



Revenge is messy.

SLAUGHTER

BESTSELLING AUTHOR
SHANTEL TESSIER

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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24/7/365 Crisis Hotline
Call: 1(800)273-8255
Text: "Answer" to 839863

PROLOGUE

PRESLEIGH

Fifteen years old . . .

“FIVE ...”

I run down the stairs, looking over my shoulder to see if he’s following me. With every step I take, my loud feet give my location away in the large and silent house.

When I hit the landing, I grip the brown wooden banister and use it to spin myself around. I drop to my knees, my jeans allowing me to slide on the tile and yank open the little door that isn’t visible to the naked eye. *You have to know it’s there.*

“Four ...”

I quickly crawl inside the small space and pull the door closed. Placing my back against the interior wall, I pull my knees to my chest. It’s dark in the small, confined space. I clamp my hand over my mouth to quiet my heavy breathing as my heart races.

He’ll find me. The question is how long before he does?

“Three ...”

His voice booms through the thick walls, and I have a moment of panic. I should have run outside. At least then I could have kept running. Now I’m trapped.

“Two ...”

My knees start to shake, and my heart pounds. My head snaps up when I hear his footsteps on the stairs I’m hiding underneath. His aren’t rushed like mine were, though. He’s taking his time, drawing it out.

He chuckles. “You’re terrible at hiding, Bunny. You know I always find you.”

He’s right. You would think after years of practice, I’d be a little better. Smarter. But then again, maybe I want to be found.

I hear his shoes hit the tile and then silence. I look straight ahead at where I

know the trap door is. I can't see it, but I can almost hear him breathing on the other side.

"One ..." The door is yanked open, and a set of blue eyes stare into mine as he kneels in front of my hideout. "I found you, Bunny."

I drop my hands and stretch out my legs. "That's not fair," I whine.

"What's not fair? You always hide in the same spot." He gives me his winning smile. The one I'm in love with.

When he reaches his hand in, I take it, and Avery pulls me out. "Plus, you're getting a little too big to fit in there."

I gasp at that statement and shove him. He grabs my wrists and pulls me against his chest. His right hand caresses my cheek, and it makes me blush. "I found you, Bunny. You know what that means?"

I smile shyly and drop my head. My heart pounds just as hard as it did when I was hiding from him. Only for a different reason now.

His fingers grip my chin gently, and he raises my head, forcing me to look up at him. "You're not playing fair," I say, nervousness starting to bubble up in my stomach.

"I never do."

His lips come down on mine and give me a sweet kiss. I open my lips for him to deepen it when he pulls away from me quickly, leaving me disappointed.

"Get out of here, Vaughn!" he barks.

I look over to see his older brother standing at the other end of the hall. He's holding a video camera, recording us.

"Go ahead, Avery," he taunts. "Show me what you were going to do to her." He pulls the camera away from his face and winks at me.

Avery stiffens. "Go upstairs, Bunny. I'll be there in a minute."

"But—"

"Go!" he orders, interrupting me.

Vaughn lifts his chin and puckers his lips to blow me a kiss. "Yeah, go wait upstairs for me, *Bunny*. Make sure to undress before you crawl into my bed."

Avery runs straight for him. He clocks him in the face, making Vaughn fall back onto his ass. The video camera hits the tile with a clank.

"I've warned you, asshole!" Avery growls.

"Come on, bro. I'll share any of my women with you," Vaughn continues.

"Keep your hands off her!"

“ENOUGH!”

I take a step back, hitting the wall I was just hiding in, when their father enters the hallway and yanks Avery off Vaughn. “You two knock it off,” he orders.

My father chooses that time to join us, and I pull my shoulders back when he glares at me with his dark brown eyes. There’s only one reason he’s here. And it’s not good. “What did you do?” he demands.

I open my mouth to answer, but Vaughn beats me to it. “We were just playing around.”

I say nothing, and Avery glares at him.

“Well, knock it off,” their father orders. Then he turns to Avery. “Meet me in the cellar in ten.”

I swallow nervously, and my stomach knots up at his words. *The cellar?* We all know what he does down there. That’s why my father is here. They are in business together. They sell anything and everything. Drugs, guns, people. Well, more like girls. I was born into a world where anything can be for sale for the right price. No matter what. They will strip you of the life you know and bind you to an eternity of servitude.

Slavery.

“Yes, sir,” Avery says with a nod and then he walks over to me, grabs my hand, and drags me up the stairs I had just run down.

Shoving me into his room at the end of the hall, he slams the door shut behind us. “You should go home,” he says with a sigh.

My chest tightens at his words. I hate it there. “But I wanna stay here with you. We were gonna watch a movie,” I remind him.

He runs a hand through his dark hair nervously and takes a step back from me. “That was before my father wanted me to join him.”

Placing my hands on his forearms, I lick my lips. “Just don’t go ...”

“You know I can’t do that, Bunny!” he snaps, pulling away from me.

I wrap my arms around myself. “Do you enjoy it?” I ask, my voice barely over a whisper.

He reaches out and pulls me to him. “Look at me,” he orders. I slowly lift my eyes to meet his, and they look down at me with concern. “I’m not like them,” he tells me. “And you know that.”

I bite my bottom lip. “But you—”

“Play my part,” he interrupts me. “I do what I need to do. Just a few more years. Once you graduate, we are out of here. Together.” He wraps his arms

around my waist. “It’ll be me and you, Bunny.” He lowers his forehead to mine, and whispers, “All I need is you.” Then he seals that promise with a kiss.

CHAPTER ONE

AVERY

Thirteen years later . . .

MY FATHER ONCE TOLD ME that a man who wants, takes. He said, boy, a woman will fear you, and men will respect you if you're willing to do what it takes in order to get what you want. Deserve. His hands were covered in blood at the time—not his—and he had a smile on his face as if he was sharing some family secret.

I hate that the sorry bastard was right.

I have taken a lot over my thirty years. Lives included. It's what I do. I take. And take. And take. I never ask permission and have no regrets. My father raised me, after all.

He was all me and my brothers had. I'm the middle son. My mother walked out on us when I was five. She'd had enough of her marriage to a sick, twisted man and three boys who were going to grow up just like him. She had no hope, and we were all damned.

I don't blame her. Who could? My father was the devil. And the fucker is still alive to this day, working with his demons to rule the world. The only thing I hate is that I grew up just like him. It was inevitable, I guess. And the sad part is, I wouldn't change my life if I could.

"Just fucking kill me," the man by the name of Marc growls.

"Not until you tell me what I need to know." I place my hands in the pockets of my black dress slacks and look down at him. He thrashes in the chair but isn't going to go far. I put four-inch nails through both his hands, securing him to the chair the moment he arrived.

"I know nothing," he snaps.

"I don't believe you."

He looks up at me—well, the best he can. His right eye is swollen shut thanks to my fist. "I'm telling you the truth."

I cross my arms over my chest. "The truth is you're lying."

“I am not!” he shouts.

I arch a brow at his tone, and he cowers. I smile. “I ...”

A knock comes on the door, and I walk over to it, yanking the heavy steel open. “I said don’t disturb me ...”

“You have a call, sir,” Kayn, my head of security announces, holding my cell out to me.

I let out a sigh of annoyance and yank the phone from his grasp. I look down to see it’s a blocked number. *Not good.*

“Hello?”

“We’ve got a problem,” the male’s voice informs me.

“I’m listening.” Kayn moved to stand in front of the guy I have nailed to the chair.

“Preston fucked up.”

My jaw tightens. “How bad?” The bastard is a thorn in my side. Has been since we were kids.

“Bad enough that his sister is in danger.”

And just like that, my already sour mood turns deadly. My hand clenches the cell, and my jaw tightens. “What kind of danger?” I growl.

“I have a reliable source that says she’s on Damon’s radar.”

Fuck!

“Where is she?” I demand, knowing what I have to do. It’s not even a question.

“New York.”

“I’ll call my pilot and get my jet ready—”

“No,” he interrupts me. “That is not your job, Avery. You take care of Preston. Presleigh is on her own.”

“I’ll take care of Preston, but she is—”

“Insignificant,” he argues, interrupting me again.

I bow my head and close my eyes, taking a deep breath. When I say nothing, he continues. “I mean it, Avery. Take care of Preston and Preston only.”

Click.

I place the cell in my pocket and then turn to look at the man still sitting in the chair. “You have one chance to tell me where the fuck Damon is!” If I can get him, then I won’t have to save her. There’s a reason she isn’t in my life anymore, and I’d like to keep it that way.

“I don’t know ...”

“Okay, let’s play it your way.” I grab a pair of pliers off the wooden table next to me and then turn back, grabbing his head. “If you’re not gonna talk, then you don’t need your tongue.”

He looks up at me wide-eyed. “I’ve heard how sick you are. They say everyone should be afraid of you.”

“Rightfully so.”

“I swear ...” He thrashes in the chair, causing blood to pour from his hands secured by the nails, and he grits his teeth to keep from crying out like a baby. “I know nothing ...”

“Kayn, hold his head,” I order.

He walks behind Marc and reaches down to grab his chin and yanks his head back, securing it in place.

“Open!” I demand.

He tries to shake his head, but it’s impossible with Kayn’s iron grip on him.

I grab his nose and pinch it, taking away his air. When he opens his lips to suck in a breath, I shove the pliers in, and he starts to mumble around the cold metal when I grab his tongue. Blood instantly fills his mouth from the instrument of torture.

“I think he’s trying to talk to you, sir,” Kayn observes.

I pause and look into the man’s watery brown eyes. “Are you going to give me something useful?”

He blinks rapidly and tears roll down his face. *Pathetic!*

Everyone dies eventually. I was taught to die with dignity.

I pull away, and Kayn releases his head. He bends forward and spits blood onto my concrete floor and some of it lands on my shoes. He heaves in breath after breath, bending over.

“You’re wasting my time.” I grunt.

“Cuba.” He gasps. “Damon’s in Cuba.”

I tap the pair of pliers against my right thigh. “I already know that. Give me something else.”

He shakes his head, still looking down at the concrete floor. Blood runs from his mouth just like his hands. “That’s all I know. He keeps us in the dark for this very reason.”

I need more than that! Her life is on the line. Just the thought of her has my heart beating faster. It’s been eleven years since I’ve seen her last. I was nineteen, her seventeen. We were just kids still.

I fist my left hand at that thought. I don't even have to count the years. My mind just knows. My heart also remembers how she stomped on it.

"How does he contact you?" I growl.

"Burner phone. He calls us on it, and then we destroy it afterward."

Hmm. Not helpful.

What am I gonna do? *She's in trouble.*

I blink. Don't think about her. But like an unexpected storm, she starts to flood my thoughts.

Laughter fills my ears as the prettiest blue eyes stare up at me. Her blond hair fans out over her pillow. Soft hands wrap around my neck, and she pulls me down to her. "I love you, Avery," she whispers against my lips.

"I love you too, Bunny ..."

"Avery?" Kayn snaps.

I take a step back and look up at him. I blink, then look down at the man I was in the middle of torturing when I got that phone call.

I need more than that!

"There's a woman. Her name is Presleigh Clarke. Have you heard of her?" I demand. Saying her name out loud almost brings me to my knees.

He looks up at me, and for the first time since I dragged him down to the cellar of my house, he looks utterly surprised.

He knows something.

He seems to regain his composure and starts shaking his head quickly.

I punch him in the face so hard his head snaps back, more blood pouring out of his mouth and now nose, his hands still nailed to the chair.

"She doesn't ... belong to him," he says, trying to breathe through his busted nose.

I lean down and grip his neck, the pliers still in my free hand. "What the fuck does that mean?"

"Damon would never go after her," he chokes out.

He's playing me. "I have heard otherwise."

He coughs, and it makes his entire body shake. "He has men on her ..."

Fuck! Fuck! "He what?" My jaw clenches. "How fucking long?"

He closes his heavy eyes, and I slap him.

"How fucking long?" I shout, hating to repeat myself.

He whispers, "Six months now."

I drop the pliers on the concrete floor at his words and run a hand through my hair. “No.” That’s all I can think to say.

Six months?

For six fucking months, Damon has had his men watching the woman I used to love?

How did I not know this? *Why do you even care is the more important question.*

I look at Marc while I feel Kayn’s eyes on me but choose to ignore him. “But you said he won’t go after her?” I ask.

He shakes his head quickly, and blood flies in the air.

“Why would he watch her but not touch her?” I ask myself out loud. It doesn’t make sense.

“You love her,” Marc lets out a rough chuckle that turns into a cough.

Kayn’s brows shoot to his hairline in surprise. Again, I ignore him.

“What?” I snap.

His head is back; his one useful eye is heavy on mine while he stares up at me from his chair. He gives me a bloody smile, and it makes a chill run up my back. “I said you love her.”

Love? That word sounds minimal compared to what I once felt for her. She was life. She was ... everything.

It’s freezing out here on this mountain. My hands and legs are on the verge of going numb even with all my gear on. “Come on, we’re almost there,” I say, pulling her behind me.

“I can’t feel my feet,” Bunny whines.

I chuckle, but mine aren’t far off from hers. “Just a little farther.”

My boots dig into the firmly packed snow. I make it to the spot and turn to face her. She has her arms crossed over her chest, briskly bouncing up and down to keep warm. She wears a white snowsuit and jacket. She has the hood up and a pink scarf wrapped around her face, covering her mouth and nose. All I can see is her pretty blue eyes.

“Let’s go.” She gestures to the skis that I hold in my hands. “I wanna get down the mountain and then get a cup of hot chocolate.”

I drop them, and they fall to my sides.

“Avery ...”

I kneel down and look up at her.

She takes a step toward me, narrowing her blue eyes on mine. “We don’t

have time for this, babe. It's freezing ..."

I pull the white box out of my pocket, and her words come to a halt.

She reaches up and pulls down her scarf to show me her pink lips. "Avery," she whispers. "What are you ...?" She looks around as if this is a joke. As though someone is gonna jump out and say gotcha. I get it. We're young. But I love her. Presleigh Joanna Clarke is the one for me.

"Bunny, I love you!" Tears instantly spring to her eyes. I clear the knot in my throat. "Will you ...?"

"Yes!" She squeals before running and jumping on me. I go tumbling backward into the snow, laughing as her lips touch mine.

I pull myself out of that memory from so long ago. Yet so much changed right after that. Not sure what I was thinking anyway. She was seventeen, and I was nineteen. Too young to be engaged. Too young to be in love. And just months later, she left me.

I look down at him, and that sadistic smile is still on his face—as if he can read my mind. See my thoughts.

He's fucking with me. He has to be. How would he ...?

"I can see it written all over your face," he muses and then coughs, blood spilling out of his mouth and running down his chin.

I run a hand through my hair and let out a growl. This can't be happening! "Get ready to leave," I tell Kayn, and he frowns at me, not knowing what is going on. He doesn't know about *her*. The woman I loved to the bitch I now hate. If anyone is going to have her, it's gonna be me.

The man in the chair chuckles. "When he finds out you have Presleigh, he'll kill you, and then he'll take her. All bets will be off."

He's telling the truth, but he underestimates me. Just like they all do. That's why he is about to die, and I'm not. I pull my cell out of my pocket and hit number two on my speed dial, dialing my pilot's number. "Hello?" he answers sleepily.

"I want wheels up in an hour. We're going to New York." I hang up and hand it to Kayn. He takes it without a word. "Now, where were we?" I ask, twirling the pliers in my hand.

CHAPTER TWO

AVERY

“HEY, YOU’VE REACHED PRESTON. Leave a message ...”

I hang up, walking onto my private jet. Going straight over to the minibar, I pour myself a glass of scotch and then sit down on the white leather. I’ve showered and put on clean clothes. It delayed my departure by an hour, but after I butchered the man in my cellar, I needed to do a few things.

Kayn comes to sit across from me. “I got the information you asked for, sir.”

“What did you find?”

He flips open a white folder. “Presleigh Joanna Clarke. Age twenty-eight. Female. Blue eyes—”

“I know all that,” I growl, interrupting him.

He nods and then scans over it some more. “Marital status. Single.”

My brows lift. “Divorced?”

“No, sir.”

“Widow?”

“No, sir.”

Interesting.

“She got a GED at the age of nineteen.”

“She didn’t graduate from high school?” That’s surprising.

“No, sir. She also has no record of current employment.”

I take a sip of my drink. “So she doesn’t work.”

“Maybe she gets paid under the table in cash,” he offers with a shrug.

“Maybe.” But that doesn’t sound like her. She had dreams. Growing up, she was always painting. She wanted to be an artist. And she was good. Great even. I never doubted her talent. But her family had money, so maybe she lives off that.

“As far as medical, I didn’t find much. She has a physician there in New York City along with a psychologist, but that was years ago.”

“For what?” I wonder.

“Doesn’t say,” he answers, looking over the paper. Then his eyes meet mine. “She also has an OB-GYN. A hysterectomy was performed but no date given.”

I tighten my hand on my glass.

He continues. “Past procedures include rhinoplasty done back when she was eighteen.”

“Rhino?” I ask confused. “She had her nose done?”

He nods.

“Breast augmentation a year later.”

She got a fucking boob job? What the actual fuck? She wasn’t conceited, but she was never ashamed or wanted to alter her body in any way.

“Oh, and she was in a car wreck when she was eighteen. Resulting in a coma for two weeks ...”

“Give me that!” I yank it from his hands. My eyes scan over the medical report as I hear the engines of my jet roar to life. Three broken ribs. A broken nose. Punctured lung and broken wrists. Jaw wired shut. *Goddamn!* “That’s all it says?” I growl, going to flip through the pages, but there are no more.

He shrugs. “As I said, sir, I couldn’t find much. I didn’t have much time.”

My eyes go back down to scan it over again. “Does it say who the doctor was?”

“No, sir.”

I sit back in my seat, taking another drink, and then order, “When we get back, find out more.”

“How long are we gonna be in New York?” he asks while we make our way down the private runway, accelerating for takeoff.

“As long as it takes.” I take a drink, enjoying the burn before looking out the window into the Vancouver night.

“As long as what takes, sir?”

I take another drink, ending this conversation.

I’m coming for you, Bunny. And you have no fucking idea how much your life is about to change. For the worst.

CHAPTER THREE

AVERY

I SIT AT THE ROUND TABLE tucked back in the corner of the dark club. My right ankle is propped up on my left knee, and my arms span the back of the circular booth.

Being here reminds me why I hate these places. Music so loud you can't hear yourself think. Neon lights so bright they're blinding. And the drunks. I've never cared for them. They're annoying, to say the least. I'm a drinker, but I've been doing it for as long as I can remember. My father always said that alcohol would cure anything. That was why he was always shoving it down our throats. I had developed a tolerance by the time I was fourteen.

The brunette at the bar, the one who brought me to this God-forsaken place, gets my attention when she throws back the shot.

She looks so different than I remember. She used to have blond hair; she called it highlights. And she kept it short, right above her shoulders.

Now it's a rich brown and long. She stands at the bar, her back toward me, wearing a silver glittery dress that the neon lights bounce off—making it easy for me to keep an eye on her. It's shorter than any dress should be—attracting attention from every guy here.

Her six-inch fuck-me black heels make her look taller than I know she is. I've been in New York for five days, following her every move. She stays home all day, and every night, I've ended up at a smoky bar or a packed club. She drinks until she stumbles out of the establishment and goes home with a man. The past two nights have been the same guy. I'm not sure what relationship they have or if they've recently met, but he's not here tonight. I looked. Not that I'm worried. Even if she does have a man in her life, it won't complicate things. I'll still get what I want.

Her!

I've always wanted her!

That's my problem.

But now I have a reason. An excuse to take what I want.

She was what I once thought I wanted. Needed. But things change. She throws back another shot and spins around to face the dance floor. My eyes go to her tits. They're on display like all the other nights. The dress has a plunging neckline, showing off what I now know were paid for.

My cock starts to harden, and I grind my teeth in annoyance. I'm not the kind of guy who thinks with his dick.

Not anymore.

I once loved her, but she cured me of that disease. Now I only fuck women until I throw them away—just as she did with me. She taught me well.

I reach forward and grab my scotch. I take a sip, sitting back in my seat, and watch as she pushes off the bar to head to the dance floor. Her brown hair flows down her back, and she spins around, placing her hands above her head while her hips sway to the music.

I adjust my slacks while she dances as if no one is watching. My eyes lower down over her ass and to her thighs, remembering what it felt like to be between them.

She may be a whore now, but I had her before anyone else did. A part of me is proud of that, and the other part is just ashamed. I worked so hard for it, and now she gives it away to anyone who throws her a smile.

She's smaller than she used to be. She reminds me of a runway model fresh off the stage in Paris. Over the years, I've grown to prefer a woman with curves, but there's something about the way she dominates a room—she demands attention, and no man can deny her that. Even the women stare at her with envy.

A man gets my attention when he sits down at the bar in the seat she just vacated. He looks around quickly before pulling his phone out of his pocket and snapping a couple of pictures of her on the dance floor.

My jaw tightens, knowing he will be jacking off to them later. As if he has that same thought, he places his hands between his legs and adjusts himself. His black eyes look her up and down before he bares his teeth and runs his tongue over them. He's salivating like a bitch in heat.

I quickly look at her to see she is still dancing and then back at him. Now he's looking down at his phone, typing away on it, and I know he just sent that picture he took of her to his boss—Damon. The same man who I'm trying to keep her from.

He gets up off the barstool and pockets his phone before throwing her one last look and then making his way through the crowd and out the front door.

Tonight is her lucky night.

Once my threat is gone, my eyes go back to her, and I watch a new man approach. Wrapping his arms around her waist and pulling her to him, he thrusts his hips into hers, and my anger rises when she pulls him to her instead of pushing the stranger away.

What did I expect? This is what she does. Gets drunk and takes a random guy home to fuck. Thankfully, that other guy took his pictures and left. Otherwise, I'd have to act sooner than I had planned.

She'll be mine soon, though.

She wraps her arms around his neck, and he lowers his lips to hers while he pulls her flush to his body. Her hips grind into his, and his hand drops to cup her ass. I take another drink of my scotch.

My hand tightens around the cool glass when her head falls back, lips parted and eyes closed. I wonder if she ever thinks of me like I do her.

"Avery." She cries out while lying on her back as I hover over her. Our bodies slapping, and our breaths ragged.

Music fills my bedroom to try to drown out her voice, so my brothers don't hear her screams of pleasure.

"I'm coming." She pants, her nails digging into my back. "Oh, God..." I lower my lips to hers to swallow her words. The music not helping much.

I'll find out soon.

The song "You Don't Own Me" by Grace comes to an end, and she leans in, speaking into his ear before she walks off the dance floor toward the ladies' room.

I finish my glass and set it down on the table. I get up and make my way over to him, shoving the people out of my way in the process. Grabbing the back of his shirt, I pull him over to the far corner in the darkness. He trips over his own feet but manages to stay upright.

I slam his back against the black wall and stare down at him. "Find your own whore. She's mine. Understand?"

Brown eyes look up at me, wide with terror, and he throws his hands up and nods quickly.

I punch him in the face just because I fucking can. I yank him from the wall as blood runs from his nose and shove him forward. He takes off into the crowd while the music continues to pound the floor under my feet.

Going against my better judgment, I take off down the hallway to the women's restroom. I walk on in and find two girls who look too young to be in this club. Their eyes widen in surprise when they notice me. When I snap my fingers and point at the door, they run out without a word. I lock it behind them, then turn around and lean against it. Placing my hands in the pockets of my slacks and crossing my ankles, I wait for her to exit the stall, trying to look unaffected even though my heart is pounding at the thought of coming face to face with her. After all this time ... I swore I'd never call her. Never chase her. She made her decision, and I had to live with it.

Now she is wanted by the exact men we swore we would never become. And even though I hate her with all I have, it doesn't mean I want her sucked into a life of slavery. A life of being raped and beaten. If anyone is going to fuck her, it should be me! If anyone is going to whip that ass, it should be me! I've earned it! I fucking loved her until she ruined me. And she doesn't even care. She never looked back. But now she will. Now I get to remind her that the past always catches up with you. And she's not going to like it.

She walks out of her stall, not even noticing me as she makes her way to the sink and washes her hands. Opening her mouth, she runs her tongue over her strawberry-painted lips, the motion reminding me just how much I used to love them on me. How they would sigh while I made love to her. How they would call out my name when she was coming. Or how they would kiss my chest softly while we lay in bed together afterward. I hate that other men get to experience that now.

After she dries off her hands, she turns to exit. Her heels clap on the floor, but she fumbles to a stop when she sees me.

And all I can think about is how much I hate her now. How much she took from me. This bitch is my heaven and my hell. My angel and my demon. And here I am, staring down the very woman I gave everything to, only for her to take it and run, never looking back.

Big blue eyes stare into mine with a look of terror. *Good, she recognizes me.* Even in her drunken state, and eleven years later, she still knows who I am.

Her pink lips part, inhaling sharply. Her entire body goes rigid. I take a step toward her as she pulls me in just as she always did. I never could control myself with her. But this time has to be different. I have to be in total control of myself and of her.

She doesn't move.

She doesn't blink.

She doesn't breathe.

Deciding to close the gap completely, I take two more steps until my body is close enough to feel the heat radiating from hers. Her long, dark hair drapes over one shoulder, and it looks good on her. She loved when I used to run my hands through her short hair and play with it. Now I just want to wrap it around my fists and force her to her knees. We never did fuck. We made love—always soft and slow. Now when I picture us in bed together, she is bound and gagged. That way, she won't be able to stop all the sadistic shit that comes to mind.

I've become one of those men I swore to never be! All because of her.

I want her to beg me.

I want her to bleed for me.

I want her to love me.

But I'm not stupid. None of those things will come willingly. I'm gonna have to take them. And I have no problem with that. She made me who I am today, after all.

She continues to stand there like a deer in headlights. I give her a threatening smile but reach out to tuck her hair behind her ear in an innocent gesture when what I really wanna do is slap that look of surprise off her face.

Her body physically shakes.

"Hello, Bunny. Miss me?"

PRESLEIGH

Blood rushes in my ears. My heart pounds in my chest, and my palms instantly start to sweat.

If the sight of him alone hasn't knocked the wind out of me, calling me *Bunny* does the trick.

I haven't seen him in eleven years, yet here he is, standing in front of me. The last time I heard his voice was on my voicemail. He was cold, and his words were sharp like a knife—cutting me from the inside out.

Now he's standing before me, touching me like he used to.

But looking at me as though he wants to kill me.

I swallow nervously, my tongue suddenly heavy, my mouth instantly dry.

Chest tight and wide-eyed, I look up at the man I once loved. The man who

was supposed to love me back.

I finally blink, thinking I'm just hallucinating. All the alcohol I've consumed is playing tricks on me. Or maybe someone slipped something in one of my drinks, and I'm really passed out on the floor, having a really bad dream.

My heart pounds, and I can't breathe. I feel a panic attack coming on. I also haven't had one of those in years.

He leans into me, his nose tracing my jaw, and my heart stops altogether. I should yell for help, but I know it wouldn't do me any good. He inhales deeply and whispers against my neck, "You smell just as I remember." He pulls back and looks down at me, his eyes dropping to my cleavage. They give nothing away; he remains indifferent at seeing me. They lower to my exposed thighs, and I feel heat rush to my pussy. And I hate how my body wants what my mind and heart know is a danger.

Stay away from him! You'll end up dead!

I try to move my lips to ask him what the hell he is doing here in New York. Standing in front of me in a women's bathroom nonetheless. But all I can manage is whispering his name. "Avery ..."

His hand shoots out, wrapping around my neck, cutting off my words. He spins us around, slamming my back into the closed door.

If he wasn't cutting off my air, I'd gasp. He never put his hands on me back when he loved me ... I stop that train of thought. That was a long time ago. A lot has changed since then.

But the force and his dominance makes my pussy tighten. My legs threaten to buckle, and the room begins to spin. I stare at him unable to move. Still in shock as my eyes look over his sharp jaw and blue eyes. They've changed over the years and are darker now. As if he has seen too much evil. They're still framed with long dark lashes that made me jealous and those soft lips I loved to kiss. And dark hair that I would play with when he slept with his head on my chest. It's longer now and styled to a messy perfection. He's what most women would call a fuck-boy. He was once my boy.

His hand loosens to allow me a breath, and his free hand goes between my thighs. Still no emotion in those smoldering blue eyes. His fingers gently crawl upward, setting my skin on fire. He does it as if he owns it. And in a way, he still does. No matter how many men have been there, he always has.

My hands are free, but I don't push him away. I don't fight him. I'm not sure what to do. What to say. My mind has shut down, and my body has

come alive—it physically shakes with fear and with need.

“Do you still taste as good, Bunny? Like the sweetest fucking piece of candy?” He moans, closing his eyes, and I take a ragged breath. They open and drill into mine. “Goddamn, I can still taste that cunt on my tongue.”

Him saying *cunt* has me whimpering. He never spoke to me that way back when we were in love. Now he hates me.

I hate him just as much, if not more!

His hand tightens on my throat once again as if he’s reading my mind. My lips part, trying to suck in a breath but get nothing. His eyes trace my lips before they meet mine. I’m reminded his hand is still between my legs when his fingers reach their destination. Without permission, he pulls the black soft fabric of my thong to the side and runs a finger along my pussy. “Are you that excited to see me, Bunny?”

I’m wet.

Soaking. Fucking. Wet.

Goddamn him!

I always was for Avery. He was everything I ever wanted. Until he wasn’t.

He removes his hand from my throat along with my pussy with a look of satisfaction on his gorgeous face.

I’m able to pull myself out of the fog now that he’s no longer touching me. I take a deep breath, and my anger sets in.

I slap him across the face as hard as I can. Eleven years of pent-up aggression released in one hit. His head snaps to the right. The sound bounces off the bathroom walls over the music booming on the other side of the door.

I fist my stinging hand while he turns his gaze back down on me. His dark blue eyes narrow. “I’ll allow you that this one time.” He growls before lifting his hand as if he’s gonna strike me back.

I don’t flinch.

I’ve had worse. My mother used to tell me *don’t dish out what you don’t want served back to you. Just because you have a pussy doesn’t give you a pass to put your hands on a man. He’ll retaliate, and it’ll be twice as hard.*

But instead, he places it on the door by my head, caging me in, and leans toward me. His overpowering scent almost knocks me to my knees. “Not so sweet and innocent anymore, are you?” My chest tightens, and he knows those words affected me because he gives me the coldest smile I’ve ever seen, freezing me to my core.

“What do you want?” I ask through gritted teeth.

He says nothing; instead, he presses his hips into mine, and my breath catches when I feel his hardness. *He wants to fuck!*

“No,” I say, placing my hands on his hard chest over his black button-down and pushing him back. He doesn’t budge.

Instead, he laughs as though I’m joking.

“Avery,” I growl.

“Where’s your brother?”

I didn’t expect him to ask me that. But then again, when I woke up this morning, I didn’t expect to be drunk and locked in a bathroom with my former lover. “How the hell would I know?” I snap.

He removes my hands from his chest and pins them above my head to the door. And just like before, my body betrays me as my knees threaten to buckle, and my lips part as I take in a shaky breath. “Avery ...” I whisper. “Don’t ...”

“Don’t what, Bunny?” he asks. As he grins down at me, that million-dollar smile looks more threatening than friendly. “Don’t make you want me?”

“I don’t want you!” My voice is breathless while my pussy reminds me just how much I’ve missed him. It’s getting harder to breathe.

His eyes drop down to my cleavage as my breasts bounce from my heavy panting. He laughs again. “You always were a terrible liar. Your pussy is wet, and your knees are shaking.” My hands fight for him to release me, but he doesn’t. His free hand comes up and wraps around my neck loose enough to still allow me to breathe. He tilts it upward, leaning his face toward mine. His eyes drop to my lips. My heart beats wildly in my chest, knowing he’s going to kiss me. Eleven years I’ve dreamed about him. Wanted him. And here he is. It’s like a nightmare come to life.

