, I watch them walk from the room. Just after crossing the threshold, I see her slide her arm around his waist and lay her head on his shoulder. She needs comfort, security. Luca respectfully places his hand on the middle of her back. That’s the moment I realized I fucked up. I look at the two men on the floor of my dungeon, and I silently chaise myself. They can wait. My wife, the woman I have fallen madly and dangerously in love with, needs me. I will do anything to make sure she is okay and that her needs are met. In this bloodthirsty moment, I forgot that because of my lifelong need for vengeance on my mother’s behalf.

I turn back and address the room. “I need a few minutes alone with my wife. I’ll meet you in the holding room.” Then I stride out of the room and call for Luca to stop. They are already halfway down the hallway to the steps that lead upstairs.

I watch Haven’s shoulders release the tension. She runs to me, plastering herself against my sweat-soaked chest. Instinctively I squeeze her and start walking up the stairs to our home.

“Put your head on my chest.” I tuck her into my body further. She doesn’t need to see the carnage Thor left behind. Luca and Joseph followed us up here. I turn to them before entering the hallway. “Clear this place twice over. Make sure no one is hanging around. Call the cleanup crew. Then change the security codes. When you’re done, wait for me downstairs.”

CHAPTER  
**FORTY-EIGHT**

**D** EMETRI

I CARRY Haven through the bedroom and straight to the shower after toeing off my shoes. Stepping inside, I turn the water on and inhale the fear she is releasing. With each second that passes, she melts further into my arms now that she knows she is safe. The need to wash her body clean from any trace of his touch burns me. I failed to protect her. She was put in harm's way right under all of our noses. That's a hard pill to swallow for a man like me. My wife may hate me in the future with the added bodyguards I will place on her, but her safety is my first concern.

I cradle her body under the spray and let the warm water rush over her body. She clings to me in a way that isn't fear anymore, but comfort as I hold her in my arms.

"I'm okay," she whispers, her head leaning against my bare chest.

"I'm not." I set her down and remove my shirt from her body. When I get to the last button and slide the shirt over her shoulders, I repeat, "I'm not."

She stands there, her interest only on my face as she lets me manipulate her. I tilt her head back and let the spray saturate her hair. Instead of her soap, I grab for mine. The need to have my sent all over her becomes a burning

need. My movements, although not harsh, are rushed. I force myself to slow down. My wife has just been through something traumatic, and the sad part, I think she is handling it better than I am.

She grabs for my hands and stills them, holding them in place until I give her my full attention.

“Demetri. I’m okay.” She leans in.

“I failed you.”

“You could never.” She leans in further and places a kiss on the corner of my lips.

“He took you from your homeland. Flew you across the world and brought you to our home. Do you know... Fuck, Haven, what he could have done to you in that span of time. I swear I almost killed the pilot for not flying fast enough.”

“He took me to our home because he wanted to show you he could take what was yours, in your own space. You got to me before he did anything too serious. It means you didn’t fail me,” she breathes. “You got to me in time, Demetri. What he planned to do in front of you is...”

I release a deep agonizing growl. It’s unbearable for me to think about what he planned to do to her with me present. My need to slaughter him only deepens. The satisfaction of watching him take his last breath will be utterly satisfying.

I wash her entire body from head to toe. The scent of my soap almost too much, but the man in me needed to mark her with my scent.

She leans in closer. I know what she wants. But when I make sorrowful love to my wife, apologizing to her with my body, I will only do it after my brother’s death.

With that thought, I rinse her off, shut off the water, remove my wet pants and socks, shove them to the side, and place a towel around my wife's beautiful body.

It’s time to end my mother’s biggest mistakes: her lover and her first

born.



CHAPTER  
FORTY-NINE

H AVEN

THE BLOOD SPLATTER on his bare, tattooed chest when he walks through the door to our bedroom is repulsive and satisfying all at the same moment. I jump from the bed and run to him. He holds his hands up, telling me to not touch him. He doesn't want their blood tainting me any further than it already has.

He strips down after entering the bathroom. I watch him from the bedroom. The way his bloody body flexes. The way his length bobs between his thighs. He steps under the shower spray and roughly scrubs his face with his hand. The soap runs red, swirling down the drain.

I take the few steps I need to lean against the vanity, quietly watching him, wishing he would let me touch him. Watching on as he washes his body down for the second time.

“Get in here, firefly.”

I strip from his T-shirt that he wrapped my body in before leaving me and rush to the edge of the shower. I take his hand when he reaches out for me. He pulls me into his chest and wraps his arms around me.

“Are you okay?” He pulls back and checks me over.

“Yes. Yes, I’m fine.”

“Haven, I am so sorry. I never thought... I thought it was our limo I was putting you in. I would have never put you in danger.” He releases my arms and runs his hand through his wet strands. “Fuck, baby. I don’t know what I would have done.”

“I’m okay. I’m right here. And I’m okay.”

He grabs me and pulls me back into his arm. His hug is fierce, one that says he never wants to let me go.

This Demetri standing before me is a relieved one. The Demetri from the shower a few hours prior was a tense, retribution fueled man with the added emotion of guilt.

He shuts off the water, wraps me in a towel, and hoists my body up. My legs and arms immediately go around his body.

He lays me down on the bed, separates the tucked edges of the towel, and makes love to me for the very first time. Demetri and I are, and always have been, explosive together but this... this is him telling me he is sorry.

And I accept his apology over and over again.

*The End*

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

So I hate this part. I am absolutely terrible at it. I should be prepared and have a list made but by the time I get to this part I'm frantic to get it all done because it is coming down to the wire. So here is my sincerest apology if I do miss you.

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do the dark world justice.

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michelle B was born and raised in New Jersey, where she lives with her husband and furry co-writing buddy, Mr. Bojangles. After secretly writing two of the five books in the Heart series, she decided it was time to hit the publish button. She has turned her love for reading hot, steamy books into writing them. Her way of writing angsty, suspenseful romance draws you in and makes you feel like you live inside the pages alongside the characters. She is unapologetically addicted to Starbucks and loves going to the movies with her husband of thirty-ish years.