I lick my lips and push forward, but his hand pushes me back, pinning me to the door. Instead of his lips touching mine, he moves them to my ear. “Tell Preston I know what he did. And I’m looking for him.” Then he pulls away, letting go of my arms and neck.

I grind my teeth in frustration. He’s playing with my emotions.

He looks at me with indifference as if I’m some stranger he is passing on the street. Not like the girl he once planned to marry. And I hate how much that hurts. “I’ll be seeing you soon, Bunny,” he says before opening the door, shoving me forward and walking out.

I run over to the sink and almost fall into the counter. I turn on the cold water and splash my face, not caring that my makeup will run. I grab some

paper towels out of the dispenser and then push my back up against the wall. I slide down to my ass and pull my knees to my chest as memories flood me like a fucking hurricane.

We're lying on his bed on a rainy Sunday night. Remember the Titans plays on his TV.

I sneak a glance over at him to find he's already staring at me. "What?" I ask.

He reaches out his right hand, pushing my blond hair behind my ear. "Just admiring how beautiful you are."

I blush and bite my bottom lip. Every time he says that to me, it makes me nervous. His eyes stay on mine, and I look back at the movie, wanting to avoid his stare. But it shuts off, enveloping us in darkness.

"Hey," I whine.

"You've seen it before." He laughs softly, and then I hear the remote hit the floor. Shifting on the bed, he pulls me to him. His hand slides up the back of my shirt, and I hiss in a breath at his touch. Lightning strikes, lighting up the room, and gives me a glimpse of his blue eyes. They're staring at me with a need I can't explain. My body heat starts to rise, and my heart pounds.

"Avery," I whisper. We haven't had sex yet, but I want to. I want him to want me the same way I want him.

"Yes, Bunny?" His voice is rough, and I lean my head back when I feel his lips gently touch my neck. "What do you want?" he asks.

I moan. "For you to want me," I say honestly.

"I do." His lips trail across my skin.

"Then show me."

"You're not ready." He denies me once again.

I feel a pain in my chest at his rejection. A part of me thinks he'll never want me that way. His father teaches him and his brothers to treat women like nothing. But I want to be his everything.

"Do you love me, Bunny?"

My breath catches at his question. Of course, I do. This boy means everything to me. I'd be lost without him. But I've never told him that because I'm afraid he doesn't feel the same. The dark room gives me the courage to say what I've wanted to say for years. "Yes," I whisper so low that I hope he didn't hear me.

Lightning flashes again just as he pulls away from my neck. I look up at

him, and he gives me a soft smile. "That's enough for me." Then we're covered in darkness once again.

The door to the bathroom swings open and in walks my best friend, Alex. "Girl, what the hell are you doing in here?" she demands.

"This is the women's bathroom," I reply, looking around aimlessly. I can still feel Avery in here. My body is covered in goose bumps. My skin burns from where his hands were on me. I can still smell him. And my pussy still begs for another touch of his fingers.

"I know, but you've been gone forever. I got worried." She places her hands on her hips. "Why are you on this nasty ass floor?"

"I ... uh ..." I lick my suddenly dry lips. "Needed a second," I lie lamely.

She arches a dark brow as if she knows I'm full of shit. "And what is on your face?" Her nose scrunches in confusion. "Is that sweat?" I shake my head and hold out my right hand. She grabs it in hers and helps me to stand. "What the hell have you done to yourself?" she asks, yanking the paper towel from my free hand to clean the black streaks off my cheeks. I stay frozen in place.

My legs shake, and my mind is still foggy from the man who was dead to me. But like a ghost, he has come back to haunt me. And even though I haven't seen the man in eleven years, I know nothing good can come from his presence. "I need a drink," I blurt out. That's what I need. More alcohol.

"Well then, come on. They aren't gonna serve you in the bathroom."

CHAPTER FOUR

AVERY

I'VE BEEN IN NEW YORK for two weeks now, and I'm ready to leave. This is not the place for me. I grew up here in New York City but moved to Vancouver when I was nineteen. Right after Bunny broke my heart. I couldn't bear to be anywhere near her. I knew the odds of running into her were too strong because our circle was too tight. Our parents had been best friends before we were even born. We grew up together and then fell in love. After she left me, my father suggested I move to Vancouver with my grandfather.

I never looked back until I got that phone call two weeks ago and realized her life was in danger. I'm her only hope, but I have to be honest, I won't be the kind of help she wants.

I may hate her, but they don't deserve her. She would be useful to me. And if anyone is going to use her, it's gonna be me. She owes me that! She owes me fucking everything!

I'm being a selfish prick, but I don't care.

Tonight has been like any other night. She left her house and went out to a bar dressed in a little skirt and top with all of her assets on display. She caught every man's eyes, but one caught mine. The same black-eyed man from the club last weekend who took her picture. Well, tonight he decided to make his move. Damon must know I'm on her. It's not like I've tried to stay under the radar, but someone must have seen me, so he ordered them to make their move. She took the bait so fucking easy, making me want to slap the fuck out of her.

I sat back all night and watched her drink like a fucking fish until she *accidentally* stumbled into him, and then he offered to take her home. He's like all the others I've seen over the past two weeks—too eager to fuck her. All she has to do is look their way, and they start panting with need.

It's sickening.

But I know this guy is different. She doesn't know he's a hired rat. He

won't just fuck her; he'll take her afterward, and her world will never be the same. I may be no different, but I am the better choice.

I sit in the back seat of the blacked-out Mercedes across the street from her house. It's smaller than I expected. Her mom and dad left her and Preston with millions when they died, so I figured she would have a penthouse overlooking Central Park. Instead, she lives in a little townhome. Preston sure does live it up. The guy blows as much money on real estate around the world as he does on his expensive whores and drugs.

"Sir?" Kayn breaks the silence from the driver's seat. "What's the plan?"

"Wait," I answer.

They stumble up the stairs to her front door. Well, she really does stumble, but his is just for show. She throws her head back laughing when she almost trips, and he grabs her by the arm just in time when they hit the landing. They trip over each other's feet and fall against her front door. His hands go to her hips, his face to her neck, and she closes her eyes while her bright red lips part.

My cock hardens even as my jaw tightens. *When did she become such a fucking slut?*

He finally pulls away, and she opens her door before they disappear inside. I take a drink, finishing off the scotch, and then place the now empty glass on the seat beside me. "Let's go," I order, climbing out of the back of the car.

"Am I waiting on you, sir?" he asks while making our way toward the house.

"No," I answer, straightening my black tie. I'll get a ride.

I place my hand on the doorknob and turn. It opens for me, and I silently curse her for being so caught up in the idiot that she left it unlocked.

The sounds of moans and sighs fill the entrance of her house. It's nothing as I expected it to be. Her favorite color used to be pink, but now it seems to be black and gray. Void of any color and lacking any pictures or décor. It feels cold and empty. Just like her heart.

"God, baby ..." He groans.

"You like that?" She gives a soft laugh.

"Fuck yeah."

I walk down a long hallway, Kayn following me.

"Do it again ..."

I shove open the door at the end of the hall, and it hits the interior wall with a loud bang. She sits up with a scream, and he looks over his shoulder at

me still straddling her hips. “What the fuck? Get the fuck out!” he shouts at me.

Kayn walks right over to the bed and yanks him off her without saying a single word. He tries to fight him, but with his jeans down around his knees, it won't do him any good.

“What the hell, Avery?” she snaps, pulling her skirt down over her pussy.

“Avery?” the guy shouts, yanking his jeans up. “I know who you are ...”

Kayn shoves him forward, and I punch him in the face. The man falls to his knees on her floor.

“Avery!” she squeals, but I ignore her. I'll deal with her in a minute. Bending down to his level, I speak softly so only he can hear me. “I know who you are too.”

“Fuck you.” He spits blood onto her white rug. “I won't tell you shit.”

“We'll see.”

I lift my right hand and motion for Kayn to get him out of here. Kayn grabs him by the back of the neck and drags him to his feet before he removes him from the room. I turn toward her bed to once again face the woman I loathe.

“What the fuck are you doing?” she demands.

“I could ask you the same thing,” I respond calmly although I'm far from it. If I hadn't been watching her, she'd be drugged and on a plane to Cuba already.

She jumps out of bed and storms over to where I stand. She stops a foot from me, and her glassy blue eyes narrow on mine. Then just like last time I saw her, she slaps me.

This time, I slap her back.

The force makes her move back two steps, and she places her hand over her cheek while gasping in surprise that a man who had never laid his hands on her could now slap her without a second thought. She recovers quickly and lifts her hand to slap me again, but I shove her back, causing her ass to hit her long dresser and making her things rattle. “I told you I'd give you one pass.” I lean my lips down to hers like I did in the bathroom and almost kiss her. “Gonna yell for help?” I ask.

Her eyes narrow on me. “You don't scare me, Avery,” she says, breathing heavily.

I chuckle and grip her hips. She tries to twist out of them, but I keep her pinned between me and the dresser. “You should be very afraid of me, Bunny,” I say honestly.

“Go to hell!” she yells in my face, her fists punching my chest.

“Okay, Bunny. You wanna act tough?” I remove my right hand from her hip and run my knuckles down her reddened cheek where I just slapped her. She doesn’t even flinch. “But just know that I warned you.”

“What’s there to be afraid of?” she asks, and I want to slap her again. If only she knew.

“Me.” It’s simple.

“You’re just a man,” she snarls.

My eyes narrow on her, and my hand grips her hair, yanking her head back. It hits the mirror on her dresser with a thud. She doesn’t make a sound even though I know it hurt. I like the way she takes pain. Almost like she needs it even though she always seemed so fragile. I don’t know if the time apart has changed her, or if I could have been this rough with her all along. “What does that mean?” I demand.

She gives me a sinister smile as if she’s the one holding me in place and not the other way around. “It means you think with your dick. Even at this moment, I can feel how hard you are.” She licks her lips slowly as if she wants me to shove her to her knees and fuck her pretty little mouth. Images of her looking up at me with tears running down her face flash before me. But I’m brought back when she continues. “If I told you to fuck me right now, you’d do it.”

“Is that what you want? Want me to fuck you, Bunny?” I ask with a smirk.

She lifts her chin. “You weren’t the guy I planned on fucking tonight, Avery.”

I’ve had enough of her shit! She isn’t the same Bunny I remember. And I don’t like it. “Maybe I’ll do it anyway. I don’t need your permission.” Her lips thin. “Plus, from what I’ve seen, you don’t care who it is.”

“You don’t know anything about me!” She growls.

“I know enough.”

“Fuck you, Avery!”

I want to. Fuck, how I want to. It’s all I’ve thought about ever since I saw her at the club. Her hands on my skin. Fuck, I want to strip her down, shove her face first into the mattress, and fuck her without mercy. But I can’t. Right this second, I have other things to take care of, so she will have to wait. I let her go and take a step back.

A slow smile spreads across her face, lighting up her dark bedroom. She places her hands out to her sides, grabs an imaginary fabric, and curtsies.

“Thank you, sir.” Sarcasm drips off her words.

My cock throbs.

As if she knows what I’m thinking, that smile drops off her face, and her eyes narrow on me. “Now get the fuck out of my house, Avery. And I don’t want to see you again.”

I go to turn around, but something on her dresser catches my attention. I look down at the joint and arch a brow, looking back at her. “Alcohol, slut, and druggie?” I say, and her face tightens. “Never thought I’d see the day.”

“If I remember correctly, the first time I got drunk was with you. The first person I fucked was you. And the first person who got me high ... was you.”

I sit in a chaise chair, my head resting back and a cold beer in my right hand. Bunny straddles my hips. Her short blond hair tucked behind her ears. Laughter fills the room while my friends from school crowd around. Some playing pool and others playing darts in my father’s game room upstairs in his mansion.

“Here, man.” My friend Mitch hands me his blunt in passing.

I place it between my lips, taking a hit, then turn my head and blow it out so that it doesn’t blow in Bunny’s face. She hates when I smoke.

“Why do you do that?” she asks.

“Because I like the taste,” I respond honestly.

She tilts her head to the side. Her eyes go to the blunt in my hand, and she pulls her bottom lip between her teeth as she rolls it.

“Wanna try it?” I ask her.

She doesn’t answer, just continues to stare at it. I sit up and place my beer on the floor by my chair, then grab the back of her neck with my now free hand. I pull her toward me and her lips part, thinking I’m going to kiss her. Bringing the blunt to my lips, I inhale and then lower it, pressing my lips close to her face, and I blow it out. “Breathe in,” I order, and she does—shotgunning it from me.

She pulls away, coughing. And I lean back with a smile, taking another hit.

“Avery? Your turn,” Mitch calls out over by the pool table.

I slap her thigh, and she hops up, allowing me to walk over to the pool table to take my turn. Leaning over the side, I set my sights on the five ball and line my stick up with the cue ball. I look on ahead and see her now sitting in my chair, taking my place. I hit the ball, and it goes in. I line up my next shot, and it too goes straight to the pocket. My next shot is the eight ball, and

I sink it, winning the game.

I toss my stick onto the green felt and go back over to her. She looks up at me, and I straddle her hips and take another hit before leaning down and blowing it once again in her face. "I'm gonna get you high, Bunny," I tell her, and she coughs some more. "And then I'm gonna make everyone leave and bend you over the pool table."

"I told you to leave, Avery!" Her voice brings me back to now.

And I've had enough of memory lane for the night. I smile and tell her the same thing last time I saw her. "I'll be seeing you soon, Bunny." Then walk out of her house.

I stand in the abandoned old warehouse that Kayn found last week here in New York City. The man who I removed from Bunny's house lies on the floor, face covered in blood from my fist. His wallet lies open beside me, and I toss his license next to it.

I've removed my tie and rolled up my sleeves. I crouch down to his level, resting my forearm on my thigh. "Why does Damon want her?" I ask for the fifth time.

He spits blood out and looks up at me. "I'll never tell you."

I arch a brow. "You'd die for her?"

"Fuck no. Damon."

"He would never die for you, yet you show him this much loyalty?" I ask confused.

"I don't expect you to understand," he growls.

I stand and turn to face Kayn. He stands, shoulders back and head held high. That pissed-off look he always wears on his face. I hold out my hand, and he passes me the bolt cutters without thought.

Turning back to the man on the floor, I bend down and yank him to his feet. I throw his body over the silver table and flatten out his right hand. When I place his finger between the cold steel, he tries to yank it back.

"Kayn!" I bark.

He comes to stand behind the man without question and leans over him placing his forearm across Dennis's back to keep him pressed down onto the

table.

“For every minute you’re silent, I’ll take one of your fingers.” He whimpers. “Then I’m going to rip out a tooth for every minute after that. Then I’m going to drop you on his fucking doorstep. If he’s so fucking loyal to you, he’ll put a bullet in your Goddamn head.”

“If I tell you, he’ll kill me anyway,” he snaps, still trying to pull his hand free. I look up at Kayn, and he removes his forearm and places his hand around the back of his neck instead, getting a better grip.

“True,” I agree with him. And his body starts to shake. “The countdown has begun,” I say, looking down at the watch around his wrist as the seconds tick away.

I learned at a very young age that you can change a lot of things, but time is not one of them. It goes on. You can’t stop it or slow it down. My father taught me to use it to my advantage.

“One down,” I say when his first minute is up.

“No, no, no, no ...” he screams frantically.

But I press down, cutting into his flesh and bone with a pop, and his finger is gone. He screams into the silent warehouse as blood pools around his hand. The sight of it reminds me of my father. He always lived for shit like this. And somewhere along the way, he made me crave it too. No matter how long I tried to deny it.

“Why does he want her?” I ask again.

He bites his bottom lip, tears running down his face as his body shakes uncontrollably. But he stays silent. When another minute has passed, I do it again.

I look up at Kayn and give him a nod. He lets go of his neck and takes a step back. Dennis begins mumbling to himself in what sounds like German.

“What is that?” I ask, leaning down to his face.

He closes his eyes tightly as drool runs down his mouth. His head drops to the table with a thud. I roll my eyes. “Kayn,” I order, and he grabs him by his hair and yanks his head back again. Red, watery eyes meet mine. “Good, I was afraid you passed out on me.” I smile. “Where would the fun be in that?” He whimpers while drool runs down his chin, mixing with his tears. Two more minutes tick by when he finally opens his mouth to do something other than scream like a little child.

“Preston ran his mouth ...” He gasps through a sob. “That you are in love with her ...”

I look up at Kayn and even his usual look of hatred has turned to confusion. “How does he even know about Presleigh?”

He sucks in a deep breath. “Damon has been watching ... Preston. She met up for lunch with him last month while he was in New York ... Later on that night, Preston killed Damon’s brother.” My brows rise. That’s news to me. I didn’t know Damon’s brother was killed. I also didn’t know that Preston had lunch with her. He never mentioned meeting with his sister. But why would he? He knows how we feel about one another. “Damon wants her for revenge.”

“But why? I was told she was off-limits? Belonged to someone else. What the fuck does that mean?”

Snot runs from his nose. “I don’t know ...”

“Stop lying!” I roar.

He shakes his head, and Kayn lets go of it before it falls to the table once again. His blood covering the side of his face and hair.

I release his hand and take a step back, running a hand through my hair. He falls to the floor, cradling his thumb to his chest. Since it’s the only finger he has left on his right hand.

“What were your orders?” I ask, trying to make sense of this. “You were going to fuck her,” I say more to myself than him. “Damon wouldn’t want used merchandise.” But then again, it’s not like she’s a virgin. I took that cherry.

He sucks in a breath, tears still rolling down his face. “I was told I could do whatever I wanted with her ...” He sobs. “It didn’t matter how she arrived as long as she was delivered.” His voice rises; I’m sure he’s becoming angry due to his lack of power.

I spin the bolt cutters between my fingers and look over at Kayn. That stone-cold look back on his face. “When?” I ask Dennis.

He bows his head. “I was given forty-eight hours six hours ago.”

“I’m gonna give you twenty-four.”

Then I turn around and walk out of the warehouse, knowing that things are about to change. And they’re not gonna be better for Bunny. So like the selfish guy I am, I’m gonna go and get what I’ve wanted for eleven years now. Before the game changes.

PRESLEIGH

Eleven years ago . . .

I sit on the floor in my hotel room, slowly rocking back and forth with my knees pulled to my chest. I feel so lost. Alone. My chest tight and my mind silently screaming.

Why?

What did I do?

Was it all a lie?

I had been so naïve. So in love with a boy who I was blinded to what he was capable of—destroying me.

I look down at my phone and press play again even though I've already listened to it countless times since this morning. "I fucking hate you, Presleigh!" Avery growls, and my heart shatters a little more. "You were nothing to me. Do you hear me? Fucking nothing!" His voice rises to a scream. "Just something to kill the time." Tears run down my face, so much that they soak my shirt. "I hope you are happy with him. Just so you know, you'll never be anything to him either. You'll always be a whore who was meant to be used." I cover my face with my hands and sob at his words. He's right. I'll never be worth anything. They made sure of that. "He did me a favor, Presleigh." I choke out another sob. "Just as you fooled me, he'll do the same to you."

I sway in the shower, the water running down my body as the memories return. Not like I can forget. I haven't thought of them in a while, but like always, they creep up and remind me who I am. Numb. I've been numb for years.

Until Avery showed back up into my life. And now I feel alive. I try to push him out of my mind. He'll get me killed. But is that such a bad thing? There is no pain after death. No memories. And most of all, no love.

I still wear my pink thong and matching bra. The room sways, and I stumble over my own feet and go to grab my shampoo. I slip and fall into the tile wall, hitting my head.

I moan and then press my back into it before sliding down onto my ass.

I'm so fucked up. I'm not new to the club and alcohol scene by any means, but I've been drinking more ever since Avery cornered me in the bathroom at the club two weeks ago. I've been trying to drown my thoughts and desires

for him. It's not working.

I have to remind myself I fucking hate him. And then he showed up again at my place tonight. He slapped me. It was hard and unexpected, but I admit that I liked the way it felt. It made me wet. Finally, I felt something other than numbness. It also made me ashamed. So after he walked out of my house, I made my way into the kitchen and grabbed a bottle of vodka out of my fridge and started drinking more.

Even now, it sits beside me on the floor of the shower, half gone. I grab it and throw it back, not even feeling the burn. I hear my cell ringing, and I crawl out of my shower and onto my tiled floor, welcoming the coolness.

"Hello?" I slur when I push answer.

I hear a deep sigh. "Are you drunk?"

"Yes." Don't see the point in lying.

"Jesus, Pres," my brother snaps. "Where the fuck are you? Are you still in New York? I can get someone to come and get you."

"I'm fine," I say and then lick my lips. Vodka lingers on them, and it makes me moan.

"Fuck! I don't have time for this," he all but shouts in my ear. "I need you to get out of town. I need you to hide from him—"

"He already found me," I say, interrupting him and taking another drink of my vodka still in my hand.

He's silent for a long second. "Who found you?"

"Avery."

"What the fuck does he want?" he shouts as if that was not the *him* he was referring to earlier.

"He was looking for you actually."

"Fuck!" He hisses. "What else did he say?"

What did he say in the bathroom that night? "That he knows what you did."

"Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!" He curses in my ear.

I lie down on the cool tile while the shower continues to run. Closing my eyes, I release the bottle and slide my now free hand down my stomach to dip into my wet thong. I lean my head back and sigh when I run my finger over my pussy, thinking of Avery. At how much he would fuck me. I saw the look in his eyes and the power behind his hand to my face. He wants to dominate me. Hate fuck me. I hear that's the best.

"Presleigh?" my brother snaps in my ear. "What the fuck are you doing?"

I ignore him, hoping he'll hang up, but he doesn't. "Listen. I need you to jump on the jet and fly to me. Okay. Can you do that? I can come and get you, but it'll take me too much time." My finger slides between my wet lips, and I imagine it's Avery's. That he is teasing me. Making me wetter with anticipation.

"Goddammit, Presleigh," he shouts. "You need to listen to me ..." His words trail off, and I bite my lip to keep from moaning when I add a second finger. "Wait a second. You said you're in New York and that Avery was there. When did you see him last?"

"Tonight." I sigh, but he ignores it.

"Where did you see him at?"

I suck in a long breath. "My house," I say, removing them and enter them again.

"Next time you see him, call me," he demands.

"No," I manage to say.

"Presleigh! You don't understand what he is capable of. How dangerous he is," he urges.

"I do." Did he forget how we were raised? What we saw? Our father was just like Avery's, and I know that Preston is no saint. He took just as much as the others did. Women. Money. Drugs. You name it, my brother has snorted it and sold it. In our world, nothing is off-limits.

"Get your ass off this phone and on the jet. Now, Presleigh. If you don't, he will make a move." He growls. "And it'll be too late."

"Hello, Bunny."

I open my heavy eyes and look up from the tiled floor to the doorway in my bathroom. I blink a few times, wondering if I'm really seeing Avery standing there or if I'm dreaming it.

"Pres? Are you listening to me?" my brother yells.

"Gotta go," I mumble before I hang up, ignoring him shouting my name.

I drop my phone on the floor and sit up. His dark blue eyes stare at mine, void of emotion. His black tie from earlier is gone and his top two buttons are undone, but his shirt is still tucked into his black dress slacks. His hands are in his pockets while he casually leans against the doorway. His sleeves are rolled up, showcasing a set of tan and muscular forearms. His body looks relaxed, but his eyes tell a different story. They drop to between my legs where my hand was a moment ago.

"Thinking about me?" he asks with an arch of his brow. "Or was it the

bastard I had dragged out of here a few hours ago?”

My eyes narrow on him. “Fuck you, Avery.” I can’t let him see how he still affects me after all this time. Not after what he did to me. He doesn’t deserve two fucking seconds of my life.

He pushes off the doorway and stalks over to me. He removes his hands from his pockets and undoes the belt around his pants. My breathing hitches when the button comes undone, and then he is pushing down his zipper. Coming to a stop before me, he stares down at me. He reaches out and threads his fingers into my wet hair, tightening his grip. My lips part, and a cry falls from my lips when a thousand needles pierce my scalp.

“You know how long I’ve imagined you like this, Bunny?”

I don’t answer. I can’t. He’s got me under his spell just as he did back then. The past forgotten for a moment. I like his presence; it silences my mind. All I do is feel.

“Too fucking long.” He answers his own question.

Letting go of my hair, he wraps his large hand around my wrists and pulls me from the floor. Before I can say anything, he grabs my hips, lifts me, and carries me out of the bathroom.

He lays me on my bed. My body’s still wet from sitting in the shower, but he doesn’t seem to mind. He pushes the wet strands of my hair from my face while he pulls his hard cock from his slacks.

“Avery ...” I pant.

“What, Bunny? Isn’t this what you want?” he asks with a chuckle, and I hate that I can’t form a fucking sentence. That my body betrays me even when my mind screams to fight. To hit him. To tell him no. Fuck, he always had too much power over me. I look up at him, and the room sways. He smiles down at me as if he knows I’m under his spell.

His free hand yanks my thong to the side, and I close my eyes when he runs his fingers over my pussy. “I think you were thinking about me.”

I bite my bottom lip to keep from crying out from his soft touch. He lowers his lips to my ear. “I want you like this one last time, Bunny,” he whispers harshly.

“What do you mean ...?” My slurred words are cut off when he slides into my soaked pussy. Stretching me in the way that only he ever could.

“Fuck!” He growls into my ear.

CHAPTER FIVE

AVERY

I BUTTON UP MY SHIRT and turn to the bed. Presleigh lies on her stomach, her arms fanned out and head to the side, facing me. And I want nothing more than to pick her up in my arms and carry her out of this house. But I can't. Not like this. Certain steps must be taken in order to ensure I get what I want. I turn and walk into her bathroom. Bending down, I pick up her cell off the floor and go to her call log. Last incoming call was from Preston. I smile. And he's called ten times since then. He knows I'm here, and she told him that I'm looking for him. Good. All part of my plan. Setting the phone back down, I turn and walk out of the bathroom. Going over to her dresser, I start opening her drawers. Not looking for anything specific, just doing it simply 'cause I can.

Drawer after drawer, I find nothing but clothes. After shutting the last one, my eyes land on the joint she has lying on top of the dresser. I pick it up and walk back into the bathroom and flush it. She won't be doing shit like that anymore.

I pull my cell out of my pocket while making my way into the kitchen.

"Hello, sir." Kayn answers on the first ring.

"Did Dennis make the call?" I ask although I already know he did.

"Yes. We're following him now, sir."

I yank open a drawer by the sink and reach into it. Turning my hand, I feel along the top of the drawer. *Gotcha!* I feel the brass key and yank it free from the tape holding it in place. Some things never change. "Don't bother," I tell Kayn, holding the key. "There's a few things I need you to do for me."

"What are they?"

"Meet me at her house. I want surveillance on the inside and outside perimeter."

There's a long pause. "Are you there now, sir?" he asks.

"Yes," I snap. "Does that make a difference on whether you're gonna do your job?"

“No, sir! I was just ...”

“Good. Then get your ass here and get the cameras in place!” I bark out the order and then hang up.

Placing the phone and key in my pocket, I make my way back into her master bedroom. I lean up against the doorframe and cross my arms over my chest. She hasn't moved, and the urge to remove my clothes and crawl between her legs again is overwhelming. My cock hardens just looking at her. But I was telling her the truth, that was our last time like that. Next time I take her, she will be sober, I'll be rough, and she'll be on her knees begging me. Tears in her eyes and trembling lips. I smile. I'll have her exactly where I want her.

I don't know how long I stand there staring at her, but it must be a while 'cause I undo my arms and spin around when I hear the front door to her house open. Kayn walks toward me seconds later. “I'm ready to set up, sir.”

Darrell, another one of my guys, walks in behind him, but instead of looking at me, his eyes go to the naked brunette lying in her bed. I reach behind me and pull her bedroom door shut. His eyes find mine. “Get the cameras up and running,” I order and then walk past them, heading to the living room.

PRESLEIGH

“What's wrong with you?” Alex yells over the music.

I shake my head at her and holler back, “Nothing.” Grabbing the shot of Fireball off the bar, I throw it back. I close my eyes and hang my head, taking in a deep breath from the burn.

“You're not yourself tonight,” she continues, shoving another shot in front of me.

“Tired.” I grab it and swallow it as well.

“Bullshit!” She places her hand on my shoulder and spins me around to face her. “What is it?”

I look over her pale blue eyes and bleach blond hair. She raises her brows and places her hands on her narrow hips. “Spill it.”

I run a hand through my hair. “I'm just ...” Confused? Concerned? Going insane? I woke up this morning naked in my bed, my shower still running with an ache between my legs trying to remember what the hell happened last

night. What was real and what was a dream. I know I spoke to my brother. The twenty missed calls I had verified that part. And he's continued to call me all day, but I've ignored them all. But Avery? Was he really there? Did we have sex? Did I say something I'll regret? Like I love him? Or worse? Tell him the truth about what happened all those years ago?

"Presleigh?" she snaps.

"Tired," I repeat. "Just tired."

Alex eyes me skeptically, and I give her a fake smile. She rolls them but turns to the bartender. Holding up two fingers, she orders more shots.

An hour and countless drinks later, the alcohol has set in, and I realize it was a dream. He wasn't really there, and we didn't have sex. I just chalk it up to some sick fantasy. And I hate how much I wish it was true.

Alex grabs my arm, and I allow her to lead me away from the bar and down a hallway to a private room that reads *greed* on the door.

"There's my girl." Milton, a guy I've been sleeping with for the past three years, sits on a couch with his arms out wide when we walk in. "Come," he orders, patting his thighs.

Like the lap dog he thinks I am, I obey. Plopping down, he places his hands on my face and pulls me down for a kiss. It's wet and messy, but I don't pull away.

Alex sits down on her friend's lap. The guy is a major drug dealer here in New York. Whatever you want, he gets it.

"Brent, get our waitress to bring the girls some drinks," Milton orders his other friend who sits in a chair. Then he looks back at me. "Where you been, baby?"

"The bar," I answer and lean into him. *Forget about Avery*. I'm done seeing him. There's a disco ball hanging from the ceiling, and someone turns it on, making all the colors bounce off the walls. I blink a few times, thinking the room is spinning.

"You okay?" he asks me.

I nod my head and close my eyes.

"Here. Give her some of this," his friend offers, handing Milton a baggie full of what I know is cocaine.

"No." I push it away.

"Babe? Come on. It'll help you sober up, and then you can drink more." He places the bag in front of me again.

"I said no." I push off him and storm out of the room. I run into a few

people as I make my way through the packed club, not really knowing where I'm headed. The place is crowded. Seven Deadly Sins just opened last week, and tonight is our first time here. It already has a reputation. Word spreads fast in this town.

The hairs on the back of my neck stand up, and I come to a stop. I spin around, looking to see why I all of a sudden feel like I'm being watched.

Is he here?

Could Avery have followed me tonight? Is he still in town?

It wouldn't be a stretch. He's showed up twice now in the past two weeks. And I have a feeling he's not leaving New York until he locates my brother.

Someone bumps into me, and it causes me to spin around. I trip over my heels and fall into a set of arms. "I'm sorry ..." My words trail off when I look up into a set of familiar brown eyes.

They narrow on me. "What the fuck are you doing here?" my brother demands.

"Preston?" I blink, confused.

"Fuck, Pres." He grips my upper arm and starts to drag me through the crowd.

"Ow." I whine, trying to keep up with him. "You're hurting me."

"I don't have the time to babysit your ass." I can barely hear him over the music.

"What are you doing here?" I ask. Last I heard, he was in London. But that was a month ago. He didn't sound like he was in New York when I spoke to him last night.

He doesn't answer. Instead, he pulls me through the exit, and there's a black Hummer parked right outside.

"Preston ..."

He opens the back door and shoves me into it before jumping in himself. I turn on him. "What the fuck are you doing?" I snap.

"Business," he says.

"Business?" I repeat as the driver stomps on the gas. "If you're here for work, then why did you just drag me out of the club?"

He pulls his cell out of his pocket and starts typing away. "Because you're business, Pres," he says.

I sit back in my seat, cross my arms over my chest, and let out a huff.

"Take me home," I demand.

"That's exactly where you're going," he says matter-of-factly.

I ignore him. He always thought he was my boss, and it just got worse after our parents died. Preston treats me as though I'm still sixteen. We were never close. He was like them—our father and Avery's father. He liked the girls, the drugs, and the money. I, however, didn't find myself in a bottle or high until I was older. I despised my father for his life choices. And I hated Preston for looking up to him and wanting to follow in his footsteps. I never understood it. The need for the power, for control. I never cared what others thought of me. Well, anyone but Avery. I wanted him to think I was a good person and wanted him to see another life with me. A way out from under his father. Then there was my mother. She was no better than the man she married. She never hurt the girls, but she never stopped him either. She liked the mansion, summer villas, furs, and expensive jewelry he gave her. She told me some are born lucky and some are born to serve. We were the lucky ones. The older I got, the more I began to understand how wrong she was.

A phone rings, breaking the silence. "Hello?" Preston answers. "Perfect." He slaps his hand on his thigh and smiles like an idiot. "I'm about thirty minutes out. Dropping off Pres and then I'll be there." He nods to himself. "See you then."

I look away from him and out my window at the New York City lights that light up the sky. They blur under my drunken state.

"I'm dropping you off at home," he says. I ignore him. We've already established that. "Then I'll be back later to pick you up."

"Don't bother," I say, still looking out the window.

He grips my thigh, and my head snaps to face him. "Stop touching me, Preston!" I yell, trying to shove him off, but he doesn't let go.

"It wasn't a request," he growls.

"I don't know what the hell is wrong with you, but you need to drop the tough guy act." I punch him in the arm. His grip just tightens. "I don't want you here. And I sure as hell am not going anywhere with you."

"You'll do whatever I say, Pres."

My jaw tightens, and my teeth grind. I want to knock the shit out of him, but I know he'll hit me back. It wouldn't be the first time we've dished it out. And he wouldn't just slap me like Avery did. When Preston starts, he doesn't stop. My father never taught him that. You fight till your death.

"Why don't you do something about it?" I demand, following my brother down Mr. Decker's hallway. We both used to spend a lot of time here but

each for different reasons. Now that our parents have passed, we live here.

“Because I don’t want to do anything about it,” he answers.

I grab his arm and yank him to a stop. It takes all my strength. He spins around to face me. His hands come out, and he shoves me backward. Hard. I hit a wall, and he gets in my face. “Shut the fuck up, Pres!”

My eyes narrow up on his. “You wanna be like him? Dad?” I verify. “Preston this is wrong. What you’re doing is ...”

He slaps me across the face, cutting off my words. Pressing his body into mine, I whimper. It’s not the first time he’s put his hands on me, but I’ve never told anyone. Avery would kick his ass, and that would just start trouble. Trouble that I don’t want Avery getting into. “Shut up, Pres!” he whispers harshly. “Keep your head low and your fucking mouth closed.”

Tears begin to sting my eyes when he grips my chin tightly and forces me to look up at him. “If you know what’s good for you, you’ll pretend you don’t give a damn about these women.” He lets go of my chin and runs his knuckles down the side of my face. I physically shake in fear. Our parents are dead, and Avery isn’t home at the moment. I have no one to protect me from him. I shouldn’t have pushed him. “If you start to care too much, you may find yourself in their position.”

“Preston!”

I relax when I hear Mr. Decker call out his name. He’s not the first person I’d want to help me, but I’ll take it.

Preston takes a step back from me and turns to face him. “Go to the cellar. There are plenty of women to play with down there.” Mr. Decker’s eyes meet mine and he adds, “She doesn’t belong to you.”

I hate how they refer to me as Avery’s property. But it’s better than the alternative.

Then he spins around and walks away from me. Before Mr. Decker can say anything else, I run to Avery’s room and slam the door shut behind me and lock it.

“How did you find me?” I ask.

Of course, he doesn’t answer. He takes my subject change as if I’ve agreed to go anywhere with him and lets go of my thigh.

“Max will stay back at your house with you.”

“Who the hell is Max?” I demand.

He points at the man driving us around.

“Preston, I don’t know what is going on, but I don’t need a babysitter.”
What the hell is my brother’s problem, and since when is he concerned about my safety?

Instead of arguing with me, he sits back and makes a phone call.

I fist my hands in my lap. Whatever. I’ll allow him to take me home, and his buddy to stay, but I’m gonna lock myself in my room and drink myself into a coma. That was my original plan for tonight anyway. I just wanted to do it with Alex, but I guess I’ll do it alone instead.

CHAPTER SIX

AVERY

MY HEAD HANGS FORWARD, my chin resting on my chest. My hands are tied behind my back while I sit on a cold and unforgiving metal chair. My breathing is even, and my heart is beating steady. I show no sign of consciousness. I show no sign of fear. This is who I am. This is how my body operates. I'm never in a situation I didn't see coming. I knew they'd come for me. Exactly how I wanted them to.

They had to hit me over the head and knock my ass out before they took me from the back alley at my hotel here in New York. And brought me to the same abandoned warehouse where I brought that fucker Dennis last night. But I've been awake most of the transfer—biding my time.

“Wake him up.” The familiar voice rings out in the room.

A hand digs into my hair, and my head is yanked back. Then I'm slapped. My eyes spring open as I look at the man who orchestrated this horrible plan, ignoring the sting on my face. My body still just as relaxed as before. I've been conditioned to take pain and not show it.

He knows this!

“Nice of you to join us, Avery.” The man standing in front of me smiles excitedly as if he just got his prize. “I hear you've been looking for me.” He removes his hands from the pockets of his slacks and spreads them out wide. “Here I am.”

I say nothing.

Two men stand on either side of me. I know them well—Jasper and Kin. The one to my left still holding my head by my hair out of disrespect for me.

He dies first.

“Have nothing to say?” he muses with a chuckle. “Well, there's a first for everything.”

I very carefully reach into the back of my slacks and open the secret pocket where the tiny pocket knife is located. I'm prepared—always ten steps ahead. I planned this down to the second. *He's so predictable.*

Slowly, I work the knife through the rope that binds my wrists. If his men were smart, they would have used handcuffs. I would have gotten out of those too, but still. Just more proof that he's an idiot.

The ropes break free, but I keep my hands in place, holding the rough material so it doesn't fall to the concrete floor and give my freedom away.

I continue to stare at him.

He continues to smirk at me.

"You must have something to say. Beg for your life. Ask for a quick death."

Still, I say nothing.

He runs his mouth too much. I can't wait to see him begging for mercy for what he's made me about to do. I won't show it. I never do.

"You made quite an impression on Dennis last night. I must say, I'm surprised you didn't just go ahead and remove his thumb." He shakes his head as if disappointed in me. "Not like it's gonna do him any good." I don't miss the fact that he hasn't mentioned me talking to his sister. I know she told him I was here in town because that's why he's here now. She told on me just as I wanted her to. I stood there watching her lie on her bathroom floor for a couple of minutes before I let her know I was there. Too lost in the moment of watching her touch herself.

"Well, as fun as this chat has been, I must be going." He rocks back on his heels. The smile on his face widens, and his dark brown eyes light up with pleasure. "It's just business, Avery. You understand that, right?" He looks at the men who flank me and nods. "Make sure to grab the goods after you're finished with him." Then he turns around and walks toward the two steel doors, whistling.

I smile.

Bringing my arms out from behind me, I jam my knife into Jasper's neck. I yank the gun out of his waistband before he hits the floor and shoot Kin in the head. They both fall to the ground dead. Just as I had planned.

I look up to see Preston has turned to face me, and that smirk's no longer on his face. It's now drained of color. He raises his hands in surrender.

"Avery ..." I shoot him in the leg.

He drops to the concrete floor, blood instantly pooling around him. I shot his thigh right above his knee, avoiding his femur. I don't want the guy to die, but I do want him to suffer.

The double steel doors open, and two of my men walk in. I had them stay

back and follow when I was taken, so they were waiting outside for their cue, which was my gunfire. Their shoulders back and heads held high, dressed in their expensive Armani suits. They look like they're dressed to impress, not beat and enslave.

They both walk to Preston and pick him up under his arms. He whimpers when they place him in the metal chair I had previously occupied. They then grab the dead guys and place them against the wall on top of one another before they return to stand by him.

"You're right." I finally break my silence. "I was looking for you. And I must admit, you were hard to find." I've been trying to locate him ever since I got that phone call weeks ago. The bastard is actually good at hiding, but he's also predictable.

"I messed up," he admits, dropping his head.

"That's an understatement."

"Please don't kill me." The sound of his begging makes me smile.

"That would be too easy for you."

He tries to get up off the chair, but my men place a hand on his shoulders to keep him sitting. He looks at both of them with a terrified expression.

"How did you ...?"

"You think you outsmarted me?" I laugh. "I *allowed* you to take me. I couldn't find you, but I knew you'd come right to me. And now, here we are."

He lets out a moan of pain. "You baited me?"

I don't answer because I refuse to waste my breath on stupid questions.

"What are you gonna do with me now?" he asks, hanging his head. Not sure if it's in defeat or due to blood loss. The warehouse smells of copper, and a steady drip falls from the chair to the concrete floor.

"I'm gonna give you a chance to make it right. But in the meantime, I'm gonna keep something to make sure you get the job done this time."

"Anything. You know I'm good for it." He lies easily, forgetting that I know him well. He's already thinking of ways to fuck me.

He's not gonna like *what* I plan on taking. "Presleigh."

His head snaps up, and he looks at me, his eyes wide and face drained of color. That right there was the look I wanted to see. It makes letting this man take me worth it.

"No ... you ... can't ..."

"Phone," I demand, lifting my free hand to my men.

Mason digs his phone out of his pocket and hands it to me. I dial and then place it on speakerphone before setting it on the metal table next to me. The same one where I cut off Dennis's fingers just last night. His blood still covers it, now dried.

"Kayn." The male's voice answers. He does all my dirty work for me. I pay him more than enough to follow orders, and he never asks questions.

"What's the status?"

"About to breach," he informs me.

I smile. "Perfect timing." It's a little past four a.m., so she should be home from the bar by now. And they've already been instructed that if a man is there, to kill him and get rid of the body.

Preston stares up at me. "Wait, Avery. She'll hate you ..."

She already does. And the feeling is mutual. "I don't care."

When he realizes I'm telling the truth, he continues to beg. "Avery, please ..."

"Too late to beg." I made up my mind weeks ago. And once I make a decision, I never go back on it. Plus, I want her. Fuck, how I want her.

"Stand by," Kayn says quietly.

We stand in silence, listening to the phone. There's the sound of a door creaking open, then nothing but silence.

After a few minutes, you hear a muffled shot, and then Kayn says, "Living room clear." I know that wasn't for my benefit. He's speaking through his earpiece to the five other men I have there.

"Hope he wasn't important to you," I say to Preston, knowing that Kayn just killed one of his guys.

"Avery!" He growls. "You can't do this ..."

"Shut the fuck up," I snap.

He did this to her!

He closes his eyes as if he can't believe this is happening.

A loud feminine scream comes through the speakers, and I smile at the sound of her voice. Then glass shatters. "Get off ..." she calls out, but the rest is muffled by a hand over her mouth.

"Fuck." One of my guys moans.

"Fucking bitch," another says, followed by the sound of her being slapped. My smile widens at Preston while he listens in horror.

"Hold her down," another demands.

"Trying ..."

She screams again, and then you hear commotion as things get knocked over. More glass shatters.

“She ran out the back door,” another one calls out.

Hope blooms in Preston’s eyes that she may get free. I continue to smile, knowing they’ll get her. That’s what I pay them for. Plus, my men like to hunt.

We can hear him running after her, and her faint cries in the distance, but he’s gaining on her. He’s six-foot-four, so those long legs will get her in no time. I know they’re running behind her house. I could have taken her last night after I made love to her one last time, but I wanted to play mind games with her. I had slapped her earlier and then told her I was gonna take her body. But I wanted her to give it willingly. I wanted to see just how far she would let me go. When I showed up back at her place, she was even drunker than when I left her, but there was no denying it. She may hate me, but she wanted me between her legs. But that’ll never happen again. Not like that—soft and sweet. It’ll be hard and dominating. I’ll remind her why she hated me in the first place.

“Please, Avery ...” Preston pulls me back to the moment. This is why I waited. He never really treated her like he cared, but put in a situation he can’t control, I knew it would affect him.

A few gunshots go off, and Preston gasps before he narrows his eyes on me. “If you kill her ...”

“I want her alive,” I say simply. And my men know that. They did it as a warning.

His jaw tightens, and he looks away from me. Once I get her, she’ll wish they would have killed her.

“Found her,” a man shouts, and then she screams as we hear them hit the ground. “Drug her,” he orders, barely out of breath.

I run my men like dogs, so they attack like wolves.

“No.” We hear her panicked voice. “Don’t ...” Her voice trails off, and then there’s silence.

I walk forward, closing the distance between Preston and me.

“You son of a bitch,” he says through gritted teeth.

“This is your fault. You chose to fuck up! Now you must pay the price.”

“She’s innocent,” he growls.

“The innocent are the first sacrificed in war.”

He hangs his head and shakes it, knowing I won’t give her back. “How

long?” he finally asks.

Now we're getting somewhere. “You have four weeks to kill *him*.” The longer I have her, the more he'll sweat. I snap my fingers, and the men drop the black duffle bag by his feet.

“No one can kill him!” he growls through gritted teeth.

“You better find a way, Preston,” I say. I'm setting him up. He has to know that. I plan on finding Damon and killing him myself. But this will keep Preston busy and out of my way. And who knows, maybe he'll get himself killed along the way.

“When I finish the job, you'll let her go?” he asks roughly.

I almost laugh. “No. You complete the job in four weeks, and I'll kill her.” He doesn't even flinch. “If you haven't fulfilled your duty by the end of the four weeks, I'll keep her.” Whatever he chooses to do, she will spend the rest of her days under my control.

“Fucking bastard.” He sneers. “You loved her once.”

I ignore that statement. “What's it gonna be, Preston? Her blood is already on your hands.” He tries to stand on his one good leg from the chair, but my men grab his shoulders and shove him back down to his ass. “Now it's up to you how she spends what time she has left.”

“Sir?” Kayn's voice comes through the phone. “The package is secure.”

Piece of cake. “Four weeks, Preston.” I then turn my back on him, pick up my phone, turn it off speakerphone, and place it to my ear, walking out into the early morning night. “No one touches her but me. Am I clear?”

“Yes, sir.”

I sit in my study back in Vancouver with a glass of scotch on my desk. My younger brother lounges in the chair across from me. The crackling of the wood in the fireplace fills the room. Doesn't matter what time of year it is, I always have it burning. “You sure you wanna do this?” Tristan asks, breaking the silence.

“It's already done.”

He sighs, but I ignore it, hoping he'll drop the subject. He doesn't. “Let's not forget that it's Presleigh. One, you guys were in love. Two, now you guys hate one another. And three, any bitch being here day and night would be a

problem. There's a reason we sleep with nothing but whores." He takes a drink of his scotch.

"You fuck whores." *I don't pay for sex.*

He ignores me just as easily and continues. "You've never lived with a woman before, and now you're moving her in here with you like she's your fucking wife."

"Slave," I correct him.

He rolls his eyes, not believing me. "Come on, Avery. You can't fool me."

"What do you suggest I do?" Not like I really care.

"Break her neck and throw her into the Mediterranean Sea. Let the sharks swallow what's left of Preston's family." He takes another drink. "She's gonna do nothing but cause problems."

"I can handle her."

He snorts.

That's the difference between me and my brother. He prefers the easy way, and I don't. "Plus, that means what I told Preston was an empty threat."

He shrugs. And tosses back his drink. "So?"

"So? What's the point of making a threat if you don't follow through with it?"

We are ruthless. Soulless. We make those who fuck us, pay—with their lives. Our father taught us that respect should be earned, and we have done things to make sure we get that.

He looks up at me with no emotion in his blue eyes. "She's gonna die regardless. If not by you, then Damon will ..."

I lift my hand to stop him, and he obeys.

"I can do it for you," he offers when I don't say anything.

My eyes narrow on him. "Don't fucking touch her." *She's mine.* She always has been and always will be. That's why I chose to take her when I did. Damon doesn't deserve her. I do!

He rolls his eyes. "I'm just trying to help you. I've seen you kill without blinking. And if you don't plan on bluffing ..." He spreads his hands out wide. "Then you have to kill her."

"I will. When I'm finished with her," I say through gritted teeth. That could be years down the road.

I haven't been able to get that look on her face out of my head. The way her glassy eyes looked at mine and how her soft hands gripped my shoulders. It was as if I had been dead for the past eleven years and she brought me back

to life.

It's fucking pathetic!

I take a drink of my scotch.

It proved that, after all this time, she still wanted me. And I plan on giving her what she wants. I'm going to fuck her until she's a crawling, sobbing mess. But this time will be different. I'm calling the shots.

Her brother actually did me a favor by fucking up.

The door opens, and my butler walks in with his hands behind his back and dressed in a black three-piece suit, thankfully ending this conversation.

"They've arrived, sir."

"Thank you, Marvin." I nod and abandon my study, Tristan following behind me.

We both come to stand in the foyer of my home when the double doors open and in walks Kayn. He has that usual look of hatred on his face, and he's carrying an unconscious Presleigh in his arms.

Her head bobs, then it flops back, exposing her thin and elegant neck. Having my hand wrapped around it made me hard. I loved that she didn't even try to fight me that night in the bathroom of the club. That seems so long ago now. Her right arm dangles to the side and long legs hang over the other as he carries her limp body.

"She's a handful," he announces.

My brother grunts as if to say *I told you so*.

"How so?" I question, wanting details. It's been almost ten hours since I heard him take her from her home in New York. I haven't spoken to him, knowing they were traveling on my private jet.

"She woke up on the plane and stabbed Darrell in the arm with a fork."

At the mention of Darrell, he walks in behind him. Shirtless with a white bandage wrapped around his upper arm, he has dried blood running down to his wrist.

"How did she get a fork?" I ask, smiling. She's got bigger balls than her brother. But she always has. That's why I fell in love with her in the first place. She's also afraid to fly. That's another reason they needed to drug her. I knew she'd freak out in the air.

"I was eating, and she grabbed it from me," Darrell explains. "I didn't think she'd wake up. I gave her enough to keep her out for the entire flight. Or so I thought."

I arch a brow. Maybe I need to kill him since he fucked up and let a

woman get the better of him and can't do a simple job.

Kayn comes to a stop in front of us. Some of her brown hair covers her face, and my brother pushes it away to reveal her to us. It's void of any makeup; her full lips are slightly parted, and there's a handprint across her right cheek and a bruise on her shoulder. Her bottom lip has a cut on it. I told Kayn that no one touches her, but I meant sexually. I knew my men would do whatever was necessary to get her—even if that meant smacking her around.

She wears a white tank top that has ridden up, exposing her flat stomach and a black jeweled belly piercing. With a pair of white cotton shorts. *That's what she must have worn to bed.*

"Now I understand why you want to play with her," my brother says as if he could forget how beautiful she is.

I never did.

Kayn goes to step around us, but I hold out my arms. He hands her off without protest.

Her frail body sags in my arms, but she doesn't make a sound. "How much did you give her the second time?" I ask because it should be wearing off soon.

Darrell smiles. "I gave her a double dose. She should be out until later tonight," he says, proud of himself.

I give them my back and begin climbing the winding staircase to her new room.

PRESLEIGH

I wake to a pounding headache and dry mouth. I dig my face into a soft pillow and moan in agony. My entire body is sore. I lick my cracked lips and hiss in a breath when I feel a pain in my neck. It's stiff.

Sitting up, I brush my wild hair out of my face and open my eyes. I blink a few times, trying to adjust to the darkness. A lamp is on a table to my left but dimmed. My head falls forward, and I place my hands over it.

What did I do?

My cheek throbs, and I pull my hands away to see cuts on them and my wrists. I flinch when I touch my face.

I look around and realize I'm in an unfamiliar bedroom. Bright white walls with five big bay windows to my right. Blood red drapes are open, showing

me the night. The floor is a dark hardwood with a big area rug to match the drapes and comforter. The bed is a white four-post sleigh bed. A white leather couch sits in front of the windows. A chair sits over in the corner, and in front of me, there's a fireplace. It's the exact opposite of my black and gray décor. Not to mention, this bedroom is the size of half my house.

Where am I?

Did I drink too much last night? I remember going out with Alex and then Preston showing up and dragging me out. He had taken me home. I opened a bottle of Fireball the moment I got inside my house. I don't remember passing out, but I do remember waking up at one point ...

A strange sound wakes me up. I open my eyes and see my bedroom door still shut. I lie back down, knowing it's Max, my brother's idiot friend. Maybe Preston is back.

"Living room clear."

I open my eyes again and blink. Is someone else in my house? No. I dreamed it. The alcohol is making me hear things. I close my eyes, and seconds later, I hear my bedroom door open.

I scream as a man walks into my room. He rushes my bed and grabs me, but I shove him off. He hits my nightstand and knocks over my lamp, shattering the bulb. "Get off ..." I scream, but a hand slaps over my mouth. I bite down on it as hard as I can.

"Fuck." The guy who had hit the nightstand moans from the floor. "Fucking bitch," the guy who I bit growls, and then he slaps me across the face.

Two hands grab my shoulders, pushing me onto the bed. "Hold her down," another demands.

"Trying ..."

I scream, kicking one in the face, and then I jump up and run toward the back sliding glass door. Glass shatters behind me, but I don't stop.

"She ran out the back door," I hear one say.

I run barefoot through my backyard toward the trees. I can climb one and hide until they give up.

My heart races, and I trip, scraping my knees on tree branches. The world tilts from my drunken state, and I cuss myself. Gunfire goes off, and it has me looking backward, causing me to trip once again. I cry out, standing just as one of them leaps for me, taking me to the ground.

“Drug her,” he orders

“No ...” I scream. I’ll never make it if they do. “Don’t ...” I get out just as I feel a prick in my neck. And everything goes black.

I throw the covers off me when I feel bile rise. I stumble to one of the doors in the bedroom and fling it open. Thankfully, it’s the bathroom. It bangs, hitting the interior wall. I run toward the toilet and fall to my knees just in time to spill all my contents into it.

No. No. No. This can’t be happening.

I hug the toilet as more memories flood my foggy thoughts.

Where am I? I can hear the roaring of what sounds like engines and feel vibrations. Am I on a plane? No, I can’t be. I don’t fly.

My body jerks, and my eyes spring open. The first thing I see is a row of empty seats facing me. My chest starts to tighten. My head snaps to the right, and there’s a window. All I see is a red blinking light out on a wing. My breath comes quicker.

I’m on a plane.

My palms start to sweat, and my stomach knots.

I’m on a fucking plane.

I don’t fly. Preston knows that. All of my friends know I have aerophobia—a fear of flying.

I undo my seatbelt with shaky hands and stand. I see the back of three male heads about five rows ahead of me. I run toward them, not knowing what I plan on doing but needing to get off this plane.

“Shit!” one says when I near.

The other two turn to face me right as I approach. One stands and grabs my right wrist. I go to open my mouth, but he yanks me down to the floor.

I scream and try to push myself up when the third stands. A plate falls to the floor along with a fork. I grab the fork with my free hand. When a guy bends down to pull me up, I lift the utensil and jam it into the nearest piece of flesh I can find.

I’m screaming, thrashing around on my stomach, when someone grabs my hair and slams my head into the floor. Then everything goes black.

I continue to hug the toilet, retching all the alcohol I had last night along with whatever they gave me. My vision is still a little foggy, my body still

drowsy. It not only knocked me out but also left me with a pounding headache. Or that could very much well be the hangover.

I hear the sound of shoes clapping on the hardwood in the adjoining bedroom before they enter the bathroom. I stay on my knees with my head down, refusing to look up.

Out of my peripheral vision, I see a pair of shiny black shoes stop beside me. Whoever he is, he doesn't say anything and just stands there looking down at me as I continue to vomit so much I start to dry heave.

"Go away," I order roughly, knowing it's my brother. He said he'd be back for me. He probably realized I wasn't going anywhere with him after he dropped me off at home. He's such a fucking ass.

He continues to stand there, being the dick of a brother he is. I sit back on my heels. I wipe my face with the back of my hand and place my pounding head in my hands.

"Get up." He finally speaks.

I look up to see a pair of baby blue eyes, and I blink, thinking he'll go away like magic, but he doesn't. Avery stands above me. I can't help it. I burst out laughing. "Is this some kind of a joke?" I ask, looking behind him for my brother. They have to be playing some very shitty trick on me.

"Preston?" I call out, and my voice squeaks.

He doesn't answer or laugh. He's dressed in a black button-down with the sleeves rolled up to expose his forearms and black slacks with his hands in the pockets. A skinny black tie around his neck. He looks good and dangerous.

His dark blue eyes stare down at me. He doesn't look annoyed or happy. Just indifferent.

"I said go away," I snap, narrowing my eyes on him. "I don't have time for whatever game you're playing, Avery." I suck in a long breath and scream out. "Preston ...?"

His hand shoots out, and he grabs me by my hair and drags me up off the floor, cutting me off.

My scalp stings, and I hiss in a breath at his roughness. "What the hell ...?" I try to fight him off, but he's too strong. He shoves my back against the cool wall, and my head hits it with a thud. My eyes fall closed as the room starts to spin all over again, making my nausea return.

"Look at me," he demands as his hand wraps around my throat, holding me in place.

I open my heavy eyes, trying to calm my racing heart. His hand tightens on my neck, and it takes my air away.

His blue eyes narrow on me, and he leans in, placing his face in front of mine. “When I tell you to do something, you fucking do it.”

Gripping his wrist, I try to get his hand off my throat, but it’s no use. My lips part, trying to suck in a breath, but nothing comes. My back presses into the cold wall, and I release his wrist and place them on his black button-down. I try to push him away, but he just steps closer, his body pressing into mine. Dots form in my vision, and tears well up in my eyes, but I refuse to let them fall or show any kind of weakness.

Not this time.

Not for this man!

“Do you understand?” he demands.

My mouth opens to answer, but nothing comes out. The dots double, and I can feel my heartbeat in my face, making my already sore cheek throb.

“Answer me!”

“Y-yeesss,” I manage to choke out.

He releases my neck and steps away from me. I crumple to the floor once again like a sack of bricks. My already bruised knees sting from the force of meeting the cold tile. Coughing and holding my neck, I take a deep breath, and it burns. The tears still threaten to fall, but I hold them back.

My headache intensifies, and I feel the rush of blood pounding loudly in my ears.

“Get up.”

I look up at him, and he glares down at me, daring me to defy him again. His hands are back in his pockets, and his muscular legs wide. He looks relaxed, but I can see it in his eyes. He’s waiting for me to disobey again. He wants to slam me back up against the wall, and this time, I have a feeling he won’t let go until I pass out.

Deciding I’m better conscious than knocked out, I slowly rise on my shaky legs. His eyes stay on mine.

“Where the fuck am I, Avery?” I ask, and my voice is scratchy. I’m surprised I was even able to get a word out. “And why did you bring me here?” It doesn’t make any sense. Eleven years and all of a sudden here I am.

He ignores my questions. “Your clothes are in the closet.” He looks me up and down, pulling his lip back in disgust, adding, “You look like shit and need food. Get dressed and meet me downstairs for dinner.” Without waiting

for me to argue, he walks out.

I make my way over to the sink on shaky legs and look at myself in the mirror. I have a bruise on my cheek, a cut on my lip, and bruises dot my shoulders and arms. I know they're not from him. They are from the five men who I tried to fight last night. No matter what I did, they were ready for it.

I turn the sink on and splash my face with cold water and then rinse my mouth out. I see a toothbrush and toothpaste sitting on the countertop, and I snatch them, needing to get the taste of vomit and lingering Fireball out of my mouth.

Once done with that, I yank the towel off the railing and dry my face, careful of the bruises.

I look at myself once again. My tank top is covered in dirt from being shoved down to the ground last night, and it hurts to swallow.

Avery can kiss my ass!

I refuse to bend to his demands. I haven't seen him in years, and then all of a sudden, I see him three times in one month. What is his game?

Why does he even care? I left a world that would end up killing us both. Now he's dragged me back into hell.

I pat myself down and realize I don't have any pockets for my phone. Walking into the bedroom, I yank the comforter back to see if it's on the bed. When I don't see anything, I fall to the floor and yank up the bed skirt. There's nothing under the bed. "Where is it?" I growl to myself. I search all over the bedroom for my phone and my purse but come up empty-handed. I go over to the other door and yank it open, finding a walk-in closet. I ignore the rows of hanging clothes and go to the black safe that sits on the floor in the back. It's about three feet tall and two feet wide with a keypad. I rub my hands over my face and sigh. My mind is too foggy. My body too tired to think clearly. "Think." What numbers would he use to unlock a safe? I try his birthday. Nothing. I try his father's. Mother's. Both of his brother's. Letting out a long breath, I try mine. I laugh when it denies me too. Of course, he wouldn't use mine. I mean nothing to him.

Sitting back on my heels, I run a hand through my tangled hair. Fuck! Now what?

I stand and turn around to leave the closet but stop in my tracks when I spot the stuffed bunny sitting on the top shelf to the right. Its black eyes staring at me, freezing me to my core.

“Happy seventh birthday, Presleigh,” my best friend, Avery, says.

“Thank you,” I say as I take the little box from him.

“Open it,” he says excitedly.

I look up at my mommy. She told me I couldn’t open any of my presents until my party later. “Go ahead,” she urges.

I pull back the pink wrapping paper and toss it to the floor to reveal a white box. I tear it open as well to see a stuffed bunny inside. “She’s so pretty,” I tell him, smiling down at her. She’s white with big, floppy ears and a little pink nose. I squeeze her to my chest and beam. “Thank you, Avery.”

My mom picks up the trash and walks away, and I catch him staring at me with a smile on his face. “What?” I ask.

He takes a step toward me and flicks one of my pigtails. “Your hair reminds me of the bunny’s floppy ears.” He laughs. “I’m gonna call you Bunny.”

My heart pounds in my chest at that memory. It’s like a ghost that haunts me. He kept it after all these years? Why? To shove it in my face? To make me remember that he was once my friend, then lover turned enemy?

I practically run out of the closet and slam it shut. He’s not gonna play this game with me. Not now. Not ever.

I exit my room and come to a long hallway. My options are to turn left or right. In front of me is a wrought-iron railing, so I walk over to it and look down into the foyer of his house. I’m not surprised to see that it’s just as big and expensive looking as the houses we grew up in. I make my way over to the winding staircase to my left, keeping my right hand on the rail for support. The stairs are steep, and my legs still shake. My bare feet hit the white tile floor of the foyer, and I look around. Soft crème walls and high ceilings. No pictures. No art. Bare. Just like my house.

Slowly, I explore the large living room over to the adjoining room.

I walk into the dining room, and he looks up at me from his place at the head of the large mahogany table. It could easily fit twelve guests. His jaw tightens and his eyes narrow when he sees I didn’t change. Then a slow smile spreads across his face, and it looks more intimidating than his scowl. He lets out a deep laugh, and I hate how it makes butterflies form in my stomach. *This is bad. Really bad.*

“Something funny?” I snap.

He places his elbow on the table and runs his fingers along his lips. His

blue eyes slowly look me up and down. And I wish I would have changed into something that covered more of my skin. “Just admiring how much you like being punished.”

I stop dead in my tracks. “Punished?” My mouth goes dry, and I immediately rub my tender neck.

He nods once and then drops his eyes to his phone. “Every time you disobey me, I’ll punish you.”

I tighten my jaw. “Fuck you.”

“That makes two punishments. Wanna make it three?” he asks, not looking back up at me.

I decide to shut my mouth and plop down on the seat to his left. I take a look around to see a floor-to-ceiling window behind him and nothing but woods beyond it ...

“Stop.”

My eyes go to his, and he must have been watching me. He sits back in his chair. “Let’s get the ground rules out of the way. One, you’re mine.” My eyes narrow. “Two, I’ll do with you what I want, whenever I want.”

“You will not ...”

“Three, you disobey, I’ll punish you. And four, don’t even think about running.”

So he was watching me.

“I placed a tracker in your left arm when you arrived,” he says calmly as if we’re discussing the weather and not my imprisonment.

“You what?” My hands instantly go to my arm and feel around for a lump. I find one a couple of inches up from my wrist.

“It has an alarm on it. If you run, it will alert me.” He finally lifts his eyes to look at mine. “I will find you. And you will not like what I do to you.”

I swallow at the threat in his voice.

“Why am I here, Avery?” I ask, tears threatening my eyes again. I’m his prisoner. He’s gonna make me his own personal slave. He’ll beat me if I defy him. Well, I refuse to do whatever he says just because he thinks he’s God. He can beat me all he wants. I can take a punch or even a kick. Him slapping my face felt more like foreplay than abuse.

I can tell he’s trying to decide if he should answer my previous question or not. Finally, he speaks. “Your brother ...”

“I’m here because of Preston?” I snap.

“You are collateral.”

I hang my head. What the hell has my brother gotten me into? What could he possibly be doing working with Avery?

Foggy thoughts of a phone call with Preston the other night comes to mind.

“Presleigh! You don’t understand what he is capable of. How dangerous he is,” he urges.

“I do.”

“Get your ass off this phone and on the jet. Now, Presleigh. If you don’t, he will make a move.” He growls. “And it’ll be too late.”

Guess this is his move. To kidnap me for something my brother has done. My chest tightens as my pussy gets wet.

I’m so fucked!

“Let me call him.” The words rush out of my split lips.

“No.”

“Avery,” I snap. “I wanna talk to Preston.” I’m gonna rip him a new one. “Where is my phone?”

He shakes his head. “You are not allowed to use any electronic devices.”

“You’re joking?” I ask as my mouth drops.

I hang my head when he says nothing. My family was just as twisted as Avery’s, but Avery and I always said we would never become them. Guess he changed his mind. My brother, on the other hand, was always in trouble. He was like both my father and my mother. I swore for a long time I was adopted. “How much?”

I look up at him, and he stares at me with an expressionless look. Eleven years ago, I could tell you what he was feeling anytime I looked at him. I guess over the years, he has learned to hide them. I’m sure his father taught him that, or he just no longer feels at all. “How much?” I demand when he ignores me.

“It’s not about money.”

“Bullshit!” I snap, slamming my palm on the table. If my brother is involved, then it’s about money. I’ve had to help bail his ass out several times over the years.

He says nothing. I hate the silence more than anything.

I fist my hand down on the table. “Then what is it about?” I snap.

“You don’t need to know,” he says simply.

“This is my life!” I shout, feeling my chest tighten. “And I don’t want to

spend it with you.” I can’t. I’ll die. I won’t be able to survive this again. I got lucky before, but *he’ll* make sure the job is done this time. And I refuse to die for Avery. He turned his back on me once, and that was enough.

“That is not your decision to make.” His voice is calm. I’m anything but.

“One million.” I offer desperately to pay him off. Maybe he’ll let me go. Money always talked with him and his family.

He can’t hide the surprise in his eyes. “Excuse me?”

“I’ll pay you to let me go.”

“You don’t have a million.”

He has no clue what I have. “I’ll pay two mill—”

He shakes his head, interrupting me. “No.”

I grind my teeth and fist my hands on the table. “It’s a simple solution,” I say although I have no idea what the problem really is.

“And I said no.” He narrows his eyes on me, daring me to argue.

I do. “Why not?”

Instead of answering me, he looks back down at his phone, dismissing me.

Fuck no!

I’m not the same innocent, naïve girl he once dated. I’m a grown ass woman who doesn’t take shit. Especially whatever game he’s trying to play with me.

I reach across the table, snatch his phone out of his hand, and throw it across the formal dining room. It bounces off the tile before skidding to a stop when hitting a wall. “Why the fuck not?” I shout.

He reaches over the table and slaps me across the face so hard that my head snaps to the right. Before I can recover, he’s up and out of his seat with his hand wrapped around the back of my neck, slamming my face down onto the table and making it rattle from the force before I can even take in a breath.

I’m able to hold in the cry that threatens to come up. With his free hand, he yanks the chair out from underneath me, making me stand, bent at the waist on shaky legs.

I suck in a ragged breath that makes my already sore throat and pounding head worse. “Avery ...” I whimper as those tears threaten my eyes again. “Please ...” I beg, not knowing what the hell is going on and hating myself for letting that word escape. I don’t beg. Not anymore.

“Spread your legs,” he growls, ignoring my plea.

I try to shake my head, but he holds it in place, my already throbbing cheek

pressed against the cold surface. When he realizes I'm not going to obey, he yanks my shorts down my hips with his free hand.

"Avery ..." I squeal. "What are you ...?"

"I told you I was gonna punish you for not obeying," he says, interrupting me with satisfaction in his voice.

A sob gets lodged in my throat when I feel my shorts hit the floor. "Step out," he orders. I obey because what other choice do I have? He kicks them away. Then his shoes are spreading my wobbly legs effortlessly. I don't even try to fight him, though I could if I really wanted to.

I'm so fucking wet for him that it's pathetic. Even if I do hate him, my body doesn't understand that.

I jump when I feel his fingers run along my pussy. I hadn't worn any underwear to bed. "You're a bastard," I whisper. It's all I can manage.

"And you're a whore."

His words make me flinch, but they're true. I can't argue them. And I hate that he knows me so well after only being back in my life for such little time.

"Tell me, Bunny. Why do you spread your legs for every man?" he asks casually.

I don't answer.

"Is it because you miss me? Is it because none of them satisfy you like I once did?" he whispers, and I try to push him off me, but I'm unsuccessful.

He slides a finger into me, and I bite my lip, refusing to give him any indication that I like the way it feels to be so intimate with him once again. I know what he plans on doing, and it's not make love.

"I want you like this one last time, Bunny."

It wasn't a dream. He was in my house. And we had had sex. Now it all makes sense.

"I told you that you are mine," he says, adding a second finger.

I close my eyes tightly. "That means if I tell you to meet me at the fucking door on your knees when I come home, you are naked and waiting, ready to suck my cock. If I tell you to be naked lying in bed with your ass up in the air, that means be ready to get fucked in the ass." My body trembles as he removes his fingers before pushing them in again. Slowly. Taunting me.

"That means if I tell you *no*, you shut the fuck up. Do you understand?"

He removes his fingers, and I wait for them to enter me again, but instead, I hear the sound of him unclasping his belt.

It's so loud, it's deafening in the silent dining room.

Then he hits me with it on my bare ass.

I cry out, fighting against his hand holding my face down while standing up on my tiptoes as it slaps my sensitive skin. The bite feels like a thousand bee stings.

“Fucking answer me!” he roars, hitting me again.

I knew that one was coming, so I managed to swallow the sob that comes up, but I can’t hold back the tears that spill down the side of my face and onto the table. And I hate that I like them. I hate that my pussy is wet.

“Yes,” I croak out.

He slams the belt down on the table beside me, and then his hand is back between my legs. And I close my eyes tightly, embarrassed that I like the way he is treating me. Like a cheap whore. Just as he said I was.

“That’s my good, Bunny,” he whispers when those fingers enter me again, spreading me. “You’re so fucking wet,” he growls.

I rise on my tiptoes, letting out a strangled moan while he roughly works them in and out of me. My heart is pounding, cheek throbbing, and my breath quickening.

“You’re just full of surprises.”

His hand tightens on the back of my neck, and his fingers pick up their pace. The tears continue to slowly fall, but my hips start to move back and forth with his fingers, needing more. The table digs into my hips, bruises already forming, but I don’t care. That feeling that I’ve been missing for so long is building. No matter how many guys I’ve slept with, none of them ever made me come like him.

Fuck!

He removes his fingers quickly, and I whimper in protest. He picks the belt up and lets go of my neck with his other hand. I think he’s gonna spank me again, but instead, he grabs my hands and pulls them behind my back. Quickly, he wraps the leather around my upper arms, pulling them together tightly. Arching my back, I bite my lip to keep from crying out from the pain.

He ties it off and then his free hand goes back to holding the side of my face down against the table. I swallow as wetness pools between my legs. I’m so wet I can feel it running down my inner thigh.

He steps back into me, and I hear his zipper being lowered. I suck in a breath when I feel the head of his cock press against my soaked entrance.

“Tell me to stop, Bunny,” he whispers roughly.

And I know he’s fighting the same internal battle that I am.

I hate him!

He hates me!

But right here, right now, we both want what we've been missing for years.

"You have to say the words," he growls, getting impatient.

No matter how many times he wants to slap me around, he would never cross this line. He would never fuck me unless I allowed it. And I fucking want it.

"Fuck me," I whisper, pressing my ass into him. "Please, Avery ..."

I whimper when he spreads my wet lips open to accommodate his large size, my words trailing off.

I expect him to shove his cock into me and take me rough and fast like he did with his fingers. Instead, he surprises me by slowly sliding inside me like he did the other night. And that makes it worse.

New tears come to my eyes at the feel of him, and it takes what little breath I have away.

"Fuck, Bunny." He breathes pulling his hips back, and I whimper. "I almost forgot how good your cunt feels."

I never forgot how good you felt.

No amount of alcohol or drugs could erase my mind. Memories. They're a sickness with no cure. And I've been slowly dying ever since I lost him.

I suck in a long breath when he glides forward again, slower than last time. And without thought, I shove my hips back, trying to push against him. My silent plea that I want more.

Need more.

He chuckles, and I close my eyes tightly. The sound making me feel more ashamed than anything he could possibly do to me.

Now he knows that I want him.

I'd rather him think I had a temporary lack of insanity than think I willingly gave it. That after all these years I still want him.

I'm so fucked up.

So I fight.

I use my chest and legs to push myself off the table. I get about three inches before his hand shoves the side of my face back down. I start wiggling my hips back and forth. "Get off me, Avery!" I growl in frustration when I'm unsuccessful.

He doesn't say anything. Instead, he releases the side of my face and leans

his chest on top of my back, pressing my hips against the edge of the table and placing all his weight on me. Making it hard to breathe, he then slides his hands into my hair, gripping it tightly. He yanks my head off the cool wood, pulling it back, and I hiss in a breath. His hips go faster, fucking me with pure rage. Hard and fast. My eyes close, and I can't hold back the moan that escapes.

He places his lips by my ear. "You want me to take it, Bunny?" he demands roughly.

I don't answer. I can't. If I open my mouth, I'll be done for. My pussy is already wetter from the new position. The domination.

I hate myself!

I hate him!

"Is this what you do with the other men you fuck? Hmm? Let them take you home and then pretend you don't want it?"

New tears run down my face at his words.

"Make them overpower you to let them feel like they're in charge?" he growls. His hips slamming into mine rattle the table.

"That's not the case now, Bunny. I *am* in fucking charge! Do you understand me?" He pulls back and then slams forward. A sob comes out of my parted lips when he hits that spot, making me wetter. "Fucking say it!" he snaps, his hips continuing their assault.

"You're ... in ... charge," I manage to get out on shaky breaths.

He doesn't let up on his hold of me or his fucking. He's ruthless. And before I know it, my lips are open, gasping for a breath, and my eyes are heavy as that sensation starts to build.

"I feel your pussy tightening around my cock," he taunts.

I whimper. He never was one to talk during sex, and pure jealousy courses through me at the thought of all the other women he has slept with since me.

My arms have gone numb, and my back hurts from him pressing them along with the belt into my skin and muscles. I can feel the bruises that have already formed on my hips from the sharp edge of the table.

But none of it matters. That sensation starts to build more, and I suck in a deep breath as he pulls back and slams into me over and over.

"Tell me you're about to come, Bunny," he demands in my ear roughly.

Sweat covers my body, and the buttons on his shirt dig into my back and arms with each thrust. "I'm ... almost ... there ..." My voice trails off when he yanks my head back even farther, making it harder to breathe at this angle.

All I can see is the white ceiling above us with the crystal chandelier hanging. My body begins to warm. It starts in my thighs and moves to my stomach. I close my eyes, waiting for it to take over my body completely.

Without warning, he thrusts his hips forward, and I feel his cock pulse inside me as he comes with a grunt in my ear.

He stays that way for a few seconds and then pulls out, letting go of my hair. My face falls onto the table with a heavy thud, and I suck in breath after breath. My body shakes with need.

He didn't let me come!

I close my eyes, panting as I realize that was his plan all along. That was my punishment.

Fucking bastard!

“Stand up,” he demands from behind me.

I pull myself up off the table with a whimper. My body screaming at the movement. My tangled hair falls around my face, and I'm all but gasping for air. My face wet from tears and sweat.

“Turn around and drop to your knees.”

A shiver runs through me at his voice. It's no longer rough. Now it holds authority once again. As if what we just did didn't happen.

I do as he says, mainly because my shaking knees can't hold me up. Avoiding eye contact, I try to ignore my pussy throbbing with need between my legs. I bow my head, not wanting him to see me like this—desperate for him.

“Look at me, Bunny.”

I hate that tears still run down my cheeks.

Taking a deep breath, I open my eyes and look up at him. His blue eyes stare down at me without any emotion, and the tears slip from my eyes as a whimper escapes, unable to hold it back.

He reaches out and runs the pad of his thumb over the handprint on my face as if he fucking cares that anyone slapped me around. “So fucking gorgeous.” He says it like he still cares about me, but he can't. We can't go down that road again. He can keep me as his fucking sex slave as long as he wants, but this is all I can be to him. Because the truth is, I don't have much longer. “Even when you cry.”

Then he pushes my wild hair from my face and steps into me. His semi-hard cock is covered in our arousal and right in front of my face. His black slacks no longer clean. Cum leaks from the tip, and my mouth starts to water,

thinking of what he will taste like. I didn't give him head very often back then, and it never seemed to bother him.

Things have changed.

I try to shift my arms behind my back, the belt digging into my skin to the point I think it's cut me.

"Open that pretty fucking mouth and clean me off," he orders, taking his cock in his free hand.

I hate that the need to get off is so strong that I will do whatever he says in order to please him.

Without argument, I lick my lips and open them.

CHAPTER SEVEN

AVERY

I WATCH MY COCK SLIP between her pretty pink lips. Tears slowly run down her face, and her body shakes while she kneels on the tile floor.

I overreacted.

I didn't plan on fucking her so soon, but when she threw my phone, I had a split second to decide my plan of action.

And I decided to put her in her place sooner rather than later. If I let her slide, she'll run all over me. We both know that.

It's like I told my brother—I don't do empty threats. No matter who the fuck you are. Bunny is no exception.

I could have dragged her up the stairs by her hair, tied her face down on her bed, ripped off my belt, and beat her ass until it was fucking bleeding. Or I could have fucked her. I chose the option that most benefitted me. The three hits to her ass were just for fun, and she liked them. They turned her on. I'll remember that for later.

She licks up my shaft, tasting me, and I moan, tightening my hand in her hair. I want to hear her come so bad. I want her to scream my name and need to show her that no other man can get her off like I can. But I can't. Not yet. She has to work for it.

Earn it.

She closes her eyes and fresh tears run down her cheeks. "Open your eyes!"

She looks back up at me and whimpers around my cock. I pull out and then slide it forward. I release the base of my dick and slide my hand into her hair, shoving my hips forward. She tries to pull back when I give her more of me, but I don't allow it.

My cock starts to harden once again while I fuck her mouth. The tears come quicker as spit runs down her chin. She's never looked more beautiful.

Of course, I'll never tell her that.

I throw my head back and close my eyes while she sucks me like her life

depends on it in my formal dining room. And in a way, it does.

I meant it when I said she is mine! For however long is anyone's guess, but while she's here, she is going to be my own personal slave. I'll fuck her whenever I want, however I want.

"Fuck, Bunny," I say through gritted teeth, opening my eyes and looking back down at her.

Her arms are still tied behind her back, and her knees are spread wide. I smile to myself in satisfaction, knowing my cum is running down her thighs. I haven't come that hard in a long time. Actually, the last time I can remember was with her. Three nights ago.

That makes me hate every woman I've ever fucked—and the list is long. The fact they couldn't live up to her or make me forget her pisses me off.

I fuck her mouth harder, and her gorgeous eyes are full of new tears. They continue to flow like a waterfall due to my roughness. I treat her mouth just as I treated her pussy. And I'll do the same to her ass. I have an endless amount of time to break her. To remind her that I'm no longer that pathetic boy she can run all over.

I'll show her just what being fucked feels like. And by the way she's looking up at me, she'll enjoy every minute of it.

I'm gonna ruin her for other men. Although she'll never get to experience another man.

Once again, I give her no warning. She tries to pull away, but I hold her head still by her hair. When she used to suck my dick, she never wanted to swallow. And I always respected that until now.

Instead of demanding she take it, I just don't allow her any other choice. Her eyes widen for the briefest moment as I push to the back of her throat and come.

"Swallow, Bunny," I order; my voice rough, my breathing ragged.

She looks up at me through watery lashes and swallows—her body jerking. Once I'm done, I release her hair and step back.

She bows her head, sucking in breath after breath while her body shakes uncontrollably.

"Stand up," I order, placing my dick back into my zipper of my black slacks, loving this feel of overpowering her. I wanna lay her on the floor and fuck her pussy with my tongue. But there's plenty of time for that.

She stands slowly and then wobbles once on her feet. Placing my hands on her face, I lift it so she has to look at me. Her beautiful blue eyes are heavy.

Her cheeks red and lips parted. Fuck, she looks so beautiful.

I run my hand between her thighs, and her head falls back with a moan. My eyes fall to the mark on her neck from my hand, and I growl. I wanna mark all of her body!

Mine!

I pull my hand away, and she cries out. “Do you know what edging is?” I ask her.

She shakes her head once, and I smile. I didn’t expect her to. My father taught me a lot when I was younger, but I never thought I’d put it to use. “Edging is when I get you to the point of orgasm and then stop—withholding a release from you.” Her eyes widen up at me. “Do not touch yourself. Do you understand me?”

She whimpers, closing her eyes.

This was the hard part. I couldn’t figure out how I was going to know if she gets herself off or not. Until it finally hit me ...

I wait for her eyes to open before I speak. “There are cameras all over your room and bathroom. Not to mention the property—inside and outside. I will know, and you will be punished.” Reaching my hand between her legs, I shove two fingers into her without warning, causing her breath to hitch. “This belongs to me. You belong to me. Do you understand?”

She bites her bottom lip as her chest heaves. “Answer me!”

“Please?”

I remove them and smile down at her. “I love hearing you beg, Bunny.” It’s like music to my ears. “But an order is an order, and no amount of begging will change my mind. So last time. Do you understand?”

“Yes,” she answers softly.

I turn her around so I’m facing her back and look down at my belt wrapped around her upper arms. Her skin is wrinkled due to the tightness of the unforgiving leather, and her hands have turned blue from lack of blood flow. I undo it, and her arms fall to her sides with a soft sob.

An apology threatens to come out when I see that bruises have already formed on her flawless skin, but I immediately swallow it down. “Turn around.”

She does slowly, and to my surprise, she looks up at me without having to be told. Her eyes drill into mine with hatred, and I smile.

Lifting my hand, I push her wild brown hair behind her ear. “You always were a fast learner.”

She opens her mouth to no doubt tell me to *fuck off* but then thinks better of it. "I'm leaving."

Her eyes dart around the formal dining room before meeting mine. "Where are you going?" she asks softly.

"I have work to handle. Don't try to run. Guards are stationed throughout this house, and they are informed to do whatever is necessary to detain you," I inform her, and if looks could kill, I'd be dead right now. Thankfully, she doesn't wield that kind of power. "I'll be back in the morning." I don't normally pull all-nighters, but having her here has changed my schedule. Thanks to Darrell giving her more meds than she needed. "And you will be in your room waiting for me. Naked." She stands there staring up at me with that look of hatred, making me hard all over again. Fuck, I didn't expect to have this reaction to her. I thought my hatred would be enough to keep her at arm's length, and I'd only go to her when I wanted a piece of ass. It seems I'm not gonna be able to get enough of her pussy.

"Do you understand?" I finally ask when she just glares at me.

She swallows and squares her shoulders. "You can't expect me to wait all night in hopes that you're gonna let me come when you get home from work."

I refrain from smiling at her statement. "I do."

"Avery ..."

"If you come, I'll tie you to your bed, spread eagle, and leave you there." The thought of her lying there helpless makes my hard cock twitch. I'd love to see her like that.

"You wouldn't ..."

"And I'll make sure to gag you, so no one has to listen to you sob when your body starts to tremble from the need of my cock in that pussy."

She looks away from me as if she can't stand the sight of me, and I step to her. "See, Bunny." Her eyes are back on mine instantly, and they narrow for using her nickname. It used to be endearing, but now, I do it for spite.

"There's nothing I won't do to prove my point."

"Which is?" she snaps.

I love how she doesn't even try to hide her hatred for me. It's effortless and refreshing and makes me want her even more.

I'll let her get away with it at the moment since I just came twice. "That I fucking own you."

PRESLEIGH

Sixteen years old

I sit in the game room sipping on a Zima. I look around for Avery. I don't know where he went. Tristan came in here and whispered something in his ear, and then they both ran out without a word to anyone.

"Hey, Presleigh," his friend says, coming over to me.

"Hey, Mitch."

"What's with the long face?" he asks, sitting down next to me on the couch.

"Did you see where Avery went?" No point in hiding my concern.

"Vaughn got into a fight out back. He and Tristan went to break it up."

I roll my eyes. Of course, their older brother, Vaughn, got into a fight. He does it all the time. The boy is so annoying. I don't even know why he still lives at home. He's two years older than Avery. He should be off at college, but instead of going off to school, he decided to stay home with his dad and help him with the "family business." Sickening.

"Wanna play some pool? Avery was my partner, and it's his turn."

I chuckle. "I don't know how to play."

His soft green eyes widen in surprise. "What? Avery hasn't taught you how?" I shake my head. "Come on." He grabs my hand and pulls me from the couch. I laugh as he brings me over to the pool table. "Here." He takes my Zima and replaces it with a pool stick. Setting my drink on the ledge, he comes to stand behind me. He places one hand on my right arm and the other on my back. He gently pushes me forward, making me lean over the side, and wraps my right hand around the stick and then his hand closes over mine.

I look at him over my shoulder, getting uncomfortable. "Mitch ..."

"Come on, Presleigh. I don't wanna lose. Avery and I bet on this game."

I let out a sigh and look back over the cue ball. He lines my stick up with it. "See the striped five? You want to get it over in the left corner pocket."

I nod my head once with confidence. "Right," I say, acting as if I fucking know what he's talking about.

"Line it up ..." He pulls back the stick, and I bite my bottom lip, closing my left eye. He presses his hips into my ass, and I suck in a breath of surprise.

"Mitch!"

He pushes my hand forward just as his name is called out. I stand straight up when I hear Avery's voice. Spinning around, I take a step to the side just as Avery's fist connects with Mitch's face.

I storm into the bathroom once again, stripping off my shirt. It's all I'm dressed in since I left my shorts downstairs in the formal dining room. Opening the shower door, I get in and slam it behind me.

I turn on the water and then fall to my already bruised knees and bend over. As I place my face in my hands, my screams of frustration quickly turn to sobs.

My fingers tingle from the blood circulation returning, and my hips hurt from the table. My head still throbs, and the bastard didn't even offer me any Advil. Now my mouth is sore from his cock fucking it. And his taste lingers.

But I can handle all of that.

It's the throbbing between my legs that has me in tears. I'm not a sex addict per se, but I have to get off.

I place my hand between my thighs and push a finger into myself. My other hand reaches up to massage my breasts. Closing my eyes, I try to concentrate on my body and calm my tears. I won't let him do this to me.

Edging? I have never heard of it before. But when he explained it, I knew where he learned it. From our fathers. The sick bastards would use it to control their slaves. To make them beg them to come. To make them feel in control. And he is not! I control myself, my body!

He's crazy to get me that close and then think I can wait all night. And that's *if* he lets me get off when he gets home.

My thumb runs over my clit, and I whimper, opening my eyes. I freeze when I see a camera in the corner. It looks down at me. A red light glows, and I swallow the shame when I feel him watching me.

I fucking own you.

No! You don't!

He did once, and it ended up costing me everything. I'm not gonna let him do this to me again. No matter what he says, this is my body, and I'm going to do whatever I want to it.

I allow my head to fall back again as my fingers begin to work in and out of me. My pussy is soaked from my arousal and his cum. And I remember how he took me. So dominant, controlling, and all man. And it disgusts me that I actually liked it.

That sensation starts to build. My breath comes faster, and my knees push farther apart. I'm already so close. Within seconds, I come with a soft cry on my lips. My head falls forward, and my chest heaves with my breathing. I give the camera a smile before I stand on shaky legs and place my head under the showerhead.

A smug smile forms on my lips.

You don't control me, Avery. I'll prove it to you.

After my shower, I make my way into the closet again, avoiding that damn bunny. I find a black dress that is off the shoulders and down to my knees. The material is slinky and cool against my skin.

I decide against shoes since I'm not allowed to go anywhere. Although he left for work, the house is full of men. I remembered two of them from the other night, and I know they have orders to do whatever is necessary to keep me in line. If I'm gonna have any chance at getting free, I gotta play this smart. I make my way to my bedroom door and open it. Stepping out into the hallway, I decide to go looking around the house.

He said I couldn't run. He never said I couldn't explore the house.

I open every door I come to and find nothing but bedrooms. They all look the same with large beds and bare walls. The closets and bathrooms all are empty, so it makes me wonder who occupied mine before he brought me here.

I make my way down to the first floor and find an office. It's got a big black desk that's sits to the right with a fireplace across from it and a bookshelf to the left. A glass coffee table sits in the middle with a black leather couch and two high-back chairs. He must spend a lot of time in here.

I smile when I see the computer on his desk. I practically run over to it and sit down at the desk. I press the enter key, and the screen illuminates. I frown when it requires a password. Of course. I go to type out his name but then stop, my fingers hovering over the keys. He probably has it set up to alert him when someone types in the wrong one. Avery never was an idiot like Preston.

I reach over and grab the phone that sits on his desk. Line dead. "Fuck!" I shove it to the floor. I yank on all the drawers to the desk, but they're all locked.

Letting out a growl, I sit back and blow the loose strands of hair from my face in annoyance. What the hell am I supposed to do? Does he really expect me to just sit around this mansion all day and night doing nothing?

Why am I here?

My friend will be looking for me. Does my brother know I'm here? If so, will he come and get me? Doubt it. Preston can be a little coward. He never did like getting his hands dirty unless it involved women who could make him money and he could fuck. I'm neither.

A bottle of scotch over in the corner on the minibar catches my attention, and I get up to grab it. A drink sounds good.

I open the door to step out of the office but jump back when I run into a man dressed in a black and white three-piece suit. He smiles at me kindly. "Hello, Miss Clarke."

My eyes widen. "Marvin. You have to help me," I say in a rush. His smile falls.

"I'm sorry, Miss Clarke, but I cannot ..."

My hands ball into fists. "I'm not here because I want to be," I snap.

"That is not my concern," he says, unaffected by my anger. "I work for Mr. Decker, and he has instructed me to make sure you are taken care of. Now would you like something to eat?"

I stare up at him wide-eyed. I've known this man all my life. He worked for the Decker's long before I can remember. His brown hair has now turned gray and his skin has wrinkled, but he still has those kind brown eyes. I open my mouth to tell him I'd rather starve, but a man pushes his way through the office door.

"She'll have dinner up in her room."

I glare at the man. He's the same one that I stabbed with a fork only hours ago. God, that seems like so long ago. My stay here is going to be like prison time—long.

"I said I'm not hungry." I glare at him.

"You'll either eat it on your own, or I will force-feed you," he declares and then spins around and walks out of the room.

Marvin nods his head once. "Very well. I will have your dinner served to you up in your room." Then he, too, turns and walks away, leaving me alone with the bottle of scotch.

I let out a huff and storm up to my room. Slamming the door shut, I plop down on the bed and tip the bottle back. If I have to be here, I'll drink my dinner.

CHAPTER EIGHT

AVERY

I ENTER THE HOUSE AND head straight to my study. It's where I spend most of my time if I'm not in the cellar or at the warehouse my brother Tristan and I own.

"Sir—" Marvin calls out the moment I walk through the front door.

"Not now." I interrupt whatever he was about to say and make my way down the long hall. Entering my study, I slam the door behind me.

I sit down on my chair and lean back, running a hand down my unshaven face. It's been a long fucking day. And night. But that's nothing new. I've never been one who gets much sleep. Even as a kid, I never slept. Too many noises. Screams.

The door opens, and Marvin enters. "I said not now."

He closes the door, ignoring me, and places his hands behind his back. "Miss Clarke did not eat her dinner."

"Then she'll starve," I snap

He nods. "Very well." He gives me his back and walks toward the door but pauses. "It's none of my business, sir, but I don't think you brought her here to die."

I glare up at him. "You're right. It's none of your business."

I reach over and put my password into my computer. Pulling up my security cameras, I look in on her in her room. She lies on her left side, her back facing the camera. The covers pulled up to her neck as if they can save her from the monsters. From me.

My cell rings in the quiet study, and I answer when I see it's Tristan. "Hello?"

"We have movement at her house," he informs me.

"Perfect."

"And I've followed up with the local hospitals in New York. Preston hasn't checked in at any."

"He won't." I sit back in my seat. "He'll seek treatment under the radar."

Too many enemies looking for him to be out in the open.”

“What do we do?”

“We wait.” My brother has the patience of a fucking gnat. “Sit back and wait. He’ll either come for her or do his fucking job.”

“And if he comes for her?”

“He won’t get what he wants,” I answer. It’s that fucking simple.

I hang up, done with the conversation, and look back at her sleeping form. I recognize an empty bottle of scotch on her nightstand as the same bottle that was here in my study. I smile. She wandered around tonight. I wanted her to. I wanted her to see that her chance of freeing herself was nonexistent.

I press the buttons on the computer and mumble to myself. “Let’s see what all you did this evening.”

Going back to after our dinner, I see her storm into her bedroom. Her hair a ratted mess and only wearing her tank top. Her nipples are hard. She’s breathing heavy and looks around the room at a loss before heading into the bathroom. She slams it shut as well and locks it. My smile grows. As if that would keep me out. She removes her shirt and starts taking a shower. She falls to her knees and buries her head into her hands and screams. Then she quits. She’s still hunched over, breathing heavy, shielding her face from me. Then she sits up and her hands go to her boobs. My brows lift when they lower. She spreads her legs wider and then her hand disappears between them. She throws her head back, and my cock hardens while I watch her finger fuck herself. Her eyes land on the camera, and she freezes, remembering what I said I’d do to her if she touched herself. Just when I think she’s gonna stop, she smiles up at it and finishes herself off.

I turn off the screen and sit back. This Presleigh has some fire to her. The old Bunny I knew would have never dared to do something that would get her into trouble. She preferred to stay unseen.

CHAPTER NINE

AVERY

Seventeen years old . . .

“I’LL WAIT FOR YOU UP here,” she says, crawling into my bed.

She should go home. The scene downstairs wasn’t as bad as it could have been, but that doesn’t mean it’s over. “I may be a while,” I tell her, and my chest tightens when her face pales a little. I kneel by the bed. “We can watch a movie when I get back.”

She nods but stays quiet. I get up, kiss her on the head, and then walk out of my room. Heading back downstairs, I see my brother Vaughn in the hallway, putting his camera back together. He looks up at me and gives me a shit-eating grin, then picks up his equipment. We make our way to my father’s office and enter to find it empty. I go over to the back wall and open the door, entering a narrow passageway. Taking the steps to the bottom, I pause, allowing Vaughn to pass by me. I stare at the tunnel. My brother Vaughn calls it the tunnel to heaven. Tristan and I refer to it as the tunnel to hell.

“Come on, pussy.” I hear him call out with a chuckle.

Straightening my back, I walk through it. Coming to the end, I enter the cellar. It’s lit up like an arena on Friday night. To the left are cages. Each one a prison cell for a girl or boy who caught my father’s eye. To the right are shelves holding instruments of torture.

“About time,” my father announces, getting my attention.

He stands over to the right with Presleigh’s dad on one side of him and my brother on the other. They all stare at me. There’s a girl at his feet on her knees. Her head is tilted back while she stares up at him as though he’s a fucking God. It’s pathetic. How easily they break for him. He brings them in kicking and screaming, and then a month later, they’re nothing but life-size dolls being tossed around however he wants to display them. He takes their souls and devours them. They’re nothing but an empty shell when he’s done

with them. What a waste.

“Where is Tristan?” my father demands.

“I saw him earlier with Maria,” my brother answers.

My dad shakes his head. “I’ve told him to leave the maid’s daughter alone. One more year and she’ll bring in a lot of money.”

My father thinks Tristan is in love with Maria. He’s not. He fucked her last year so she could lose her V-card. He was fourteen, and she was thirteen. Virgins are always worth more. Our older brother, Vaughn, had thrown a party, and when I asked why she was drunk, Tristan told me that he told her to drink up. He was gonna take every hole she had. Later on the next day, I just happened to see him walking out of her room while slipping on his shirt. When I asked him if he regretted it, he said not one bit and that I should fuck Bunny before they sold her for her innocence. I just shook my head and said that her father wouldn’t do that. She was off-limits from them and their world. To everyone but me.

“These boys need to stop playing with things that don’t belong to them,” Presleigh’s father adds, and I don’t miss the fact that he’s staring right at me when he says it.

“Come on.” Vaughn gets their attention when he lifts his camera, pointing it down at the girl on her knees.

I enter her room to find her lying in the same position that she was in on the surveillance. But she won’t be for long.

Going to the end of the bed, I reach out and grab the duvet and yank it off her. It falls to the floor at my feet, and she moans, pulling her legs up to her chest while lying on her side. I undo my tie and rip it out from underneath the collar of my button-down and toss it to the floor to join the duvet. Then I undo my cufflinks and roll up my sleeves.

You’re gonna pay for disobeying, Bunny.

I crawl onto the bed and place my hands on her hips, moving her onto her back. Her head stays tilted to the side with her arms up by her head. She’s out. Being drugged and an alcoholic will do that to you.

Placing my hands in the waistband of her black thong, I pull it down her legs and toss them behind me onto the floor as well. Then I place my right hand by her head and lean over her. My left hand skirts up her inner thigh to cup her pussy. She moans softly.

“Avery ...”

I smile. “Dreaming of me, Bunny?”

She shivers. “Avery.” This time, she lifts her hips when she mumbles it.

I run my fingers along her pussy before pushing one inside her slowly.

Her eyes spring open. “Avery!” She squeals and places her hands on my chest. I bury my head in her neck while adding another finger roughly. She’s not wet yet, but she will be. She gasps, and I smile to myself. *That’s it, Bunny.* Enjoy what I’m doing to you for now ’cause you’re gonna be cussing me in a minute.

“You were whispering my name in your sleep,” I inform her, wanting to embarrass her.

But it does the opposite. She sighs and tilts her head back, exposing more of her neck to me. She’s so drunk and horny. I love it. “Want me to fuck you, Bunny?”

“Yes.” She whimpers.

“Want me to flip you over and fuck that tight cunt like I did earlier up against the table?”

“God, yes.” She lifts her hips and grips my shirt with her fists.

My fingers get more forceful, and her breath catches, making her wet. Then all of a sudden, I remove my fingers from her pussy, and she sags against the bed. I grab both of her wrists and pin them above her head, and she moans.

It turns me on but also makes me angry. I wonder how many other men she allowed to treat her like this. Like a fucking toy? How many men dominated her when she should have belonged to me?

I push her right arm out to the edge of the bed and release her wrist to grab the rope I have already wrapped around the bed frame—I’m always prepared, and I knew she’d disobey me. I quickly slide her wrist into it and pull it tight. She looks up at it and tries to jerk her hand away while I repeat the process on her left wrist.

“Avery, what are you ...?”

“You disobeyed me, Bunny,” I muse, running my knuckles down her cheek. Her face is cold to the touch, and her blue eyes red from her drunken state.

Her brows pull together while she thinks over my words, and then they widen, and her lips part in a small gasp. “Avery, no ...”

“Yes. You disobeyed. Now you must be punished.”

“Avery, please ...” She yanks on the restraints.

She starts bucking her hips, knowing she's tied to the bed and there's no way out of it now.

I look down at her, and tears are forming in her beautiful blue eyes. "If you were a good girl, then I wouldn't have to punish you," I say, cupping her face.

"I hate you," she says, closing her eyes. Her chest rises and falls fast, making her perfect fake tits bounce. I've never been much of a breast man, but I fucking love hers. And they're not overly big either. Even though they're fake, they fit her small frame perfectly. "I fucking hate you."

"Bunny ..." I wanna tell her that I'm not gonna hurt her, but that would be a lie. I'm many things, but a liar isn't one of them.

"Fuck you, Avery!" she shouts, opening her eyes, her face reddening in anger. "Fuck you ..."

"Enough!"

She closes her mouth at my command and looks up at me with so much hatred that it makes me smile.

I run my hands up her narrow waist to her chest. I cup both her breasts, and she arches her back, her head falling back as she lets out a shaky breath. "I know you like it when my hands are on you," I tell her, and she moans.

I scoot down, straddling her legs, and lower my lips to her breasts. When I slept with her in her house a few nights ago, it was rushed. I didn't get to take my time and enjoy her body the way I wanted to. But now that she is tied to the bed, I can do whatever I want without her pushing me away. The only problem is her passing out on me before I get done with her.

I place her hard nipple into my mouth and suck, making her gasp. My free hand trails down between our bodies, and I run a finger over wet, smooth pussy again.

She's fucking soaked now.

I pull away from her breast. "You tell me you hate me, yet you're always wet for me, Bunny."

She opens her eyes, and they narrow on me. I chuckle. "Don't be ashamed. I hate you, yet I'm still hard for you." I rub my hips against hers, letting her feel me.

She whimpers, and I slide down her legs, my body lying between them. I lift her already shaking knees and place them over my shoulders before I bury my face in her cunt. I lick her. Slowly. Her body jerks, but I hold her down by her hips. My fingers digging into her already bruised flesh.

She arches her back and sighs. "Avery ... please."

"Please what?" I ask, licking her once again and tasting her. She tastes just as I remember. Like candy. She always gave me a sugar rush.

"Please let me come," she begs, and I smile against her skin.

Instead of answering, I lick her again, my tongue entering her with force. My mouth gets more and more aggressive while I look up at her thrashing against the bed while I fuck her with my tongue. And just when I feel her body tighten, knowing she's about to come, I stop and pull away.

"Avery." She pants.

I crawl off the end of the bed and grab her left ankle. I pull it over to the side where I slide the rope around it and then go to do the same with the other, spreading them far apart.

She lifts her head off the bed to look down at her ankles tied, and she tries to pull on them. Her back arches and tits bounce. "Please ..." She starts to sob.

"Begging won't work, Bunny," I tell her. She looks just as beautiful as I thought she would while helpless.

She yanks on her wrists and cries out. "Pull all you want. You're not going anywhere."

"Fucking let me go," she shouts, finding that anger again.

I wanna fuck her so bad but shake my head. "No."

"AVERY!" She screams my name.

"You disobeyed. This is your punishment."

Her body shakes as tears roll down the side of her face. "This isn't a fucking game." She arches her back, trying to yank herself free. All she's gonna do is make the ropes tighter.

"I agree." This is her life now. "You're my slave. The sooner you figure that out, the better for both of us."

"Never!"

I pull the little black ball out of the pocket of my slacks and walk over to the side of the bed. I lean over it, and she looks up at me with hatred even as new tears slide down her face. "Open your mouth," I order.

She sees the ball gag in my hand, and her lips thin.

"I won't repeat myself, Bunny."

She turns her head, looking away from me.

I sigh. "This will happen. Either you do it willingly, or I force you. If I have to force you, then there will be another punishment? So which will it be,

Bunny?”

She very slowly turns her head back to face me. I reach out and trace her soft lips. Her bottom one has a cut on it from my men. I hate to have to do this to her. I'd much rather have her lips wrapped around my cock than a silicone ball, but rules are rules, and she broke them.

She very slowly parts her lips for me, and I place the ball between them, forcing her mouth open wider. She whimpers, not expecting it to be as big as it is. “Lift your head.” She does as I say, and I fasten it in place, making sure it's tight enough she can't push the gag out with her tongue but not so tight that it hurts her.

When I look back down at her face, she has her eyes closed tightly. I place a hand between her legs, and she jumps, not expecting it. I moan, pushing a finger into her. “Once again, you're soaking wet, Bunny. I think you like being tied down and used.”

She yanks on her ropes and a sob wracks her body, muffled by the gag. I remove my finger from her, and she lifts her hips, wanting more. Leaning down, I kiss her on the forehead. “I know I like seeing you this way,” I say and then walk out, shutting the light off and closing the door behind me.

PRESLEIGH

My jaw hurts, and I can feel slobber running down the sides of my cheeks. There's nothing attractive about gags, but I hate to admit that it makes me wet. I try to move my legs to get some friction in that spot that needs it the most, but I don't have any luck. The ropes have tightened on my ankles, rubbing them raw and cutting off the circulation. But that doesn't stop me. I have to keep trying. I need it. To be touched. Or fucked.

My breasts hurt, my nipples ache, and my hands are numb. They're still tied above my head. Spread wide. All I can do is lift my head, but it doesn't matter because the lights are off, preventing me from seeing anything. I'm bathed in darkness, but I see the red light over in the corner. I know that's the camera, and I can't help but wonder if he's watching me. If he's as hard as I am wet.

I've screamed until my lungs burn, but it just comes out muffled, and now my throat is sore. I've sobbed so hard that my body still shakes, and my head pounds.

I hate him!

Another sob wracks my body, and I scream, needing to be heard. Needing to be touched. God, I would do anything for him right now if he would just fuck me. Just let me get off.

I need it!

My entire body is pulled tight, and the soft fitted sheet underneath me seems to burn my skin. My head swims in the liquor I consumed earlier. I don't know what time it is, but it has to be close to morning. I think.

Arching my neck back, I scream into the gag and buck my hips. Fuck, I hate him so fucking much! I thought I was free of him. My past. My nightmares. I thought he was the last person I'd ever see, and here I am, dragged back into hell by Avery fucking Decker!

Fifteen years old

I sit up when I hear his door open to his room.

He enters, closing it softly behind him. I look over his black T-shirt and worn-out jeans to see if I can find any sign that he got undressed. That his father made him do something with the girls downstairs. He doesn't look at me or say a word. Instead, he goes into his adjoining bathroom. I throw the covers off me and jump out of his bed, following him.

"Hey," I say softly, entering and shutting the door behind me.

"Hey," he responds flatly.

I swallow when I watch him remove his shirt and toss it onto the countertop. Then he starts unbuttoning his jeans. "What are you doing?" I ask.

"Taking a shower,"

My heart starts to beat faster. "Why?"

"Because I fucking want to," he snaps.

I bite my bottom lip nervously, and he places his hands on the countertop. Hanging his head, he sighs. "I'm sorry." He lifts his head, and his eyes meet mine in the mirror. "I..." He pauses, and my chest tightens. "I wanna be alone."

My bottom lip starts to quiver at his words. "Did your father make you ...?"

"Stop!" he growls. "Stop talking about it."

"I want to know."

“No. You don’t.” He pushes off the countertop and walks over to me. Cupping my cheek, he meets my gaze. “You’re better off not knowing any of it, Bunny.”

I lean into his touch. “We can help them.”

He shakes his head and lets out a long breath. “No, we can’t.”

“You’re not even trying,” I argue.

He pulls away from me. “Fuck, Bunny! I’ve tried before. Why do you think he has my brother record what he does? What he makes me and Tristan do? It’s so if something ever happens to a girl, he can prove that we’ve touched them. Hurt them.”

“But you haven’t hurt them, have you?” I ask wide-eyed.

He gives a dark laugh. “Whether it’s physical or mental abuse, it’s all the same, Bunny.”

I wrap my arms around myself. “He can’t keep doing this. They can’t keep doing this.”

“They’ve been doing this since long before we were born. Nothing can stop them when they have help on their side.”

“We could let them go—”

“Do you wanna die?” he snaps, interrupting me. “Because that’s what’ll happen, Bunny.” He storms back over to me. “Don’t you understand that? I can’t protect you from them. I can’t do anything right now but play my part.”

I narrow my eyes at him and shove his chest. He doesn’t budge. “I’m starting to think it’s more than a part.”

His lips thin, and he places his hands on either side of my face against the door, caging me in. “You think I like this? Huh? You think—”

“I think that all I hear from you are excuses,” I growl, not letting him finish. “I think that if you’d spend half the effort you use to pretend you enjoy helping them, then you could make a difference.”

He glares down at me, breathing heavy. His blue eyes search mine for a few long seconds and just when I think he’s about to argue with me, he pulls away and gives me his back. “Leave, Bunny.”

I turn around and storm out of his room and down the stairs, only to come face to face with my father. The last person I want to see. He gives me a hard look. “I was just about to come look for you.” He grabs my hand and pulls me toward him. “Let’s go home. Your mother has called me five times. She’s pissed because your brother isn’t home yet.”

He’s probably out scouting girls for him and Mr. Decker. They leave that

job to Preston and Vaughn. They use their good looks and disgusting charm to lure them into the trap.

“Good bye, Presleigh.”

I look over toward the voice and see Vaughn standing in the hallway just as he was earlier, and he winks at me.

I turn, giving him my back, and walk out of the door, trying not to let the angry tears fall. I hate feeling so helpless. And I hate that innocent girls are being taken advantage of just because they were born with a vagina. Men think they are God and can do whatever they want. One day, I’m gonna be able to help the girls who are trapped in this dark madness. And when I can, I’ll make the men pay.

I hear the door open over my cries, and then the light comes on. I blink a few times, trying to adjust to the brightness. “Hello, Bunny.”

I close my eyes at the shame that washes over me. That I allowed him to tie me up like a dog and punish me as if I did something wrong. As if my body isn’t my own anymore.

It’s not. He proved that. And it’s my own damn fault.

I jump when I feel his hand between my legs and let out a sob as relief rushes through me that he is touching me. I arch my back, and my pussy tightens just from that little contact. “Still just as wet,” he muses with satisfaction when he slides a finger into me.

I breathe deeply through my nose, my chest rising and falling. My nipples are hard and craving for his touch. I fucking hate myself! Is this how the girls felt when our fathers tortured them? Did they train them to want them? To need them? My problem is that I’ve always wanted Avery.

He removes his finger, and I cry into the gag.

“I’m going to release your legs. Don’t move them,” he orders.

Now he’s going to test me. And if I fail, I have no doubt he’ll tie me back up. And I can’t take it anymore.

He undoes my right ankle first, and my leg starts to shake, wanting to push it into my other thigh to rub that sweet spot that has been throbbing for I don’t know how long. He undoes my other one, and I dig my heels into the bed.

Don’t do it!

I chant in my head. I’m stronger than he gives me credit for.

My feet start tingling, the blood rushing back to them, and I wiggle my

toes.

I feel the bed dip as he crawls between my legs. “Good, Bunny,” he praises me, and I whimper, hoping *good Bunny* means I get a reward.

“Open your eyes.”

I slowly open them to see him kneeling between my parted legs. He has a white button-down shirt on and black slacks. His dark hair is damp, indicating he just got out of the shower and his face freshly shaven.

Is it morning already?

I still feel drunk. My vision a little blurry, and my limbs heavy.

“I watched you on the camera,” he admits with no shame. His hands run up my ribs, cupping my breasts. They ache for more. “You look so beautiful when you’re helpless.”

I blink, and tears run down the side of my face.

He gives me a sinister smile that makes my already racing heart pound in my chest. He removes his hands from my breasts, and I yank on the ropes that still bind my wrists.

But my eyes go to his slacks when he unzips them and pulls out his hard cock. His hand wraps around the base of it and my aching jaw tightens around the gag. He’s bigger than what I remember. My breath comes quicker and quicker, and I feel I may hyperventilate.

I silently beg him to remove the gag. To allow me to speak. To beg. To do something. He doesn’t.

He spreads my legs wider, and then he’s sliding into me. No foreplay. No kissing. Nothing but his cock in my soaked pussy.

I arch my back, my eyes closing at the feel of his impressively large dick spreading me open for him. It’s almost painful. Almost too much.

He places his arms behind my knees and pushes them forward, his fists on the bed by my head, spreading me wider for him.

I’m panting. My mouth still drooling, and eyes heavy. And without another word, he starts to move. Hard and fast. The bed hits the wall with each thrust. My tits pressed against his crisp button-down, and if I could talk, I’d ask him to suck on them. To pinch them. I’d beg him to kiss my neck or fist my hair. Something. My vision swims due to the alcohol and the pleasure.

He closes his eyes and bites his bottom lip and buries himself deep inside me. “Fuck, Bunny. Goddamn, your cunt is tight.”

I moan around the gag when he hits that spot deep inside me. The angle of holding my legs this way allows him to get deeper, making it hurt in the best

way. And I feel my eyes roll back into my head as my toes start to curl.

He rams his hips into mine, and even though my entire body screams in protest at all the shit it's been put through the past couple of days, all I can think about is that feeling creeping up my spine. Building. Growing stronger.

Yeeesss!

And then just like before, he stills, and I feel him come inside me.

He removes himself and places my legs on the bed. They shake uncontrollably along with the rest of my body. He reaches up and undoes my wrists, pulling me to a sitting position. He then removes the gag. My face hurts where the leather belt dug into my cheeks and ears. My lips are raw, the corners chapped. They feel like they've been stretched. My hands begin to tingle just like my feet did.

He places his hand on my chin and makes me look up at him. I say nothing as I look into his dark blue eyes. They search my face and then are back on mine. "Get dressed and meet me downstairs for breakfast." He crawls off the bed and stands beside it. He places the gag in the pocket of his slacks and then zips his pants. "Do I need to tell you not to touch yourself?"

I take a deep breath and shake my head. "No."

He nods and then exits without another word.

I bury my head into my hands and sob.

It took a full ten minutes for me to pull myself together. I washed my face and went to the bathroom. Funny how I never even thought about the need to go pee while being tied down. I have marks around both my wrists and ankles. And I found it harder than I thought to stand upright. I finally have all feeling back in my limbs, but they are still heavy.

I chose a white sundress out of the closet and put a nude thong on with no bra, then made my way down to the dining room. A plate of scrambled eggs and toast already is placed where I had sat last night.

He sits at the head of the table. His plate long gone. He looks up at me when I enter, and I look at the floor. I want to fall to his feet and beg him to get me off. I feel so empty, so lost, and my body won't stop trembling.

"I'll be at work today," he announces. I fall into a seat and say nothing. Instead, I stare at the table, unable to meet his eyes. I hear his chair move

back and him stand from the table. “I saw where you tried to get into my computer.” I swallow nervously. “And tried to use the phone. Believe me, Bunny, when I say I’ve thought of everything. And if you think you can outsmart me, you’re wrong.” A silence follows. “Darrell, you know what to do if she attempts anything.”

My body stiffens at his words.

“Yes, sir.” I hear the man say from behind me. Then Avery walks out of the room, leaving me alone with Darrell.

CHAPTER TEN

AVERY

“WHAT DO WE HAVE?” I ask my brother as I enter our warehouse, needing to get some work done. I take a sip of my second cup of coffee. I have yet to sleep. After I tied Bunny to her bed, I went back to my study and watched her. I needed to see her struggle more than I needed a nap. It was everything I thought it was gonna be. Even if it was only four hours.

“Kayn delivered him three hours ago. He says he knows nothing,” Tristan announces.

“He knows something.” No man just starts blurting he knows nothing before even asked.

“I agree.” He nods and starts to walk toward the back of the empty warehouse. “But this is your rodeo, so I’m letting you run the show.”

I snort. “Since when do you just stand by when it’s time to play?”

He throws me a cruel smile. “Just being nice.”

I come to a stop. “You’re never nice. So spill.”

“It’s like your reward.”

“Reward for what?”

“For sticking to your guns with Presleigh.”

I growl before rolling my eyes. Then I start walking again, ignoring his fucking laugh. I should have never told him what I did to her when he called me a couple of hours ago.

I push the door open to the back room where we do all of our work and find a man kneeling before Kayn. Kayn has that look of hatred still on his face. “Where did you find him?” I ask.

“He was at her house last night. That surveillance camera you put up was a great idea.”

I knew taking Bunny wasn’t gonna be enough. Damon is smarter than that. Dennis had informed me that Preston told Damon I love her. So they will all expect me to let her go. That maybe she is just shacking up at my house for a few days.

Wrong!

“How did you know where she lives?” I ask.

The man ignores me, so I walk over to him. “I won’t ask you twice.” I hate repeating myself. It’s a pet peeve of mine. A big one.

He finally looks up at me. His thin lips pulled back in a scowl. Dark blue eyes narrowed on me. “I know nothing.”

“So I’ve been told. But here’s the thing.” I crouch. “I don’t believe you.”

“Fuck you!”

I stand back up and walk over to the table. Kayn has already set out my favorite toys. I pick up the hammer and go to stand back in front of him. “Today is your lucky day.” I smile. “I’m only gonna break both of your legs. Then I want you to crawl back to your boss and tell him that I bought Preston’s sister for two million dollars.” His brows rise in surprise. “She’s my slave. Not his.”

“Everyone knows who you are, Avery. And your father. You don’t own slaves.” He shakes his head. “You’re not like him. Never were.”

I smile. “I do now.” Then swing the hammer.

He screams out, throwing his head back, and I smile. His broken leg lies at an odd angle. “One down,” I say.

“You fucking bastard!” he shouts, spit flying out of his mouth.

“I’m no different than you,” I say with a shrug.

He sucks in a breath through gritted teeth, and his chest heaves. “Whatever you do to me, he will do to her in return.”

I lift my right hand and rest the hammer on my shoulder. “That is where you’re wrong. He’ll never touch her.”

He nods his head quickly. “Oh, he will. He has men on his side.”

I drop the hammer to my side. “What the fuck does that mean?”

“It means that no matter what you do, she’ll end up at his feet.” He growls. “She will end up being his slave!” His voice rises. “She may be your little pet right now, but it’ll be his cock she sucks ...”

I swing the hammer on his other leg. He cries out as his head falls back.

I start to circle him. “Keep going.”

His cries turn to fits of laughter, causing his entire body to shake. “Enjoy your time with her, Avery”—he sucks in a breath—“because you won’t have her much longer.”

I look at my brother, and he watches the man with an expressionless look. “Why were you at her house if you knew Avery had her?” he asks, tilting his

head to the side.

He grinds his teeth. "I told you." His eyes turn to mine. "Damon doesn't believe he'll keep her. Not as a slave."

I walk back over to the table and place the hammer down. My brother walks up beside me. "You're gonna have to prove yourself," he says softly so only I can hear.

"I know."

"Can you do that?"

I look over at him with narrowed eyes, picking up a knife. "You doubt me?"

He sighs heavily. "Keeping her tied and gagged to a bed is different than proving to Damon that she is your slave."

"I fucking know that ..."

"We all know how he treats his slaves. Most don't even last a year."

I drop the knife and turn to fully face him. "What are you saying?"

"I'm saying you're gonna have to up your game, or you may just lose her to a man who will treat her like an actual slave."

PRESLEIGH

After I eat, I find myself standing in the bathroom up in my bedroom once again, and I sigh. It seems to be the only place where Darrell doesn't bother following me.

I can tell Avery plans on keeping me a while because the bathroom and bedroom where I have been sentenced to have everything I'll ever need. The bathroom has all the same products I used back at home, which means the bastard has been in my house. He has watched me, more than just that one time in the club when he confronted me. Or that other time he showed up at my house twice in one night. It makes my body break out in goose bumps how much I've missed. How careless I was. I'm not that person. Not since our parents passed, but I guess over time, I just got comfortable. Thought I was safe because I did what I was told. I roll my eyes at myself. I never had a choice in the matter.

I dried my hair because I had nothing better to do wasting my time. Once done, I placed the hair dryer on the countertop and turned around to survey the bathroom. If I wasn't here against my will, I could really enjoy the white

tiled floor and gold trimmings. It has a standup shower with a glass door and a clawfoot tub. I'm not sure what Avery does for a living, but it wouldn't matter. His family has money. Just thinking about his family has my chest tightening in fear. I have to get out of here. Being Avery's slave is not an option. I have to fight for my freedom. After what he did to me this morning, I know there's no way I'll survive here. And I'd rather die trying than stay his prisoner. After all, if I remain here, death will be inevitable.

My eyes go back to the clawfoot tub over by a huge window. Looking over at, I begin to form a plan.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

AVERY

I KNOW I TOLD THE GUY I was going to break both of his legs, but after the little talk I had with my brother, I felt like breaking a little more.

“Did you know that you have two hundred and six bones in your body?” I ask, and he whimpers. “I’ve only broken about ten so far,” I say as the hammer hangs from my hand. I went back to it after I was done with the knife.

Blood pours from his nose and mouth. One eye is swollen shut, and his front teeth are missing. “How did you know where she lived?” I repeat myself.

He sucks in a long breath. “Dennis told me,” he mumbles. “I was supposed to meet him there that night you caught up with him.” He swallows.

He’s giving up information much easier now. “Why?”

“After following the woman for weeks, he was given the orders to take her just hours before he ran into her at the club that night. He had over forty hours with her and wanted to know if I wanted a piece before he delivered her.”

My jaw tightens.

“That doesn’t explain why you were there just yesterday,” my brother says.

He tilts his head back to try to stop his nose from bleeding. It won’t. I broke that bitch. “To see if she was there.”

“Why would she be there?” I snap. “I have her!”

He shakes his head softly once. “No one believes she’s your slave,” he says shakily. “They think you staged the whole thing to scare Preston and show Damon you had her.”

I take a step toward the man who bleeds before me. “I’m gonna kill you.”

His eyes widen. “But... I’m just a messenger.”

“Killing the messenger sends a message,” I inform him.

“I was supposed to report back to Damon—”

“Oh, you will,” I interrupt him. “I will ship your cut-up, rotting corpse

back to him. You will be the message.”

“Good evening, sir.” Marvin greets me when I enter the front door to my mansion along with my brother.

“Evening, where is Bunny?” I cut to the chase, not caring to pull up the surveillance.

“Up in her room, sir. Been up there since she had her breakfast.” Nice to know she finally ate something.

I nod and place my hands in the pockets of my slacks.

“I’ll wait for you in your study,” Tristan announces.

I start climbing the stairs to the upper level. I kept watching her tracker on my phone, thinking she was gonna run. But she didn’t even try to get out of the house. Which was smart on her part because I had the alarm set. If any exterior door or window opens, my men and I would know that very second. But it also ate at me. Why wasn’t she trying to run? She fought my men too much the other day to just give up today. It didn’t make sense.

I enter her bedroom without knocking because I own this fucking house and she doesn’t need to allow me in. But don’t see her anywhere.

“Bunny?” I call out.

Nothing. My irritation of being ignored rises. When I call for her, I demand her presence.

I turn to see the bathroom door shut. I shove it open without a knock as well. I see her lying in the bathtub, facing away from me. Her neck resting on the edge, her head falling back and her long dark hair spilling onto the tiled floor.

Knowing she’s naked and not caring about her modesty, I walk over to her.

But my irritation quickly turns to fear when I see her hands lying on her thighs, palms up. Blood covers her arms, legs, chest, and stomach.

What the fuck?

“Bunny?” I demand, dropping to my knees beside the tub. I finally look at her face and see her eyes are closed, lips parted.

“Bunny?” I feel for a pulse on her neck; it’s rapid but weak.

Where is it all this blood coming from?

“Bunny! Goddammit!” I cup her cheek, and her blue eyes flutter open. Her

pupils are dilated, and she looks around as if confused. “Bunny, what did you do?” I ask, unable to keep the fear out of my voice.

She opens her mouth to speak but nothing comes out. “Come on, Presleigh. Talk to me,” I demand, needing to know.

Her head falls to the side, and she closes her eyes.

Fuck!

I start calling out for Marvin. For anyone in the house to hear me. To help. I stand and place my arms underneath her, picking her up from the tub. She weighs nothing. Her body is cold and clammy. My chest tightens. I place her on the tiled floor just as Marvin comes running in, gasping at the scene before him.

“What the fuck ...?” Kayn barks, following him.

“Call Lance. Get him here. Now!” I snap. “What did you do, Bunny?”

She can’t die on me.

That’s not the plan.

I took her to protect her. Not kill her.

Eighteen years old

I sit in my parents’ game room, lounging in the same chair I always lie in. I have a beer in my right hand while my left runs through Bunny’s hair while she lies between my legs. Guys all around us talk as “Needles” by Seether blares through the speakers in the room. It’s well past three in the morning, and my eyes are starting to get heavy from the beers and the blunt I just finished.

“Avery? Wanna play another round of darts?” asks my friend Derek from over in the corner, yanking the darts from the dart board hanging on the wall.

I look down at Bunny to see her head on my thigh, eyes closed. “Nah.” I shake my head. “I’m gonna call it a night.”

He just shrugs and then turns to another friend Mitch, asking him to play. I finish my beer, tipping it back, and watch him look over at Bunny. Things haven’t been the same since I punched him when I walked in on him pressing his cock into her ass while trying to show her how to play pool. Not sure why I never saw it before, but now it’s all I see. The way he looks at her. Watches her. The only reason I allow him to still hang around us is because my father taught me to keep my enemies close. And he has definitely become my enemy.

I slowly shift her head off my leg and then stand, picking her up in my arms. I walk out of the game room and down the hall to my bedroom. I place her on my bed and then jump over her to lie down next to her.

I place one hand under my head, propping it up and the other falls to my chest. The bass from the outside speakers that my brother has blaring for those in the pool shakes my walls, but it doesn't bother me. I'm used to it.

I close my eyes, but they open when I feel a small hand on my chest. I look over to my left to see a set of beautiful blue eyes staring at me. "Hey," I say, turning on my side and cupping her soft face.

"Hey," she says with a yawn. "How long have we been in here?"

"Not even a minute."

She glides her hand down my chest and stomach and under the hem of my shirt. I tense as her fingers softly burn my skin. "Why haven't you pressured me for sex?" she asks.

Her question doesn't surprise me. She's been dropping hints here and there for a while now, but I've ignored them all. "I don't want to rush you. I can wait until you're ready." Tristan's words come back to me—fuck her before they do.

"What if I told you I was ready now?" she whispers softly like she is too ashamed to say it out loud.

My cock hardens at her words, but my jaw tightens. I've had blue balls for years now. I've thought of nothing but her and I having sex for longer that I can imagine. Our age difference isn't all that bad, but I am eighteen now. And I never wanted to push her into something she wasn't ready for. Presleigh is the kind of girl you wait for. Plus, in a world full of women and sex, I've wanted her to stay innocent as long as possible.

She sits up and pushes me onto my back. I go willingly. Then she's straddling me. My hands going to her jean-clad hips. "Bunny ..."

She reaches down and pulls her shirt up and over her head. "I want you, Avery." She bites her lip nervously. "Don't you want me?"

I sit up, my hands going to her hair instantly, and I pull her head back and she starts to pant. I press my lips to her soft skin and inhale the scent of vanilla. It's intoxicating. "Of course, I want you." I say roughly. No need to lie. She can feel my hardness in my jeans.

"Please," she begs, panting.

"Please what, Bunny?" I ask, trailing down to her breast that her bra covers. We've fooled around before, but she's always been the one to initiate

it. I never wanted to overstep that line with her or make her feel uncomfortable. I love this woman!

“Make love to me.”

The fire burns, warming my study while giving off a soft glow. I sit at my desk, holding a glass of scotch in my hand. I’m on my fourth.

“At least she survived,” Tristan offers. His words sound like he cares, but his tone is indifferent.

I know how he feels. He couldn’t care less either way.

I take a drink. “For now.”

He looks up at me. “I have to say I’m surprised with Presleigh. I didn’t think she had the balls to go that far. I thought she was more of a fighter than to give up.”

I shrug and look down at the letter opener on my desk. I found it with her in the tub along with a washcloth. It’s still covered in her dried blood. And another bottle of my scotch that she needed in order to pull it off. “Everyone has a breaking point.” A part of me hates that she gave in so fast. I liked the fight in her. It was much more attractive.

“True,” he agrees.

There’s a knock on my study door. “Come in.”

Lance, our longtime family friend and doctor, peeks his head in. He looks around nervously before his brown eyes meet mine. “She’s asleep and will be for a while.”

“Thanks,” I say, taking another drink.

His eyes shoot to my brother and linger for a second before they go to my cell sitting on my desk. Then they land on mine. His brown eyes are wide with fear, and sweat has formed on his forehead.

“You okay?” I ask, wondering what the hell is wrong with him. It couldn’t be the sight of Bunny earlier. He’s been a doctor for longer than I can remember. He’s seen worse than the state I found her in.

“Yes. Yes,” he assures me with a nod of his head. “I’ll be going.” Then without another word, he exits and closes the door.

“What the hell is wrong with him?” my brother asks.

“Who knows?” I shrug with a sigh, remembering what happened just hours ago.

Lance enters the bathroom. “What happened?” he asks as I sit on my

knees beside her.

“She slit her wrist. Found her in the tub.” My clothes have soaked up her blood, and my hands and arms are covered it in. I’ve dealt with blood before. I’ve killed before. My hands are stained with it. No matter how many times I wash them, it’ll never come off. But to have them covered in hers is different. The only woman I’ve ever loved.

“Presleigh?” he asks, his brown eyes wide when he gets a good look at her. He just stands there doing nothing but staring.

“Yes. Now fucking do something,” I demand.

He kneels beside her as well and lifts her hands. I had removed my belt and wrapped it around her forearm to close off the wound. “I think she was in shock.”

“It’s not as bad as it seems,” he observes.

“Of course, it fucking is!” Has he gone blind?

He shakes his head. “She has lost blood but not enough to warrant this kind of unconsciousness.” He stares down at her. “She needs to be admitted ...”

“No!” I shake my head. “Treat her here.”

After a long pause, he finally nods.

I finish my drink and then pour another one. My brother starts laughing.

“Care to share what is so funny?” I ask, unable to see the humor in the situation.

“I can see where she knew there was no way out. You have cameras in the house. Countless men ready to restrain her at any given moment until you arrive. And an alarm. Plus, you had a tracker placed in her. So even if she is able to outsmart your men and get a head start, she wouldn’t get far.”

“Yeah, I knew she’d run but ...” My voice trails off as his words set in.

“What?”

I set my full drink down and stand from my desk, ignoring his question. I pick up the remote and turn on my TV that hangs on the wall above the mantle and then the surveillance. I rewind it to earlier in the day. My brother turns to face it, and we see her standing in her bathroom with a bottle of scotch in one hand, my letter opener in the other, and she’s completely naked. We watch silently while the scene plays out in front of us in complete shock of her actions. When I press pause, he turns around, takes a drink, and looks up at me, chuckling. “Well, that changes things.”

I storm out of my office, ignoring his statement.

Darrell stands over in the corner of her room. He was to inform me when she woke since I've put her on suicide watch.

"Leave us."

He walks out without a word, closing the door behind him.

She lies in her bed just as I left her with the covers pulled up to her chest and still naked underneath them. Clothes aren't important when you're dying. Her arms are the only thing not covered. They rest on top of the red comforter down by her side. A white bandage is wrapped around her left wrist. Her other arm has an IV in it. Lance turned her bedroom into a hospital room, giving her everything she needed. Thankfully, she didn't have to have a blood transfusion. It could have been much worse.

I saved her. If I hadn't come home, she could have died in that tub.

She'll owe me big for that. Especially since I know it wasn't suicide due to desperation. Now I understand she cut herself open due to determination. She wanted that tracker out so she could run. She cut herself horizontally, not vertically. But I couldn't think straight. At the time, I just had to save her. She's worth nothing to me dead.

My jaw clenches at the thought of her outsmarting me. She almost did. I could tie her to the bed or take her to the cellar and chain her to a wall. Where I'd starve her, beat her, fuck her.

There are several cruel yet appealing ideas I could do to her against her will that would guarantee she'd never get away, but I don't want those. I don't want her to fight me. Plus, that would make me no better than the men who want her.

She doesn't need to know the details. She just needs to trust me as she did at one time. But she's obviously smarter than I thought. That's how we got to this point.

I want cooperation.

I want submission.

I want total dominance over her.

So I'm gonna have to come at this from a different angle. Just as she played me for a fool, I'm gonna play her.

I walk over and stare down at her sleeping face. She really is as beautiful as she used to be. Her nose is smaller, but her face still reminds me of a Barbie doll and porcelain skin.

Now that I know she's not suicidal, she's even more intriguing. Even more

resilient.

My Bunny!

Her dark hair is fanned across the pillow. Her color has returned to her tanned skin. I smile at how much she must hate me in order to willingly cut herself open to rip out her tracker. Just to run from me. I know it had to hurt. I saw the tears as they ran down her gorgeous face. And it makes me hard knowing that she was that strong to keep going.

That determined.

I'm about to show her that I can match her determination.

Leaning down, I place a soft kiss on her forehead, my lips lingering for a second too long before I pull back and whisper, "It didn't work, Bunny. You're still mine. Now more than ever."

PRESLEIGH

I moan in pain as my heavy eyes try to open. The room is dark, but the lamp glows from the nightstand, giving the room some light.

I sit up but feel a rush of dizziness take over. I place my head in my hands and hiss in a breath when my right arm pinches. Pulling it away, I see an IV in it and blood.

"What the ...?" I trail off when I see a bandage around my other wrist. And I swallow the knot that instantly forms in my throat.

I failed.

My plan didn't work.

I sit in the cold clawfoot tub stripped naked. The faucet isn't running, and the tub is empty. I have no plans to bathe. But this is the only spot I could think to pull off what I need to do. Once I'm done, I'll turn on the water and wash all the evidence down the drain.

Easy cleanup.

I may not have been able to access the computer, but I was able to find something useful.

I spin the letter opener that I stole from his office between my fingers. It's sterling silver with a long blade that comes to a sharp point. The top has a black cross, and I wrap my fingers around it, feeling the heavy weight of it in my hand. My salvation!

This isn't ideal, but it's the only option I have at the moment. If I run, he'll find me, and this tracker gives him an advantage. And who knows what he'll do to me when he catches me. I could be down for weeks before I'd be strong enough to try again.

I can't have that.

If I'm gonna have any chance, I need the upper hand. Grabbing the washcloth that lays over the side of the tub, I stuff it in my mouth to quiet my screams so his butler and whoever the hell else is in this house doesn't hear. 'Cause I know this is gonna hurt like a bitch. But once it's out, I'll run.

Tears instantly sting my eyes, and my chest tightens.

"I have to applaud your effort."

My head snaps up at the sound of his voice. Avery sits over in the far corner by the large window in a high-back chair. Dressed casually in a pair of dark blue jeans and a black T-shirt, he holds a glass of dark liquid in his large hand as it rests on his thigh.

"You can't keep me here forever," I snap, my hands fisting the red comforter, and the tightness making my left wrist hurt.

"I can, and I will."

"I don't belong to you!" I shout, angry tears sliding down my face. "You can't do this to me!" My chest starts to heave, and my lungs burn. I can't breathe. All of a sudden, the room is too small. He is too big.

He tilts his head to the side, watching me with fascination. As though he's never seen me before.

He hasn't. Not this Presleigh. I used to be carefree. And in love with him. That was before ... before he left me with nothing.

I take a deep breath to calm my nerves. "Let me go, Avery."

"No."

"You fucking hate me!" I shout, my lungs burning. "Why keep me here?"

"I have my reasons," he responds simply.

I grind my teeth in frustration. And my eyes fall to the IV in my arm. Without thought, I yank it out and rip the covers back before I jump out of bed. The room sways, and my vision blurs, and I feel lightheaded. I blink a few times and place my left hand out to grab the nightstand, but it just slides across, and I fall to my knees. Dots form, and my head spins.

"You had some blood loss." I hear Avery's voice off in the distance.

"Cutting yourself open and almost bleeding to death will do that to you. Plus

the fact that you fell and hit your head on the corner of the tub. Knocking yourself out in the process.”

“Fuck you,” My head pounds, and blood rushes in my ears.

“I think you’ve fucked yourself, Bunny,” he says, and I can hear the amusement in his words.

I hang my head in defeat while I kneel on the bedroom floor. My hands fist the red rug, and I rock back and forth, trying to think of a way out. An escape. I won’t allow him to keep me here like this as if I’m nothing to him. As if I was always nothing to him.

Is this how he always saw me? Had I been so blinded by my love for him that I didn’t realize he never saw me as a person? Fresh tears fall down my face at that thought.

“You’re thinking too much.” He interrupts my thoughts. “You’re here because I want you here, Bunny. And that’s all that matters.”

I swallow a sob that threatens to come out. “I don’t belong to you.” My voice is rough, and I clear my throat. “I never did.” Just saying those words has my heart beating faster.

I hear the ice in his glass clink, letting me know he’s taking a drink. “That’s right,” he says in a clipped tone. “You never were mine, Presleigh.” Hatred rolls off his words at the sound of my name. “But you pretended so well back then. I have faith you can do it again.”

He doesn’t know what he’s talking about. He knows fucking nothing!

“Or you can continue to fight me along the way.” He chuckles. “I find that I like you better like this than the fake bitch who pretended to love me back then.”

I can’t take it anymore—the way he speaks as if everything we had, the future we were building meant nothing to me—so I change the subject. “How long?” I finally ask. He stays silent. “How long am I here for, Avery?” I snap.

I hear the leather creak as he stands from the chair. Then I see his tennis shoes in front of me. I look up, and he is smiling down at me. He likes it like this. Me on my knees. Him standing tall and all powerful.

“Until I decide I’m done with you.”

I bare my teeth at him. “I’ll fight you. I’ll make you wish you’d just kill me.” A tear runs down my cheek in frustration.

“No, Bunny. *You’re* gonna wish I killed you.”

I don’t flinch at his words, but the tone causes my chest to tighten. I stay on my knees and bow my head again, unable to look at him anymore.

He bends down, picking me up by my upper arm. His fingers dig into the bruises already left from his belt, but I refuse to let him know he's hurting me. Instead of placing me on the bed like I think he's going to, he pulls me toward the bathroom. And then he turns on the water in the bathtub. Blood is smeared over the porcelain. My blood.

"Get in," he orders, and I do as he commands. He might as well have a chain around my neck because there's no fighting him. He's proven that.

I sit down, and he leaves the bathroom, coming back with a towel and washcloth. He bends down beside me while the warm water fills the cold tub. "What did you do with the washcloth that was in the tub with you?" he asks.

I look away from him. He grabs my chin and yanks my face back to his. Dark blue eyes glare into mine. "I asked you a question."

I still refuse to answer.

"Do you like being gagged, Bunny? Is that why you stuck in it your mouth?"

Motherfucker!

He must have watched the tape. In my decision to cut myself open and rip out my tracker, I had forgotten cameras were in here.

He gets my attention as he wads up the washcloth in his hand. "Open your mouth."

My eyes widen, and I pull my face as far away from him as I can. Tears sting my eyes at having to tell him what I attempted to do. "Bunny ..."

"I placed it in my mouth so Marvin wouldn't hear me scream," I cave, knowing that the bastard already knows this. He's just making me say it. He wants me to remind myself that I failed.

His eyes narrow on mine, and his jaw sharpens. He looks at me as if he wants to hit me, and for a moment, I hope he does. I want him to make me hurt. Make me feel alive. Because I feel deader now than I ever have. Once again, I failed myself. I got myself in a situation I couldn't get out of.

Instead, he places the washcloth in the warm water that continues to fill the tub and then grabs the soap bottle, pouring the pink liquid onto the washcloth. After he lathers it up, he places it on my skin and starts to wash me. I stay silent as I remember the last time he bathed me. Before things went very south. Eleven years ago.

He sits behind me in his tub, his arms around my shoulders while my back rests on his chest. I feel his lips by my ear, and he whispers. "I love you,

Bunny.”

I smile, closing my eyes. “I love you too, Avery.”

His arms loosen around my shoulders, and his hand moves to my flat stomach. “I hope it’s a girl,” he whispers.

“Yeah?” I ask with a smile. “You don’t want a boy?”

“I want a girl. The world needs another beautiful face like yours,” he says, and I feel tears threaten my eyes at his words. I’m terrified. I have no idea how to care for a baby. But he makes me believe that we can do it. Just me and him. Our own little family.

“Well, I can’t wait to find out.” We’ve only known I’m expecting for a few weeks now, and he hasn’t let me out of his sight since. I’ve been moody and sick lately. He suggested the possibility, but I said there was no way. We have always been careful, but I guess not enough. I frown. “I wish you didn’t have to leave next week.” He and Preston are going away to look at colleges. Avery assured me I’d be going wherever he decides to go, but with the baby coming, we need to have a plan. I couldn’t argue with that.

“I’ll only be gone for a week,” he promises me before kissing my cheek.

CHAPTER TWELVE

AVERY

THE WATER IS BLOOD RED and has started to turn cold, but I had to do this. I've been sitting in her room, waiting for her to wake up, and when she did, I couldn't look at the blood covering her anymore. I had showered earlier after I watched the tape with my brother where she tore herself open, so now it was her turn.

"Stand up," I order, and she slowly makes her way to her feet.

I grab the towel off the floor and stand, starting to dry off her neck and shoulders. She silently cries, and I'm not sure if it's due to humiliation or pain. I come to her tits, and they make my cock grow behind my zipper. Her pink nipples harden from the coldness, and I run the towel over them, drying them off. Water runs down her flat stomach and her smooth pussy. She still has bruises on both of her hips from the way I took her over the dining room table, and she hisses in a breath when I push on them too hard as I dry them off. Dark bruises cover both wrists and ankles as well.

I don't apologize.

"Step out," I order her, and she does as I say on shaky legs. "How do you feel?"

"Fine."

I stop drying her legs and stand to my full height, glaring down at her. "Tell me the truth. Do you need something for the pain?"

"I'm. Fine." She says each word slowly as if I may not understand her, and I nod.

Okay.

I take her by the hand and pull her out of the bathroom and back into the bedroom. The red comforter has been replaced by a white one. The white sheets have been replaced with black ones. I had sent Marvin a text letting him know she was awake while she collapsed on the bedroom floor and to come change out the bedding and bring her a water and some food.

I pull back the duvet. "Get in," I command, and she does slowly.

“I don’t wanna sleep naked,” she says softly.

“Too bad.”

She lets out a long breath, too tired to argue. “Here,” I say, grabbing the tray that sits on her nightstand. “You need to eat something.”

She looks over at the pancakes, eggs, and bacon. After a long second, she chooses a single piece of toast. “I want you to eat everything,” I tell her and then turn around and leave.

I enter my study to find my brother still sitting there. “Don’t you ever go home?” I ask, sitting down at my desk.

He pours me a new glass of scotch. “How is she?” He was just as impressed as I was from the video of her lying in the bathtub naked, cutting herself open.

I grab the glass and take a drink. “She’s pissed.”

He sits back in his seat. “Well, that is expected. She tried to escape and failed. But I’m sure she’ll try again.”

I snort and take another sip, needing more. My cock is so hard for her it hurts.

“She’s smarter than I remember,” he says with a smirk.

I nod. “Seems so.”

“So what are you going to do now?” he asks, taking a drink from his own glass.

I shake my head. “No clue.”

He arches a brow.

“What?” I snap.

“Well, that’s not like you not to have a plan.”

I know. It’s not like me at all.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

AVERY

THE FOLLOWING DAY, I SIT at the head of the table drinking a cup of coffee when I feel her enter the room. I had sent Marvin to fetch her this morning. I decided last night after talking to my brother in the study that it's time to pull back. She needs to think she has some freedom. Security. It's part of fucking with her mind.

“Morning.”

She remains silent, and I finally pull my eyes from the emails I'm reading on my cell to look at her. She stares down at the table, her hair a disheveled mess, and hands placed in her lap. She doesn't move. I don't even see her chest rise in the black nightgown. The right strap hangs off her shoulder. She looks like a statue—gorgeous and breakable.

I place my phone in the pocket inside my suit jacket and stand. Walking over to her, I reach out and run the pad of fingers up her forearm. She tenses, and I smile. “How did you sleep?” I ask.

“You shouldn't ask questions that you already know the answer to,” she answers softly.

My smile grows. She's referring to the cameras. Of course, I watched her again last night. She slept like shit, tossing and turning mostly. Every now and then, she would sit straight up and look around like she was lost. Then the moment she realized she was living a nightmare, she would lie back down and turn her back to the camera.

My hand reaches her upper arm, and I gently pull her strap back onto her shoulder. Leaning over, I pull her hair back to expose her neck to me. I kiss the warm skin. “I'll be home at five, and I want you in my study waiting for me. On your knees.”

She slowly lifts her head, and those blue eyes I've missed all these years glare up at me. So much anger. Hate. With one look, I swear I can feel my body heating up as if she's setting me on fire. “That won't happen.”

“Oh, it will, Bunny,” I assure her. “Either you're waiting for me on your

knees, or I punish you.”

“The punishment would be me on my knees for you,” she snaps.

I step back and let her think she’s won. That I am actually taking her seriously. Walking out of the dining room, I spot Kayn in the hallway.

“I’m ready when you are, sir ...”

“Then let’s go.”

PRESLEIGH

Entering the bedroom, I look around for anything I can use. I can’t leave this room; that is too risky. There are men on the other side of my bedroom door. If I can escape from here, I may have a chance.

I walk over to my bed and yank off the comforter and then both the black sheets. I run into my closet and shut the door. It’s the only room that doesn’t have a camera in it that I know of. I’ve never seen a red blinking light in it anyway. That has to be a good sign. I tie each end together and pull on them to make sure they are secure, though the odds of them staying tight aren’t all that great. My weight may pull them apart, and I may fall to my death. Knowing my luck, I would just break a leg, but I’ll take my chances.

Taking a deep breath, I walk out of the closet and over to the window, but of course, it’s locked. I look around for something to throw at it but come up empty. “Think,” I say to myself.

Then my eyes fall on the high-back chair over in the corner. I fall to my knees before it and look at the legs. They’re big and wooden. Unscrewing one as quickly as I can, I hold it in my hands like a baseball bat and look at the window. My heart pounds in my chest. I’m not sure how long I have before they come after me, but my tracker is long gone. At least something good came out of cutting myself open. If I can just get to someone. Get them to listen or take me to the police. Then I can get back to New York. I can’t stay here. *Not with him.*

I tighten my hands on the leg, take a deep breath, and close my eyes before I swing. All it does is bounce off the glass. I tighten my grip, widen my stance, and take a deep breath, then swing again.

The glass shatters, and I have a moment of excitement before an alarm sounds.

“Shit!”

I run into the closet, grab the sheets, and wrap it around the other leg of the chair. It's not gonna hold. The chair is going to move with my weight, but it doesn't matter. I just need it to slow me down so I don't hit the ground at full force. I throw it over the window and start to climb out just as a man I've never seen walks into my room. "She's going out the window ..."

I loosen my grip and start falling. The wind whips my hair around, and my stomach's up in my throat.

Glancing up, I see the guy looking out of the window down at me. He grabs a hold of the sheet and yanks it. I let go, already committed to this extremely suicidal idea. My feet hit the ground, my knees buckle from the force, and I fall onto my back. The fall knocks the wind out of me, and I suck in a breath, rolling over onto my side. "Fuck!" I hiss, holding my side. Making my way onto shaky legs, I turn around to run when a fist hits me in the face. I'm knocked to my ass once again as dots form in my vision. I cover my face with my hand as tears instantly sting my eyes, and I cry out.

"Fucking bitch!"

My body shakes as the pain takes over, making my face throb and my tongue taste blood. Then I feel pressure on my chest, and I can't breathe. My hands are ripped away from my face and pinned above my head.

"You just don't know when to give up."

I look up through water eyes to see Darrell straddling my chest. Another man kneels above my head, holding my arms down.

I scream out in frustration while they hold my bruised and broken body down effortlessly.

"Shut her up!" barks the man holding my arms.

Darrell lifts a syringe and removes the cap with his teeth. "No!" I shout, not wanting them to drug me. I'm afraid of what they may do to me without Avery here.

He grabs my chin roughly and shoves my head to the right, and then I feel the prick of the needle in my neck before my body starts to go numb. They both are still holding me down when my world goes black.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

AVERY

MY BROTHER AND I STAND in the middle of the warehouse discussing business when a cell rings.

Kayn excuses himself to answer it. “What?” he barks out. He spins back around to face us, and I hold up my hand to my brother, quieting him.

“What is it?” I demand.

“We have a situation,” he answers, pocketing the phone.

“What is it?” I snap, wanting him to get to the point.

“It’s Presleigh. She ran.”

“WHAT?”

“Darrell stopped her ...”

“Fuck!”

“Told you she would be a prob—”

“Don’t fucking finish that sentence,” I bark at my brother, then look at Kayn. “Let’s go.”

Twenty minutes later, I barge into her room to find her lying in her bed and Darrell standing in the corner. It feels like *Deja vu*. “Leave!”

He obeys without question.

I take a sip of my scotch that I had stopped by my study to grab. I go to sit down in the chair but notice it has a leg missing. Instead, I sit on the couch and wait for her to wake up. I was told that Darrell drugged her but with less than the normal dosage, so she should be waking up soon.

So I wait.

She fucking ran!

I didn’t think she’d be that fucking stupid. *Again!*

She just continues to prove me wrong. And that does not bode well for her.

Thirty minutes later, she starts to stir.

“Fuuuccckkkk.” She groans in pain.

Darrell told me he hit her, and I’m not happy about that. Why hit her if he already had the drugs in his hands and her cornered? He and I need to have a

talk later. After I'm done with her.

She rolls over onto her back, covering her face with her hands.

"You're daring me to prove something to you, Bunny."

She sits up, and her dazed blue eyes meet mine, blinking a few times to no doubt try to clear her blurry vision. I've never been drugged with the stuff, but I know how strong it is.

After a few long seconds, she looks away and swallows.

"And I don't like to be tested," I say, swirling the scotch around in my glass.

Her eyes find mine again, and I look at the bruise on her right cheek from Darrell's fist. My hand tightens on the glass. *Only I am allowed to touch her.* I'll remind him of that.

Her jaw sharpens. She's pissed. Good! "Fuck you, Avery!"

I place my glass down on the floor and stand. Then I'm walking over to her. "Remember how I told you not to run? That you would be punished ...?"

She throws off the covers and goes to jump out of bed, but I'm faster than she is and reach the bed before she can get out. I grab her hair and pull her onto her feet.

"Avery!" She gasps out.

"You're gonna learn to keep that smartass mouth shut unless I'm fucking it," I growl, and she cries out.

I drag her out of the bedroom and down the winding staircase. Her legs can't keep up with mine due to my fast pace and the drugs still lingering in her system. She trips, but I manage to keep her up with my hand still wrapped in her hair.

She tries to fight me; her hands grip my arm, and her nails dig into my skin, cutting me, but I don't let go. I'm too pissed that the fucking bitch almost got away.

How the fuck would I have found her?

I hadn't put a new tracker in her yet. I'm just as pissed at myself as I am her. Thankfully, Darrell put a new one in while she was out this time.

I continue to pull her through the house while she cries and tries to fight me. We pass Kayn and my brother in the foyer. Both men watch with emotionless stares.

We turn the corner, and I unlock the door underneath the staircase. She sucks in a few breaths, and her body slumps against mine.

The door opens, and I yank her inside. "You're hurting me—"

I cut her off, pulling her down another set of stairs, then shoving her forward into the dark room. She trips over her feet, falling onto her stomach. I hit the switch on the wall, and my cellar lights up.

It's freezing cold and smells of blood. No matter how many times it gets cleaned, the smell won't go away. It's as if all the souls of the men I've killed remain here.

She scrambles forward on her hands and knees, trying to put some space between us. I allow it because she has nowhere to go in here. It's literally a dungeon.

When she decides to come to a stop, she spins around on her ass and looks up at me. Tears run down her face as she silently cries. Her hair a disheveled mess and her chest heaving with every breath. Her shirt pulled tight against her chest. She looks fucking perfect!

My slave!

"What ... is this place?" she mumbles, eyes searching.

It was once a wine cellar, but I had it gutted. Two thousand square feet. Enough room for me to do what I do best—torture.

It's just like my father's.

It has three jail cells to the left, lining the black wall. A silver table bolted down in the middle and one chair beside it. I also bolted the chair down just so it can't move when I'm yanking out their teeth or cutting off their fingers.

"This is where you belonged from the beginning."

"What?" She gasps, turning to face me. "Avery, no ..."

"I think you prefer to be chained to the wall." Her eyes widen, and she shakes her head frantically. "Left down here, alone. Only to be allowed one glass of water and two pieces of bread each day."

"Please don't ..."

"I think I've been more than accommodating, Bunny. But if you want to run like a disobedient slave, then I will treat you like one."

For the first time since I took her, I hate the look of terror in her blue eyes as she looks up at me from the concrete floor. This is how Damon would treat her. This is exactly how she would look up at him. I'm supposed to be better. But I also can't have her running from me. I honestly didn't think she would give me this much trouble. I thought she'd lie down and take it.

I was a fucking idiot!

I walk over to the right and grab a chain that hangs from the wall. The weight heavy in my hands. "Do you want me to chain you to the wall?"

“No! Please ...”

I take a step toward her, and she crawls backward until she’s pressed up against one of the cages that lines the wall. “Do you want to have to piss and shit in a bucket?” I yell. I may have never owned a sex slave, but my father taught me how to treat one—like they’re fucking nothing!

“A-a-aver-r-ry.” She sobs.

I storm over to her, and she doesn’t even bother trying to run from me. I lean down and grab her chin and make her look up at me. She whimpers.

“You are testing my patience, Bunny!” I snap.

“I’m sorry.” She sobs and closes her eyes tightly.

“Look at me!”

When she opens her eyes, I drop the chain and lift my now free hand to touch her wet cheek, and she flinches as if I’m going to hit her. “I don’t want to treat you like this, Bunny,” I say softly, and her body physically shakes. “I don’t want to cage you like an animal.” *Lie, that’s why I brought her here in the first place.* I knew what extremes I would have to go to, to keep her safe. *She’s not safe from me, though.* “But you’re not giving me any other choice.”

“I’ll do better ...”

I sigh dramatically for effect. “I don’t think you can.”

“Please,” she begs, and my cock hardens at how breathless she sounds. Her bloodshot eyes quickly look around the room the best she can since my hand still holds her chin in place. “I don’t want to stay down here,” she whispers once her eyes meet mine.

“Are you going to be good?”

“Yes.”

I don’t want her down here either. I want her up in her room. “This is your last chance, Bunny. Disobey me again and you will find yourself down here. Do you understand?”

“Yes, sir.”

Fuck!

The single word makes me want to rip her clothes off and fuck her right here. But that’s not part of the plan. On the way home, I decided what I was going to do with her, and it was never to put her in the cellar. I mean, the threat has been made. If she fucks up again, this is where she will find herself. But I wanted her punishment to be more of a mindfuck rather than physical.

“Go back up to your room,” I order, letting her go and standing to my full

height.

She slowly stands and then walks out without looking back at me.

Fuck, I hate that she almost outsmarted me. Again!

I run a hand through my hair, frustrated.

“Avery?”

“What?” I snap, turning to see my brother has now joined me. “Go home, Tristan.”

I know why he’s here. He thinks I’m going to fold and go easy on her. And that he can take over when that happens. *If he lays one hand on her, I’ll kill him.*

He walks into the cellar, pocketing his cell. “I made the call. We’re on.”

“We?”

He nods. “The more eyes, the better.”

I can’t disagree with him there.

He just stands there as he looks around the empty cellar. When his eyes meet mine, I can see the disappointment in them. “Not making her stay down here?”

“What I do with her is none of your business,” I growl defensively.

His eyes narrow on me. “Look. I’m putting my ass on the line for not only you but for her as well.”

“I never asked for your help!” He lets out a long sigh as if he’s tired of this fucking game already. I’m just getting started.

“Eventually, she is going to succeed.”

I shake my head. “She will not ...”

“We both know she will. Quit denying it.” My jaw tightens. “What are you gonna do when he ends up with her?”

“I won’t allow that to happen,” I say through clenched teeth.

“You can’t control her. She’s been here two days and already proven it twice.”

“It won’t happen again.”

“You can’t guarantee that.” He holds his hands out wide. “Unless you put her down here—”

“Drop it, Tristan!” I interrupt him. “I have a plan. Either fucking stick to it or get the fuck out!” Then I walk past him, exiting the cellar, running up the steps and then making my way up the winding staircase to the second floor.

I open her bedroom door without knocking to find her sitting on her bed. Her back against the headboard and legs up to her chest.

“Come here,” I order.

I wait impatiently as she slowly crawls out of bed. She has quit crying, but her cheeks are still wet, and I know the drugs are still in her system. She walks over and stands before me. I look down at her. “Get undressed.”

Her shoulders slump at my command, but her fingers remove her shirt and jeans. She stands before me dressed in a black bra and matching thong.

“All of it.”

She unclasps her bra, and it falls to the floor before my feet. Then she slowly pushes her thong down her legs, showing me her smooth pussy.

I look over her slowly, allowing my eyes to take in every inch of her. She looks better than she did yesterday. Her color is back, and her face is healing. Well, except for the new mark Darrell gave her earlier.

She reaches up, crossing her arms over her chest, and bows her head. She’s nervous. Good, I want her to feel something. Fear is a very strong motivator. She needs to be terrified of me. Because if she were to get away, and Damon got a hold of her ...

“Turn around and get down on your knees.”

Her head snaps up, and her blue eyes meet mine, wide with fear. “Avery ...”

“I gave you an order, Bunny. I won’t repeat it.”

She very slowly turns around and goes down to her knees, her hands resting on her thighs.

I grab my scotch from the floor and take a drink. This is her punishment. The anticipation. She never was good at waiting. “Place your ass up in the air and your cheek on the floor.”

“Please, Avery ...”

“What did I say about begging?”

I hear her sniff, and I take another drink. Fuck, I want to toss her on the bed and fuck her tight little pussy. Show her that she has been and always will be mine. But she ran. She made her choice, so now she must face the consequences.

She bends over, placing her palms flat on the hardwood floor, and she lowers her right cheek as well. Her ass and pussy are up in the air.

“Spread your legs, Bunny.” My voice comes out rough, and I grip my glass tighter as my cock hardens. Fuck, this woman is incredible.

A soft whimper leaves her lips while she spreads her knees for me. Not as much as I’d like, but it’s a start.

I throw back another drink and lower myself to my knees behind her. When my hand touches her ass cheek, she jumps.

“Are you going to hurt me?” Her voice shakes.

“Yes.”

She sucks in a breath at my answer. But not the way she is thinking. I’m not gonna remove my belt and make her black and blue. Or bleed. I’m gonna fuck her body and her mind. I’m gonna remind her who the fuck is in charge here.

My hand runs over her wet pussy, my thumb sliding over her clit before it enters her. She shuffles on her knees and arches her back more. I smile.

Raising my drink, I finish off the little I have left and pause. I look over her pussy and get an idea.

“Don’t move,” I order.

Lifting my glass, I hold it over her ass and pussy and pour the contents out. She gasps as the dark liquid dribbles down over her skin, coating her thighs before dripping onto the floor. Pieces of ice fall, and she sucks in a long breath. The coldness causing a chill to run through her body.

Then I lean forward and lick it off her smooth cunt. The taste has my hands gripping her cheeks, spreading them farther. It tastes like the best fucking thing in the world. *Scotch and candy.*

“Avery ...” She cries out, pushing back against me.

“What, Bunny?” I ask as my tongue creeps higher, licking up the scotch as I run over her ass. *I wanna fuck it!*

“Please.” She whimpers, pushing her hips back more.

I pull back and slap her ass cheek, and she moans. Then I lower my lips to her pussy again. Placing my hands on her thighs, I spread them farther apart and bury my face into her. My tongue enters her, and I taste the sweetness of her cunt. My cock pushes painfully against my zipper.

Her hips rock back and forth as I fuck her with my tongue, and she continues to whimper.

I hear her start to pant, feel her pussy start to tighten, and I pull away, licking what is left of her off my lips.

She cries out, and her body shakes, knowing what I’ve done. I’m gonna have my way with her tonight, but she isn’t gonna come.

I make my way to my feet. “Stand up.”

She pushes herself up off her face and gets to her feet. She sways a little bit, and I reach out to help steady her. Once I know she’s not gonna fall, I

order, “Don’t move!”

I go over to her closet and grab what I want. Walking out, I grab her arms and bring them behind her back. I wrap the fur-lined cuffs around her wrists. I would prefer to use handcuffs, but her one wrist is still healing, and I don’t want to hurt her.

“Go lie on the bed,” I instruct her. “On your back and your head at the foot.”

She gets on and lies on her back with her head at the end of the bed. I undo my black slacks and push them down my legs along with my boxers. Then I reach up and unbutton my dress shirt. I walk to the end of the bed and look down at her. She lifts her knees up, and they fall open. I smile, reaching down to stroke her face. “Tonight is about me, Bunny.”

She closes her eyes and licks her lips. I grab her shoulders and pull her closer to me, her head falling off the end of the bed.

“Open that pretty mouth so I can fuck it.”

She keeps her eyes closed but follows my command. Her lips part, and I grab the base of my cock. I rub it along her lips, letting the pre-cum paint them like a canvas. Then I push into her mouth. She opens wider, running her tongue up my shaft.

I moan when her lips close around me. There’s no other feeling like her in the world. Looking down at her, I start to move back and forth, my cock moving easier with each thrust.

I reach out and grab her breasts, my hands kneading them, and she moans around me. Her chest rises as she arches her back. I know she’s uncomfortable. She’s lying on her bound arms, her head is hanging over the side of the bed, and her pussy is begging to be fucked, but I don’t care. Just as I told her, tonight is about me.

I release her breasts and wrap my hands around her throat. I feel it work as my cock fucks it. I pick up the intensity, and her body shudders when I hit the back. “You look so pretty with my cock in your mouth and hands around your neck,” I tell her.

She moans and lifts her hips off the bed, needing more.

“Fuck, you feel incredible, Bunny. So fucking good!” I hiss.

I continue my punishing pace while her body thrashes helplessly before me, and I wanna pull out. I wanna crawl on top of her, spread her legs wide, and fuck her with passion. Remind her that she is mine! That no one could love her like I do! Or fuck her like I do!

But I don't.

Instead, I continue to fuck her as she lies there taking it like she fucking needs to be used just as much as I need to use her.

I come with her name on my lips, and she swallows.

When I pull away, she's panting, and tears run down the side of her red face from all the blood rushing to it.

I help her sit and then move over to the middle of the bed with her head at the headboard. I push her down on to her stomach and then walk into to the closet, grabbing some more things.

PRESLEIGH

Shame washes over me. My second attempt to save myself ended up hurting me more.

Avery isn't gonna let up. I don't know this Avery. The one I knew was soft and loving. He didn't believe in punishment or only pleasing himself. He didn't have slaves. He was a giver in and out of the bedroom.

I'm trying to catch my breath when I feel Avery grab my ankles. He spreads them far apart, and then I feel fur just like on my wrists wrap around them.

When he's done, I try to move them, but they're spread wide. "What?" I try to lift my head to see what he's done.

"It's a spreader bar," he tells me, coming over to push my hair from my face as he stands beside the bed. "It keeps your legs spread far apart. You're going to stay like this all night."

What? "Avery ..."

"You're being punished, Bunny. You are not allowed to touch yourself and not allowed to come. Do you understand why I'm punishing you?"

I bury my face into the pillow and try not to cry. I thought he would hit me, choke me a little, or just slap me around if he caught me. I was so wrong.

"Answer me."

"Yes," I mumble into it.

He grabs a handful of my hair and jerks my head back. I hiss in a breath as wetness pools between my legs. "Why?"

"Because I disobeyed." He can't really expect me not to try to run.

His hand comes out, and he gently runs his thumb over my cheek. "Are

you going to do that again?”

“No.” I whimper. “Please just fuck me,” I beg. After I had his lips on my pussy, it’s throbbing.

“When you deserve to be fucked, Bunny, I’ll fuck you.”

“Why are you doing this to me?” I ask as tears form in my eyes once again. I hate whatever they drugged me with because it messes with my emotions.

He squats beside me so we’re level, and he tilts his head to the side. “You are doing this to yourself.”

“Just let me go, Avery. Please.” I can’t help but beg. I pull on my chains and I hate that they turn me on. *I fucking hate myself.*

“I can’t do that,” he says softly, letting go of my hair. The side of my face falls to the pillow once again. He runs his hand over my head.

“You might as well kill me,” I whisper.

“You’re no use to me dead,” he says simply.

My heart pounds in my chest, and I fist my cuffed hands.

“Look at me,” he demands.

I open my eyes and look at him. His dark blue eyes search my face. They linger on my cheek where Darrell punched me, then they fall to my lips. I wiggle in my chains, and my pussy starts to throb.

His eyes meet mine. “There is no escape, Bunny. You need to understand that.”

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

AVERY

I WALK OUT OF HER ROOM. Making my way back down the winding staircase, I head toward my study to find Darrell already waiting for me. “You hit her.” I growl.

He places his hands behind his back and squares his shoulders. “I was instructed to do what was necessary to get her under control.”

“You had a syringe in your hand,” I snap. “That was enough.”

“Sir, I—”

“You need to remember your place,” I interrupt him. “Kayn is in charge of her. You are to follow his orders, and I do believe after the incident on the plane, he told you to keep your hands to yourself. You are to only administer the drug if needed.” He just stands there, looking straight ahead. “Am I understood?” I snap.

“Yes, sir.”

“Get out!”

He walks out, and I fall into my chair behind my desk. I pull a single key out of my pocket and unlock a drawer. Opening it up, I remove her cell phone. I had them bring it from her house because a person’s life is on their phone. This will keep me updated with what is happening back in New York now that she has been taken.

Turning it on, it starts to ding with messages and voicemails.

Where are you? Thought we were meeting at six?

Babe. Where the fuck are you?

I’m still waiting.

I went to your house. You weren’t there. Are you shackled up with some man? Is this like last time when I had to come save you from a cottage up north because your date freaked out and hit you?

Bitch, answer me!

I’m starting to get really worried, babe.

I'm outside your house, and there is a guy trying to get in ...

That's the guy I had tied up in my warehouse. The messages go on and on from someone named Alex. They're sending them every fucking two minutes.

I go to her pictures and open them up. The first three are of her. She's smiling under neon lights. You can tell she's drunk as her eyes stare blankly into the camera. A man stands beside her with his arm over her shoulders. In the next, he is leaning in, kissing her cheek while she looks up at the ceiling. The next is of her tits. Her bare tits. My jaw tightens. *Who the fuck did she send this to?*

The next is her lying on her back in a bed. I don't recognize it to be the one at her house. Her tongue is on her lip, eyes closed, and she's naked. Someone else took it because they're standing at the end of the bed while she lies on it. Her legs are closed, hiding her pussy, but you can see everything else while they stand over her.

I slam her phone down onto my desk.

What happened to her? When did she become such a fucking slut? And even now, even though she hates me, she was begging me to fuck her. That she needed to come. Maybe she's a sex addict. Possibly an alcoholic as well.

She's gonna hate me, but I'm gonna cure her of both of those things if that's the case. I turn off her cell and place it back in my drawer before I stand and walk out of my study. I have work to do.

PRESLEIGH

I sit on my bed; my momma sits behind me, brushing my hair. "Momma?" I break the silence.

"Hmm?" she asks.

"I..." I bite my bottom lip nervously.

"What is it, honey?"

Knotting my hands in my lap, I look down at them and close my eyes. "I heard a woman screaming." The brush stops running through my hair. "It was late last night." Silence fills the room, and my heart starts to pound. "I thought I was sleeping..." I ramble on. "But then I heard it again. It sounded like she was just down the hall. I left my room..."

She jumps off the bed and comes to stand in front of me. Her blue eyes are narrowed down at me, and my breath catches. “Where did you go?”

“I ... uh ...”

“Where?” she demands.

“I just wanted to help her,” I say, and my eyes start to sting with unshed tears.

She lets out a long breath and kneels in front of me. Both hands go to my face, and her eyes soften. “Those women don’t need help, honey.”

“I don’t understand. She was crying. Screaming for help. The closer I got, the more I heard—”

“No, Presleigh!” she interrupts me. Her hands fall from my face, and she runs one through her blond hair. “Some women were made to serve, darling.”

I frown. “Serve who?”

“Whoever wants them,” she answers simply. Giving me a soft smile, she adds, “Women need to know their place in this world. Some are meant to be loved. And some are meant to be used.”

“Avery loves me,” I blurt out.

She chuckles. “You’re only twelve, dear. You nor Avery know what love is.”

“I love Avery,” I tell her softly.

She lets out a long breath. “You were not meant for Avery, Presleigh. The sooner you realize that, the easier it will be on you.”

I open my heavy eyes and try to remember what she meant by that. I never figured it out, and she never told me. We never spoke about Avery in that way again. She knew how I felt but refused to acknowledge it. To her, he was too good for me. He was going to be a God who would one day carry on our family’s business—selling little girls and women. And I never heard another woman scream out for help. But it only took me two more years to understand what my father did to make that woman scream. And I wished more than ever at that point that I would have tried harder to save her.

My eyes flutter open at the sound of my door. I don’t know how I managed it, but I actually fell asleep last night. Exhaustion took over. Plus, whatever they shot into my neck has me sleeping more than usual.

“Good morning, Bunny,” Avery says happily.

I say nothing.

“Still mad at me, I see.”

“Fuck you, Avery!” I snap.

He comes beside the bed and starts petting my hair. I jerk my head away from him. Then he grips a fistful and yanks my head back and off the bed just like he did last night.

“Don’t,” he warns, glaring down at me. “Don’t make this harder than necessary, Bunny.”

“Then let me go.”

He sighs, full of disappointment that I won’t just accept my fate. “There is nowhere for you to go.”

My stomach sinks at that. I fight my restraints. “Just take me home, Avery.”

His hard blue eyes search mine, and after a long second, they start to soften. “You’re not safe there, Bunny.”

“I’m not safe here.”

“I assure you, you are. Trust me.”

Trust him? After everything I have been through because of him, he wants me to trust him? I can’t do it. But I really don’t have any other option either. I’m his prisoner. His slave.

He releases my hair, and my face falls to the bed. His hand trails down over my back and grips the chain that connects the cuffs. “Have you learned your lesson?”

I dig my face into the pillow. He slaps my ass when I don’t answer.

“Yes,” I grind out.

“Are you done trying to outsmart me?”

“Yes.” *Lie!* I’ll win ... eventually. I wasn’t raised to be a quitter. He knows that.

“I don’t want to keep you tied to your bed, Bunny, but I will if I have to. Do you understand that?”

“Yes.” I shove my head into the bed again. Maybe I can suffocate myself to the point he’ll uncuff me, and then I’ll attack.

Then his hand trails lower and falls between my legs. I stiffen. I know his game. It wasn’t hard to figure out. He withholds sex and orgasms from me, but he can’t keep his hands off me. I can work that to my advantage. Plus, the need to be fucked is so great. I raise my hips to open myself up for him, already knowing just how far he will take it.

“Your pussy is wet like last time,” he muses. “Maybe you like being

treated this way.”

My breath comes quicker as he slides a finger into me. “Please.” I beg like the good slave he wants me to be.

“Please what?”

“Let me come.”

He removes his finger, and I can’t hold back the growl of frustration.

“No,” he says simply.

Then I feel him undoing my ankles. “Turn over.”

I roll over and look up at him. Blue eyes that I used to love look so foreign now. Like a stranger just passing by. But anyone could see the clouds in them. The anger. The bloodlust. Even though he’s dressed in an expensive suit, he’s become an animal that craves madness.

“The rules still apply, Bunny. No touching yourself.”

“But ...”

“Sit up,” he orders, and I do as he says. He reaches behind me and undoes my wrists. I prefer those over the ropes as they don’t get tighter as time goes by.

I rub them, and he stands to look down at me. “Get dressed and meet me downstairs for breakfast.” Then he walks out.

I take my time in the bathroom. Mainly because my legs are sluggish and my body weak. Being punched in the face by a man three times my size and then being drugged along with being restrained all night will do that to you. Plus, I haven’t eaten much since I arrived here.

I use the restroom, brush my teeth, and put on a T-shirt along with yoga pants. The bastard brought all my clothes, which I’m thankful for, but that also means he went through my shit. Or he had someone else do it. Either way, I’m not happy about it.

I make my way down to the dining room, and he’s sitting there. His plate already cleared. He doesn’t acknowledge me as I sit down and stare at my food. My stomach is in knots for several reasons. One, I failed once again. And two, humiliation. Three, anger.

I want to kill him, but I also want to crawl up into a ball in the corner and cry my eyes out. But what will that solve? Growing up, my mother always told me tears will never change the outcome of any situation. People don’t care how you feel; they care about what you can do for them.

My mom was always strong. I never saw her cry, even when my grandparents died. I remember sitting at their funeral, and she told me, *crying*

won't bring them back, dear. It'll only make your makeup run.

"You need to eat."

Avery's deep voice makes me jump, but I refrain from looking up at him. "I'm not hungry."

"It wasn't a question, Bunny." He sighs as if I'm annoying him.

My eyes catch the silverware next to my plate. There's a fork. Thoughts of using it to stab him enter my mind. I've never imagined hurting him until now. He no longer feels shit for me, so why should I feel anything for him? I couldn't care less if the motherfucker lives or dies.

My hands sit in my lap, and I fist them, thinking how many ways it could be used to ...

"Don't even think about it, Bunny!"

My eyes snap up to meet his hard stare. I don't deny it.

He places his forearms on the table and leans forward. "I've thought of every scenario you could possibly think of. And believe me when I say I have a punishment for each one."

Fucking bastard.

His eyes look down at the fork and then back at me. "If you do anything with that fork besides feed yourself with it, I will tie you to that chair for every meal and feed you myself. Do you understand?"

My jaw clenches, but I find myself answering, "Yes."

He nods once and then reaches over beside him. He grabs a folder and tosses it down to me. It lands on the table by my plate with a slap.

"What is this?" I ask.

"Open it," he demands.

I do as he says and pick up the paper that sits on top. It has a picture of me and my name on it. I recognize the dress. It's from last Friday. I had just been shopping with Alex earlier that day and wore it out that night. "What ...?" I flip it over to see another piece of paper. Above it, it reads medical records. "Where did you get this?"

He doesn't answer, but he doesn't have to. A man like him has connections.

It shows my surgeries. All of them. My jaw tightens when I see *car wreck*. I guess it's easy to forge anything these days. "You had no right ..."

"Not that I'm complaining, but why did you choose to alter your body?" His eyes drop to my breasts.

I slap the folder shut and sit back, crossing my arms over my chest. "When

did you decide to get a slave?" I ignore his question. "How many others have there been?"

He actually smirks at me. "You're the first, Bunny."

"Lucky me," I snap.

He sits back in his seat. "I'm leaving for work. I trust you will behave yourself today?"

"What do you do for a living these days besides beat women?" I can't help but ask.

He narrows his eyes on me. I think he's about to reach across the table and slap me but instead he snaps his fingers. Darrell enters the room, and my jaw tightens as my heart speeds up. "I have given you too much freedom," Avery says, "Darrell will accompany you anytime you are out of your room."

I jump to my feet. "Absolutely not!" I snap.

"This is not up for negotiation."

"Avery—"

"This is your doing," he interrupts me, rising out of his chair. Much slower than I had.

I bite my tongue to keep from pissing him off. Or begging. Either one wouldn't be good. But I refuse to get sent to the dungeon or whatever he fucking calls that room. It smelled of blood and death. And this Avery would definitely throw me down there without a second thought.

Fuck, I hate him!

He takes his suit jacket that hangs over the chair and slides it on. He buttons the middle button and walks around the table to me. "Men will be here today to fix your window." I didn't miss the fact that they had boarded it up while I floated in and out of consciousness from the drugs.

I stand rigid as he approaches. He comes to a stop and looks down at me. Sliding his hand into my hair, he pulls my head back. I glare up at him, hoping he sees the hatred in my eyes.

He leans in and lowers his lips to my ear. "Be a good girl for me, Bunny, and I will reward you."

I hate how much I want him to do just that. I need a release. My body needs ... something. My eyes close, and he places a soft kiss on my neck. And then he's gone.

For four days, Avery has left me alone. He never came to see me after he got home from work that day. And a part of me was pissed that he didn't reward me for being a dumb bitch and following his stupid rules.

But I finally feel back to myself—recharged. I haven't been drugged, tied down, or beaten. I've even managed to eat every meal, though I prefer to remain in my room. But I did notice that Marvin even gives me a little more each time.

I am, however, going a little insane. I find myself pacing a lot. And plotting. I've imagined faking my death. And I've killed Darrell a hundred different ways. I don't have much to work with in my room; the best I can come up with is taking the hair dryer cord and wrapping it around his neck and praying he doesn't overpower me. But then there's the fucking drugs they give me. They cloud my mind and make me too emotional. I'm no virgin when it comes to illegal drugs—I've smoked pot, snorted coke, done ecstasy, and God knows I'm an alcoholic—but whatever is in that syringe fucks me up. For days. I've thought about doing something wrong for Darrell to pull it out just so I can try to take it from him and shove it into his neck. But not sure how far that would get me.

If I somehow manage to take him down, I'll be left with the rest of the men in the house. And that too will not end well for me. If I get caught and end up down in the dungeon, I'll never get out. I need to avoid that place at all costs.

I sit cross-legged in my closet with the lights off. It's gotta be late night, early morning because I had dinner hours ago. For some reason, I find the closet the best place to sit and think. When I'm in the bedroom or bathroom, my eyes always find that red blinking light, knowing he can watch my every move. Fuck him! If he wants to see what I'm doing, he can come and find me.

I sit in silence, my mind running so fast I'm having a hard time keeping up with it. Then a thought hits me. A phone. All I need is a phone. If I can get a hold of my brother, I've got a chance. And I know all the guys keep their cells on them. I've heard Darrell outside my room on his talking to Avery and others. Maybe I don't need to escape. All I need is to make one phone call. But what will that phone call get me? Will Preston know where I'm at? If so, then why hasn't he already come for me? If he doesn't know where I'm at, then the risk will be for nothing. 'Cause I can't tell him my location. I throw my head back and let out a sigh of frustration. There has to be a way. A sweet spot Avery didn't think of. I just have to find it.

Getting up, I open the closet door and lie down on the bed. I'm starting to get tired. The only reason I know it's night is because I have windows in this prison cell. They fixed the one I knocked out, and it makes me sad every time I look at it, knowing I failed. They also took the chair that I removed the leg from. I guess they were too afraid I'd use the other three.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

AVERY

I RUB MY INDEX FINGER over my lips while I watch her close her eyes on my monitor. She's up to something. I can feel it. Read it in her body language. She's been good the past four days. Too good. She's relaxed, and I'm on alert.

Don't make me hurt you, Bunny!

I sit back in my seat, watching as her body softens into the bed and her lips part a little, letting me know she's out. I turn off the computer and run a hand through my hair. What is she up to? What does she have planned? And what can I do to prepare myself for it?

I pick up my cell and dial Kayn's number. He answers on the first ring. "My study," I say and then hang up.

I'm refilling my glass of scotch when he enters. "Sir?"

"Sit," I order, and he does as I say. "She's planning something."

"How do you know?"

"I just do. I've known her all my life. I can tell."

"Excuse me if I'm overstepping, but I've been working for you for eight years now and not once have I ever heard you mention her." I arch a brow, and he continues. "Women have come and gone, but you've never kept them here overnight. This woman has been here a week now. The first few days, she did nothing but fight us. Now she's been silent for four days. Which brings me to my point. If she had another plan to escape, wouldn't she have already done it?"

I shake my head at that question. "Her head is clear. Her mind sharp. She's biding her time."

He leans back in the chair and rubs his chin. "So what do you want me to do?"

I want to punish. I need to punish her. This is why she's here. My slave. "Provoke her."

He frowns. "To run?"

I nod. Leaning forward, I place my elbows on my desk. “Let your guard down. Make her think she has the upper hand.”

He shows no surprise at my demand. I know she’s plotting, but if I give her an opportunity, she will throw her plans to the wind and take the out that Kayn allows her. “How do you want me to handle her afterward? Same as before?”

“No. Just let her be. I’ve already told her what will happen to her. The anticipation of me coming home and putting her in the cellar will be enough to drive her mad. Plus, I want her sober while she’s down there. Not drugged.”

He stands. “When do you want me to do this?”

I tap my foot on the floor, thinking about the timeline I have to work with. “Give it a couple of days.”

He exits my study after that, and I debate on what to do, but my cell ringing interrupts my thoughts.

It’s a blocked number.

“Hello?”

“Just what the fuck do you think you’re doing?” Comes the voice I know all too well.

“I have the situation under control.”

“Control, my ass!” he snaps. “You shot Preston and kidnapped his sister?” I open my mouth, but he continues. “I told you not to touch her.”

“And I couldn’t follow that order.”

“Avery,” he growls.

“I have been offered an invitation to Conway’s next week,” I say. He’s silent on the other end of the phone. “I have a plan, sir. I need you to trust me.”

He lets out a long sigh. “Get it done. Then finish them both,” he snaps and then hangs up.

I look down at my phone to see the call has ended. The clock reads 6:15 a.m., so I gotta leave for work soon.

Turning my computer back on, I smile as I get another idea. She’s been good. Too good. It’s time to fuck with her mind. I think she deserves a reward.

Making my way up to her room, I waltz in without permission to find her lying on the bed facing away from me. I walk around the bed until I’m in front of her and watch her sleep. I used to do this all the time back when we

were in love. Back when I believed two people were meant for one another and there could be a better life than the one we were raised in.

I push some brown hair from her face, and my fingers trail over her soft skin. I've always thought of her as a doll. Perfect and fragile. Now here I am fucking her like a whore and beating her like a slave.

It doesn't matter what I do to her, she gets wet. The person who kept messaging her said they had found her at a cottage with a man who had hit her. Is that what she has come to like? A slap to the face?

She knew I wasn't bluffing when I told her the consequences, yet she still tried. Why? Did she *want* to be punished?

I fucking hate this woman with every part of me, but I hate the old her. The one who left me behind and never looked back. This Bunny makes me love her like this. A weeping mess. A soaked slut who needs my cock. What has happened to her over the past eleven years that has changed her so much?

I wish I knew. She'd never tell me, and honestly, I won't ever ask.

It doesn't matter!

Nothing will change what has led us to this point.

I pull the covers back and see she is naked, and my cock hardens instantly.

I reach up and remove my shirt. Then I undo my jeans and remove them along with my boxers. I go to her closet and open the locked safe. I keep everything I had planned to use on her in here, knowing she would spend most of her time in her room.

I grab what I need, close the safe, and walk back over to the bed. Gently, I crawl onto it. She lies on her stomach and I grab her hands, bringing them behind her back and cuff them.

She stirs, but her eyes remain closed. I place my hands on her inner thighs and shove them apart. Then my hand slides up to her pussy. I run a finger over her lips, and she lifts her ass up in the air. I smile. "That's it, Bunny."

"Avery." She moans, her eyes still closed.

I push a finger into her, and she spreads her thighs farther apart for me, her hands pulling on her cuffs.

"What ...?" She trails off when she starts to come around.

"Wake up, baby," I say, sliding my finger in and out. She starts to get wetter for me.

She whimpers and begins to squirm under my touch. "Please."

I remove my finger and push in two this time. She gasps, her hips rocking back and forth on my hand. Fucking my fingers as if they are my cock.

I get up on my knees and sit between her legs. I need to feel her wrapped around my dick just as much as she needs me to fuck her. I remove my fingers, and before she can protest, I replace them with my cock.

She moans, arching her back as I stretch her tight pussy. Fuck! She feels better every time. As if no one has ever been there before. My hands grip her hips, and I start to move. I pull back and thrust forward. Our bodies slap together. She's so wet it runs down my balls and onto the sheets. She cries out with every thrust, and I slap her ass as if she's disobeyed me. A rush of rage runs through me that she hasn't defied me these past four days. That she hasn't tried to escape.

This is why I brought her here. To punish her! To show her that even after all these years, I still fucking own her. *You will, Bunny.* You'll try to escape, and I'll get what I want. I always do.

I lean over her back and snake my hand around her throat from behind. She closes her eyes and her lips part. "I heard you've been good." I slow my pace.

"Yes, sir."

Fuck, there's that word again. "Why is that, Bunny? Giving up on me already?"

She pants. "I understand my place, sir."

She's a motherfucking liar! But I can play along. "And where is that?"

"Under your command."

"Goddamn right, Bunny!" I growl, tightening my hand around her throat.

Her pretty lips part but nothing comes out or in. I pull my hips back and then thrust forward.

Her body fights under mine, and I smile against her neck. "I control every part of you, baby," I growl, slamming into her again. "Your touch." I pull out. "Your sight." I slam forward. "Your hearing." Pull out again. "Your breath." Then slam forward. "Every fucking little thing. Remember that when I'm not around, Bunny."

I release her throat, and she sucks in a ragged breath, tears filling her eyes due to my hand around her throat moments ago.

I slow my pace, and she whimpers in protest. She prefers it hard.

"Has anyone else fucked you like this?"

"Stop." She chokes out.

I have to know. "You used to like it when I made love to you. When did you start liking being fucked like a whore?" I demand.

She buries her face into the sheets. I reach up and grab a fist full of hair

and hold her head down to the side. “You won’t hide from me, Bunny.” Tears stream down her face, wetting the sheets just like her pussy is. “Where did my innocent girl go?”

“Fuck you,” she growls, fighting the cuffs.

I smile. That’s what I want. Her anger. “I prefer a slut over an innocent girl any day.” Her body continues to thrash, fighting me, but her pussy gets wetter. “I can feel how much you like this. The way I talk to you like a cheap fuck. The way I pin you down and fuck you ...”

She closes her eyes. “Please stop ...”

“Why, Bunny? Don’t be ashamed of who you are.”

“You don’t know me,” she growls.

“But I do. You’re a woman who spreads her legs for any man. Tell me, baby. Do you beg them to come like you do me?”

“Fucking stop!” she snaps.

I chuckle, and she fists her hands while her legs try to close. But I’m sitting between them, so I only shove them farther apart. She cries out in pain, and I pound into her deeper. Harder. She’s gasping for air, and her pussy tightens around my cock.

“Has this always been your fantasy? To be tied and fucked? To be used? Overpowered? Because I’ll gladly fulfill it for you, Bunny. All you gotta do is beg me for it.”

She comes as a cry is ripped from her parted lips. I feel it running down my cock and balls, but I don’t let up. I keep going, pounding into her while her body shakes uncontrollably. She lies there—her body pinned, hands cuffed—completely at my mercy. Just as I’ve dreamed of having her for the past eleven years.

I thrust forward one last time and find my own release.

PRESLEIGH

Finally!

He let me come. And I don’t even have the energy to decide if it was really because I had been good or if he wanted to mess with my mind. And at this moment, I don’t fucking care.

He removes himself from between my legs, and I pull them together and lower my ass to the bed.

I'm so sore. Every part of my body aches. Why had it felt like it'd been weeks since I'd been fucked and not four days? And why did every degrading thing he said to me make me wetter?

I hate that I like it.

I jump when I feel his hand on my lower back. He doesn't say anything as he grabs my arms and then my wrists are freed from the cuffs.

I roll over and sit up slowly as I watch him walk into the closet with the cuffs dangling from his hand.

He exits the closet, still naked and looking like a God. I haven't had the chance to see him fully naked. I try to avoid any contact with him when he fucks me. Plus, he's usually behind me. Other times, he has either had his shirt on or just unzipped his pants.

He looks better than I remember. He's no longer that tall, skinny kid. Now he's all muscles and man. His broad shoulders are pulled back. His smooth chest defined as much as his stomach, and that V that makes women stupid. He makes me an idiot.

"Bathroom," he orders before he turns and enters it.

I get a pain in my chest at the situation I find myself in. I'm going to die. There are no ifs, ands, or buts about it. He sealed my fate when he took me, so begging him won't make a difference. In order to tell him my future, I have to reveal my past, and I refuse to do it. There are some things a woman needs to take to her grave, and I have a couple of those. So I stick to my plan. And when I'm free, I'll run like hell. This time, I'll be smarter about hiding. Not even my brother will know where I go once I'm free.

I walk into the bathroom and see he has already started the shower. He walks up to me and takes my left hand. He turns it over and starts undoing the tape on my wrist. The cut isn't that big, and it didn't even require stitches. I was told some kind of medical glue was used. The cut is about three inches from my hand. It wouldn't have been so bad if I had just got the damn thing and got out of there. Instead, when I stood, I slipped in the blood and fell, hitting my head.

Fucking figures.

"How does it feel?" he asks.

I stiffen and glare up at him, grinding my teeth. "Like you fucking care how I feel."

He steps into me, his hard body pressing against mine, and I hate that my knees shake.

“You’re here because I care.”

I snort. “Don’t fill me full of bullshit, Avery. I’m twenty-eight, not twelve.”

I’m baiting him, trying to get him mad at me. This pretending to care is new. As if he is saving me from someone who would treat me worse than he does. I prefer the part where he has me cuffed and coming rather than the intimate looks and caring words.

I’m so fucked up!

He lets go of my chin, and his hand cups my face. His thumb gently rubs my skin like a lover’s caress. I refuse to flinch.

I wait for him to say something, but instead, he drops his hand and then grabs my arm and pulls me into the shower. We stay silent, and he washes me, not giving me any other choice. After the shower, we get out and dry off. He excuses himself with an order to meet him in the dining room for breakfast in twenty.

It’s awkward. I eat silently while he types away on his phone most of the time. I have a hard time even keeping my eyes open because I’m so tired. That orgasm did me in. And it felt like I was only asleep for ten minutes when he woke me up. So worn out. And I’m craving a fucking drink. Or a hit.

He sets his phone down, and I see him look at my plate out of the corner of my eye. I haven’t eaten much of my breakfast. I’m having a hard time keeping my eyes open.

“Bunny ...?”

“May I be excused?” I ask, interrupting him and hating that I have to fucking ask for permission like a child.

I place my fork on the table and stare at him expectantly. He goes to open his mouth but isn’t given the chance to speak.

“Sir?” Kayn enters the formal dining room.

I spin my head in the opposite direction to look at him. He crosses his arms over his massive chest and pulls back his shoulders. His dark eyes stare at Avery, and he acts as if I don’t even exist. I like it that way.

“What is it, Kayn?” Avery asks, scooting his chair back and standing.

“I just spoke with Tristan, and he is on his way over. He has some intel on ...” His eyes find mine before they go back to Avery. “The source.”

“You are excused, Bunny,” Avery says without hesitation.

I push my chair back, stand, and walk out, not even bothering to say a

word. Once I reach the long hallway, I look behind me to see if either one of them are following me or if they are still talking in the dining room. When I see I'm in the clear, I run into his office, grab a bottle of scotch, and then run up the stairs two at a time, ready to have a drink and pass the fuck out for the day.

I've waited two days. Once again, Avery hasn't visited me. He's stayed away, and I've kept to myself in my room.

And I'm starting to go crazy. I need fresh air. I need an adult conversation. I really need to talk to Alex. Does she miss me? Has she realized I'm gone? I wish I could say this is the first time I've disappeared and that she would be worried about me, but it's not. I've fallen off the face of the earth many times, and she's always come to save me. She's that kind of best friend. But I always had my cell. There was that one time it died, and I forgot my charger at home along with my purse and suitcase. Long story short, I ended up stealing a charger from a gas station and had to call her to come pick me up when the bastard left me stranded in Las Vegas. Then there was another time I went on a vacation with a man up to his cabin in Colorado. I had no service and had to run over a mile to a neighbor's house to call her.

Obviously, I was never sober when I did these things. I don't think I've done anything rational in the past eleven years. Guess that just proves why I am where I am today. I'm being punished. I never once tried to help or save any of those women taken by our fathers, and I'm paying for it now. But it's not a complete stranger; instead, it's someone I used to love. The only person who I thought would have my back no matter what betrayed me.

Seventeen years old

I wake up on the hotel floor. My eyes are red and puffy from tears, my back sore, and knees pulled up to my chest. My body hurts. It hasn't stopped.

He left me!

Then his voicemail ... destroyed me.

It hurts—everything. My body. My heart. My pride.

As I blink the tears away, my purse comes into view on the floor. The guy

threw it into this room along with me. It's on its side, unzipped, and the contents have fallen out. There's a pill bottle. My meds. More importantly, painkillers. I want them. I wanna be numb. Getting up on my hands and knees, I crawl over to them, pop it open, and swallow two of them. Then I make my way over to the minibar and open the mini bottle of vodka. Tipping my head back, I swallow the entire bottle, making sure I have every drop, then I suck in a long breath before throwing it across the room. It hits the door and shatters into a million little pieces just like my fucking soul.

I reach for my phone and dial his number. Maybe Avery will listen to me. He knows me.

I place the phone to my ear, and just when I think it's about to ring, a woman's voice comes on. "The number you are trying to reach is no longer in service ..."

I hang up and tighten my hands on it. No! No! This can't be ... he wouldn't ... why? Why would he not let me explain?

"I fucking hate you!" I scream as if he's here and can hear me. "Fucking hate you!" I'm shouting at the top of my lungs. My throat burns, and my heart pounds in my chest. Getting up on my knees, I allow my head to fall back and the tears to run down the side of my face.

A knock comes on my door. "Miss, you okay?"

"No!" I cry out, falling forward. I'm not okay.

They pound on it some more. "Open up, miss."

"Go away," I mumble, out of energy. My shoulders starting to sag. My head hangs forward. My vision starts to get cloudy. And I rock back and forth on my knees, hugging myself. "I hate you," I whisper harshly while my eyes get heavy. The pills are doing their job. Or maybe it's the alcohol. Either way, I welcome what is to come.

I still hear the voices outside of my door, but I can't make them out anymore. I fall to the floor face down, and I blink slowly, welcoming the silence. The darkness. The relief of the pain I know will never go away unless I drown it out. Smother it. I'll do whatever I need to do, whatever I need to drink or swallow to make sure I stay numb.

The following morning, I have breakfast alone. I sit at the table, finishing off my eggs, and look around the silent formal dining room. I have an uneasy feeling. The house has been quiet. Silent even. I think Avery and the guys might not even be here. Avery had put Darrell on babysitting duty, but yesterday he quit standing outside my room. I heard his phone ring. He answered and gave a few, "Yes, sirs," then I heard him walk away and down the stairs. I haven't seen anyone actually. I've had this eerie feeling. It's not like someone is watching me because the truth is, they are. Wherever Avery is and whatever he is doing, he has those damn cameras trained on me. And I can't help but always stare at them, wondering what he's thinking. Or what he's waiting for. How long will I be here?

Maybe I'm bait. He could be keeping me holed up here in order to get Preston to come after me. But what would he do to my brother if he showed up? And let's face it, Preston only cares about himself. So if my life is in his hands, I'm as good as dead anyway.

So many questions that I can't even ask. Avery wouldn't even acknowledge them, let alone answer me.

"Did you have enough, Miss Clarke?"

I jump when Marvin enters the dining room. "Yes."

"Did you get enough?" he asks, and I nod.

Grabbing my plate, he turns and walks away, once again leaving me alone. I stand from my chair and walk over to the floor-to-ceiling windows. I look out over the tall trees, wondering where in the hell I am. After Avery walked away from me, I never tried to find him. And I never opened any social media page. I stayed under the radar for a reason and it was to avoid the situation I'm in now. For all I know, we're not even in the US. Dark gray clouds cover the sky, making me wish I was still in bed.

"I've got to get out of here," I whisper to myself.

Turning around, I walk out of the dining room and down the long hall that I know leads to his study. He seems to keep a nice collection of scotch in there. And I could use another drink.

I sit behind his desk and stare at his computer but don't touch it. There's no point. He has all his shit on lockdown. I do try all his drawers in his desk, though, but again, they're all locked.

Looking around, I sigh when I see nothing that can get me drunk. He's either hidden it or drank it all.

I walk out of his office and back up to my room. I lie down on the bed and

look up at the ceiling, trying to decide what I can do to get the fuck out of here. Closing my eyes, I let out a breath. I could seriously go back to sleep. My body teetered on sleeping and getting up for the day. But like every other day, I'm reminded there's nothing to get up for. I may be sentenced to a fancy bedroom in a mansion, but I might as well be in a prison cell. I no longer know what day it is or even care.

My door opens, and I let out a sigh. No one ever knocks before entering my room. I have no privacy.

“Get up.”

I grind my teeth at the command of one of Avery's men. I remain where I'm at.

The covers are ripped away from my body, and I cry out when a hand digs into my hair and I'm hauled out of bed. “I said get up!” I'm shoved against the wall and come face to face with the idiot Darrell. “When I tell you to do something, you do it.” He spits in my face before he lets go of me and walks into my bathroom. I hear him turn on the shower and then he enters my closet.

He walks out moments later with a bag over his shoulder. “Get cleaned up.” He looks me up and down with a scowl on his face. “We leave in an hour.”

My heart rate picks up. “Leave? Where are we going?”

He walks out without answering me. Maybe Avery has realized I'm a burden, and he's taking me home.

An hour later, I make my way down the winding staircase to the foyer. Darrell stands there with his shoulders back and arms crossed in front of him. He has an earpiece in his right ear and is dressed in a black button-down and black slacks. He looks like he works for the FBI.

He doesn't acknowledge me in any way, and I don't mind.

“Yes ... I'm about to leave ...”

I hear Avery's voice coming down the hall from behind me, and I refuse to turn around to look at him. Still ashamed of getting turned on no matter what he does to me.

“We should arrive around seven tonight ...” he continues to talk as he

approaches us, then hangs up his cell and places it in the pocket. He wears a crimson button-down and black slacks. “Darrell, call Fritz and let him know we’re on our way,” he orders, and Darrell gives him a nod before he pulls out his cell while opening the front door.

“Where are we going?” I can’t help but ask, and I hope he doesn’t hear the excitement in my voice. This could be my chance to get away.

Darrell walks out the front door, and Avery turns to look down at me. His blue eyes give nothing away, but a muscle clenches in his jaw. He’s mad at me. It could be a number of things, but the thing is, I don’t care.

“Don’t think about running. I put a new tracker in you.” No surprise there. And I haven’t had a good escape plan worth trying since my second failed attempt. But that doesn’t mean I’ve given up hope either. “And good luck finding this one.” He takes my hand but doesn’t answer, dragging me out of the house and into his Escalade that awaits us in the drive.

My hands itch to slap him, just to get a reaction out of him. He took me, fucked me, and now, he ignores me.

I thought I preferred the silence, but it’s eating me alive. He types away on his phone as though I don’t even exist. Why take me away from my life, even if it wasn’t all that productive, only to treat me like I’m not even here? He’s playing head games with me. *And they’re working.*

I’d rather be a slave to his words than a prisoner in my own mind. And even I know how fucked up that is.

Thirty agonizing minutes later, we pull into a private airport, and I feel panic start to rise. I’m terrified of flying. The fear of falling to my death has sweat forming on the back of my neck.

My hands start to shake. “Avery, I can’t ...”

A sting in my neck cuts me off. I spin to my left to see him sitting there, staring at me. He places the cap on a needle before putting it in his pocket. “I know, Bunny.” He reaches out and pushes my hair behind my ear as my eyes start to grow heavy. The last thing I see is his eyes as mine close.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

AVERY

“TELL FRITZ I WANT THE wheels up in fifteen,” I tell Darrell when I step onto my private jet with a sleeping Presleigh lying in my arms. And Kayn steps on behind me.

“Yes, sir,” he says before he turns to head to the cockpit.

I walk down the aisle to the back door and into the small bedroom. I place Bunny’s sleeping body on the cream-colored comforter. Her head falls to the side, and I cup her warm cheek.

I’ve been avoiding her. Been too busy with work and trying to decide what I can do to make it very clear to everyone else that she belongs to me. And I think I finally found my answer. I did, however, watch every move she made on the camera, hoping she would disobey me again. Needing to punish her for something. She didn’t. I had called Darrell off her and some stuff came up with work so Kayn hasn’t had the time to set her up. She’ll fuck up. And I’ll punish her when she does.

I also couldn’t see her because I wanted to fuck her. I realize how taking her was a bad idea, but it was the only choice I had, given the circumstances her brother put us all in.

I hadn’t fucked a woman in three months, and she was consuming me. Even when I knew she needed time to heal, I was still taking her. Her body needed a break. My mind needed to be clear. She’s like fog so thick that you can’t see your hand right in front of you. And that’s not good. She could very easily shift the tables on me, bringing me back to that teenage boy who was obsessed with her. I can’t afford to lose focus or my mind.

I remove my tie and undo the top two buttons on my dress shirt. I make my way onto the bed and lie down beside her. I watch her chest rise and fall in a simple white dress. My hands ache to touch her perfect tits. I still haven’t got to play with her body. Not as I had planned. I wanna kiss every inch of her. I wanna make love to her. But that isn’t what I’ve allowed myself to do. Love shows weakness, and I can’t show the slightest with Bunny.

I'm supposed to hate this woman! She destroyed me. But having her with me makes me forget that hatred. Makes me want to bury my cock inside her while she screams my name.

Don't mistake my horniness for weakness, though. I still want to slap the shit out of her and wrap my hand around her neck while I pound into her soaked pussy too. Tie her to my bed and have tears running down her face as she begs me to let her come. But I can only do that for punishment. I'm not like those men who want her. I'm supposed to be the good guy, the one who saves her, but the more time I spend with her, the more I realize I'm the villain. I'll never let her go. She'll spend what life she has as a prisoner in my house. Only seeing me when I allow it.

There's a soft knock on the door. "Come in."

Darrell peeks his head in, his eyes pausing on her drugged and vulnerable form lying next to me longer than I like.

"What?" I snap.

He clears his throat, and his eyes find mine. "Can I get you anything, sir?"

"No," I say, dismissing him.

He closes the door softly as I hear the engines to the jet roar to life.

Almost fourteen hours later, we make a soft landing in Rio de Janeiro. I look over to see Bunny is still out. But she's been moving around for the past twenty minutes, making little noises that have my cock hard.

Just as we did when we got on my jet, I take her in my arms and carry her toward our car that waits for us.

Fifteen minutes later, we pull up to my house that sits on a cliff overlooking the Atlantic Ocean.

"Avery." She sighs, turning her head and placing her face in my chest.

I groan at the way my name sounds on her lips, wishing she would say that while I'm inside her.

"We're here, Bunny," I tell her, entering my home.

My men scatter to their positions, and Marvin heads off to the kitchen, ready to start feeding them.

I walk her into my master room at the back of the house. I had every intention of giving her, her own room like back in Vancouver, but I want her

right next to me, underneath me. I can't wait any longer. If she hadn't been knocked out on the plane, I would have had her numerous times already.

I kick the door shut with my foot and lay her on the dark brown comforter. Her arms go around my neck as I go to walk away from her. "Avery." She moans, lifting her hips in the air.

"What, baby?" I ask, my voice thick.

"I need to be fucked," she whispers.

My hand grips the white fabric of her dress and yanks it up her legs. She places her heels on the bed, and her knees fall open for me. "I need to come."

I smile. "I decide when you come, Bunny."

She groans in frustration. "Please, Avery. I've been good."

I remove her arms from around my neck and stand to look down at her. Those big blue eyes are open and stare up at me, still heavy from sedation.

She slides her hand down her dress and between her legs. I reach out and grab it. She whimpers.

"No," I say. "What did I tell you?"

"I haven't touched myself."

I've watched her every second of every day, hoping she would, and she disappointed me. I crawl onto the bed and place her hands above her head and hold them there. "I know."

"Please. You have to ..."

"I don't have to do anything." I will give her what I want, when I want. She needs to understand that.

I never watched her after she broke my heart. I never tried to find her. I didn't want to know if she was married or had children. I had pictured her my wife. The mother of my kids. It would have been too painful to see her any other way. But I never stopped thinking about her. She consumed me even then. And I refuse to show her that now.

"I need you," she whispers.

I release her hands and lean up on my knees, sliding a hand between us to her thighs. I push the soft fabric of her thong to the side to find her pussy soaked for my cock. For my mouth.

Using my free hand, I rip her dress down, exposing her breast to me. She's not wearing a bra. I lower my head and take her soft pink nipple into my mouth. It hardens instantly. Her hands find their way into my hair, and she pulls on it

Sliding a finger into her pussy, I feel her hands in my hair, pulling my head

up, causing my lips to release her nipple. “I need more,” she says, shaking with need.

I remove my finger from her and get off the bed. I undo the buttons of my shirt, and she licks her lips. Once it’s gone, I undo my belt and pull it from my slacks. I grab her hand and pull her off the bed. She sways on her feet. The drugs still present even though she is lucid.

I yank her dress over her head. “Turn around,” I order, and she obeys.

Grabbing her arms, I wrap the belt around her forearms, careful to stay away from her wrist. Her body shakes as I tighten it and then turn her back to face me.

Picking her up, I toss her onto the bed. She cries out, landing on her bound arms. I remove my pants quickly, along with my shoes and boxers before I shove her underwear down her shaking thighs.

She’s so wet for me her shaved pussy is glistening. I crawl on top of her, my hand going back between her legs. I slide two fingers into her, and she arches her back, moaning. “Fuck, I forgot how much I love that sound,” I say, watching her eyes close.

She licks her pretty lips and the urge to kiss them is strong, but I refrain. This isn’t about love and being intimate. This is about me controlling her body and fucking her. This is her payment to me for helping her out. *She fucking ruined me!* And now she’s back in my life. And I can do whatever the hell I want with her whenever I want.

My anger for her rises when I think about how many guys have had her over the years like this. How many she made fall in love with her only to leave them. My fingers pick up their pace, getting forceful, and she bucks her hips, fucking enjoying it.

“Oh, God, Avery. Please ...”

I can’t stand the sound of her sweet voice. It makes me feel things for her that are not allowed. So I place my free hand over her mouth.

Her chest shakes as she whimpers into my hand. She inhales a long breath through her nose while arching her neck. My fingers continue to work between her legs as her body thrashes under me. My thumb plays with her clit, and I feel her pussy tighten. She’s so close. Her eyes open, and she looks up at me. Heavy and wanting. And for the first time since she re-entered my life, I can’t deny her anything right now.

This is bad!

But I don’t stop. I continue to fuck her soaked pussy with my fingers until

she comes all over them.

I remove my hand from her face, and she sucks in a deep breath. Getting up, I make my way to the bathroom to get what I need. When I get back to the bed, I flip her onto her stomach and pull her ass up in the air, spreading her legs with my knees. I open the bottle and smear it over her ass.

I want it!

“Has anyone ever fucked your ass, Bunny?” Back when we were together, I never tried, knowing it was off-limits. Now that she’s mine, there are no limits.

“Yes,” she whispers, and my jaw tightens with jealousy. “But I didn’t like it.”

That helps. A little. “Then he didn’t do it right.”

She whimpers, shaking her ass back and forth. I push my fingers into her, but she stiffens and tries to pull away.

“Stop,” I warn with a smack to her ass. She moans, digging her face into the bed. “Just relax, Bunny.”

“It hurt last time.”

“It will this time too.” I’ll teach her to like pain. Crave it.

I slowly press my finger into her. And I moan at the tightness of her pretty little ass. My cock throbs to fuck it.

“Avery,” she whispers, pushing against me instead of pulling away.

I slowly push my cock into her pussy, getting it wet with her cum and then pull out. I position the head at the entrance and press forward, spreading her open.

She cries out, her arms pulling on the belt wrapped around them. I pull out and then push forward again, giving her a little more, and her body starts to shake. “Fuck.” I curse when I pull out and do it again.

She writhes underneath me as I repeat the motion what feels like a hundred times until my cock disappears inside her tight ass.

“Avery.” She gasps. “It hurts.”

“I know, Bunny.” I start to move. Not wanting to stop. I wasn’t lying when I told her it was gonna hurt. It gets better. I can make it better.

I grab her hips and help move her with me. Slowly, still letting her ass get used to the feel of me. The size of me.

My right hand goes around her waist, and I find her clit. I rub it, and she moans into the bed. “God ...”

“Better?” I ask, pinching it between my fingers as I pull my hips back.

“Yeeesss.” She sighs heavily, and her hips start to rock against me.

I have to agree with her. And a thought hits me. Filling both her pussy and ass at the same time. A butt plug in her ass while my cock pounds her cunt. I’ll have to remember that for later.

I begin to move faster, and her breathing picks up as I fuck her ass just as I do her pussy. Like it’s mine.

She comes with my name on her lips, and I come minutes later, out of breath and exhausted.

I pull out and release her arms, before falling onto the bed beside her. She lies there on her belly, her hands now by her side, and her heavy eyes closing slowly. “Take a nap, Bunny. We’ve got an hour.”

PRESLEIGH

I’m so fucked up in the head!

That’s what I’ve been telling myself for years. But Avery takes me to another level of crazy. The man who I once loved, and now hate, drugged and flew me to who knows where and I woke up horny and wanting him to fuck me.

I should have been fighting him. He should never be allowed to touch me. But he does. And he makes me like it. Fuck him!

I should jump up right now and search the new place to find an escape. Instead, I’m lying here still half drugged, satisfied, and exhausted.

He lies beside me on his back. One hand behind his head and the other resting on his slick, chiseled chest. His eyes are closed, and he’s still breathing heavily from what he just did to me.

If I had the energy, I’d get out of bed and use this moment as an opportunity, but instead, I yawn and close my eyes. My legs are Jell-O and my mind foggy. My ass is sore and my body tired. Any attempt to escape will have to wait until later.

I sit on the end of the bed where Avery fucked me earlier. Alone. Fresh out of the shower. It’s late; the sun must have set hours ago. I don’t know where we are or why we’re here. When I woke up from my nap, I was alone in bed. I

just laid here while I allowed the drugs to work their way out of my system. Then when I felt like I could stand without getting dizzy or falling over, I got up and showered. I needed to feel refreshed. When I got out of the shower, there was a tray full of food in my new room. I ate a piece of toast and drank the glass of water. It helped clear the fog a little bit.

My dream of him letting me go home starts to fade as reality reminds me it's not gonna happen. Why is he moving me? Does it have to do with me or him? Maybe he's here on business but didn't wanna leave me behind. Or maybe he brought me here to meet up with Preston. Could this be over? My heart starts to pick up pace as I think about being able to go back to my house in New York. Hell, I would go to some shitty little town no one has ever heard of if it meant he was done with me.

I need away from him. He's clouding my mind with sex and drugs. And not the kind I prefer.

A knock sounds on the door, and I wrap the towel tightly around myself. "Come in," I say, surprised whoever it is didn't just barge right in.

A woman in her fifties enters the room. She has jet black hair and red colored lips. Bright green eyes and a button nose. She's beautiful.

"Presleigh," she says with an accent I can't quite place.

"Yes?"

She smiles warmly, shutting the door behind her. "I'm Claire, and I am here to get you ready."

"Ready?"

She doesn't give me any more details than that, and I don't ask any more questions. What's the point? Everyone is on his payroll, and I'm just the girl who he is keeping for leverage.

An hour later, my hair is up in a big bun, the curls pinned to perfection. My makeup is done a little heavier than I like, but I won't deny it looks beautiful. My blue eyes lined with thick black liner and cream and black shadows. She put a soft nude color on my lips with a coat of clear gloss. It's the first time I've worn makeup since I've been with him because I haven't had a reason to. She walks into the closet and comes back out with a black beaded dress, mermaid style. It's backless, dipping low to the top of my ass. The front also is low cut, and I realize I'm not gonna be able to wear a bra.

"This is going to look fabulous on you." She beams. "Avery has such great taste." She winks at me, and I'm not sure if she's talking about me or the dress. "He's going to fall in love the moment he sees you."

I wonder if she knows that he already loved me once. And that it's impossible now. Sometimes, too much happens, and you can't get back what was broken.

She helps me out of the towel wrapped around my chest and into the dress. She doesn't give me any underwear. I should feel modest, but years of spreading my legs cured me of that.

She turns me to face the mirror, looking at me over my shoulder. "Stunning," she whispers. "He won't be able to keep his hands off you."

I wish! I still have an ache between my legs. Even after coming twice earlier.

The door opens, and I keep my back to it. She looks up and smiles. "Mr. Decker. Perfect timing."

He doesn't say anything, but she pats my shoulder before she walks out, shutting the door behind her. Closing us in together.

I hear his shoes clapping on the light hardwood before I see him come up behind me in the large floor-length mirror.

His eyes are downcast, looking at my bare back and barely covered ass. He reaches out, his hand cupping my right cheek, and I try not to flinch. But fail. "You look gorgeous," he says softly.

I don't say anything. Instead, I look over his all black tuxedo. It does things to my heart that I want to ignore. He isn't the same guy I fell in love with all those years ago. And I'm no longer that naïve girl who thought she could survive on love and hope. I was delusional.

He walks into the closet, and after a few seconds, he walks out with a black fur coat draped over his right forearm. His left hand grips a short chain that connects to two black leather cuffs lined with black fur.

My heart rate picks up. Taking a step back, I turn to face him.

"I have business to attend, and you will accompany me," he says as if I ever thought I had a choice.

"What kind of business?" I ask as my mouth goes dry. "What do you do, Avery?"

His eyes drill into mine, and he ignores my second question. "The kind that requires a beautiful woman at my side."

I swallow, sweat beginning to bead on my forehead. What could he possibly make me do getting this dressed up and yet make me wear those? "They have to be cuffed?"

"Yes," he answers simply.

He takes the few steps, closing the distance between us. I look up at him, heart pounding and mouth dry. “And if I say no?” I can’t help but ask.

He tosses the coat onto the bed and then lifts his now free hand up, running his knuckles along my cheek. I hate when he touches me like this—soft and sweet like. “I’m not asking,” he says and leans down, placing a gentle kiss to my neck. I bite my bottom lip to keep from crying out at the contact. “You don’t have a choice, Bunny. Now turn around.”

I straighten my shoulders. “What are you gonna do if I refuse? Drug me again?”

His blue eyes drill into mine, and a slow smirk creeps across his face. It makes my chest tighten with worry. He looks like such a villain. The kind that bury bodies in their backyard.

“No.” His fingers gently trail over my skin, down over my neck and shoulder blade, and then to my chest. My heart pounds against them, and my breathing picks up. “You’ll go sober, Bunny. Either you turn around and willingly give me what I want, or I take it.” His voice is low and smooth. No hint of anger. And that’s what scares me. He wants me to fight. He wants me to disobey. Because that means he can punish me. And I hate to let him win. But there is only loss for me. I either do as he says or fight him and still be forced to do what he wants.

Lifting my chin and giving him a fuck-you look, I turn around, unable to continue staring at him. I place my hands behind my back without being told to do so, and seconds later, I feel his hands place the thick black straps around each wrist before clasp them in place.

Even though the inner fur is soft on my wrists, I can’t help but try to pull them apart. The chain connecting them is short, not giving much play and pulling my shoulders back.

He places his hands on my upper arms and leans down, his breath falling over my neck as he kisses it gently again. My head falls to the side, and he makes me moan. He pulls away all too soon and turns me to face the mirror.

Standing behind me, he drops his eyes to my cleavage in the mirror. Having my arms tied behind my back pushes out my already big tits.

He reaches into the pocket of his black slacks and pulls out a necklace. Reaching in front of me, he places the thin black leather choker around my neck. It has black lace over it with a small silver ring in the front.

I look at it for a few seconds before I realize what it is. “A collar.” My eyes find his in the mirror. “Why do you feel the need to claim me?” Panic starts

to bubble up. What the hell does he do? And where is he taking me?

I know enough about owning sex slaves that by cuffing my arms behind my back and putting a collar around me, he's claiming me as his property. My jaw tightens. He's gonna show me off like a fucking trophy. But the question is, who is he going to show me off to?

His eyes finally meet mine. "You've always been mine, Bunny."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

AVERY

I SIT IN THE BACK OF THE limo with Bunny while Darrell drives us through Rio. Her hands still cuffed behind her back, and my collar around her neck.

She's mine!

And now everyone will know that.

The limo comes to a stop in front of the Colonial mansion, and she leans forward to look out the back window.

“Bunny?” She turns to face me. “You do not leave my side, and you do not speak. Understand?”

She tilts her head to the side, that worry still lingering. If she knew what I have planned, she'd be terrified. “Why can't I speak?”

Instead of telling her, I reach into my tuxedo jacket pocket and pull out the black ball gag that I've used on her before and hold it up.

Her chest rises and falls quickly, her breathing quickening. And if I didn't know better, I'd say she likes the idea of it. But that will ruin my plan. “If you promise not to speak, I'll leave this in the car.”

She nods her head once, and whispers, “I promise.”

I never make promises. They are too easily broken.

I toss it to the floor and straighten my already straight bow tie.

Darrell opens my back door, and I get out, then make my way over to hers. I help her out since her hands are bound, and then Darrell hands me the fur coat and I drape it over her shoulders, concealing her vulnerability. The men will know she's bound, but that doesn't mean I have to show it off to them.

We walk away as Darrell gets back in the limo to park and wait for us to finish our appearance. We make our way up the main steps, and two men dressed in black and white tuxedos wearing earpieces greet us.

They open the towering glass doors, and we enter the Colonial mansion. Men stand tall, dressed in their best tuxedos and suits. Women dressed in their evening gowns, hair done, and makeup fixed. Bunny gasps as she looks

around at all the beautiful women and men. To me, they are all fucking bastards who allowed their slaves to play dress up tonight. By morning, they will be stripped of their expensive gowns and chained to a wall or a bed. They'll be crying while a whip splits their sensitive skin open or begging for mercy while being taken by three men at once against their will. And these women are the lucky ones. The others, the ones being kept in another location, will be auctioned off later and on their boats or planes tomorrow, getting transported to the destination where they will spend the rest of their lives.

You're no better than they are, Avery.

I lean into her, and demand, "Stare at the floor."

She averts her eyes immediately when a man approaches us. "Avery. Glad you could make it."

I reach out my right hand to shake his. "Of course, Conway."

He smiles that fucking villain smile and then he looks at Bunny. "Gorgeous." His eyes scan her up and down, lingering on her breasts and face. "No wonder you paid two million for her."

Her body stiffens, and I ignore it. "Well, pussy isn't cheap to come by these days."

He laughs at my joke. "Not the unwilling kind. Can I get you a drink?"

"Scotch."

He lifts his right hand and snaps his fingers. A man dressed in another signature tux bows to him. "Señor."

"A scotch for Mr. Avery."

"Right away, señor."

"While we're waiting on your drink, I would like you to meet a good friend of mine." He raises his hand again and calls out. "Jensen."

I smile to myself as the man approaches. He wears an all-white tuxedo, his dark hair slicked back. The pretty blonde at his side wears a bright red dress, showcasing a set of paid for tits and thin waist. She too has her hands bound behind her back and a dainty collar around her throat. Her head downcast.

"Jensen, I would like you to meet Avery."

"I've heard a lot about you," I say, reaching out my right hand.

I shake the man's hand, pretending not to know him. "I haven't heard much about you," he muses.

"Avery here just purchased his first slave." He fills Jensen in. "He's new to the scene."

He nods in understanding. “How do you like it?”

“Can’t complain,” I say with a shrug, ignoring the heat coming off Bunny beside me.

PRESLEIGH

My body is physically shaking due to anger and embarrassment.

I stare down at the marble floor with my hands cuffed behind my back while these men discuss me and these women like we’re nothing. As if we are animals being taken to slaughter.

And I’m pissed at Avery. *Why the fuck are we here?* What does he have to do with slaves? And he told these men he bought me for two million? It doesn’t escape me that I offered him that amount to let me go. *Sick bastard!*

“There’s not much to complain about,” the man they introduced as Jensen replies carelessly.

He sounds so familiar.

“Well gentlemen, I’ll let you guys get back to the party. Anything in this house is yours tonight. My women included.”

I feel bile rise in my throat. He just shares them? Hands them out like napkins only to be used and then put away.

I jump when I feel a hand on my ass but keep my head down afraid to look up.

“It’s just me, Bunny.” I hear Avery say softly, and I melt into his side when he pulls me to him.

“Did you get what we needed?” he asks.

I frown. *Is he talking to me?*

“No.” The man sighs that I know had been introduced as Jensen. “I’ve been here for three hours and no sign of Damon.”

Who is Damon?

“Well, fuck!” Avery hisses. “So now what?”

“You can go if you want,” Jensen offers, and I bite my tongue not to scream *yes, please*. “You’ve made your appearance. I’ll stay and let you know what I hear.”

“No,” Avery clips, and my shoulders slump.

I shift from foot to foot, my feet and legs tired from the high heels. My back hurts from my arms being restrained, and I have that feeling between

my legs that just won't stop no matter how much I rub them together. And I'd kill for him to give me his scotch that he requested.

"You could fuck one of his slaves," Jensen offers. "Maybe get some information from them. Or just make use of them." He pauses.

My head snaps up so fast that I don't even get the chance to think about my move. Anger making me think irrationally at the thought of Avery fucking someone else other than me.

He took me.

He's supposed to please me.

But I don't voice those words out loud. Because everything I wanted to say dies on my tongue when I look at the guy who was introduced as Jensen. I haven't seen him in eleven years, but he looks the same. Just all grown up.

Only his name isn't Jensen. It's Tristan. And he's Avery's younger brother. He smiles at me. "Hello, Presleigh. Nice to see you again."

I snort, unable to hold it back. How is this *nice*? I'm at a man's house who obviously runs a sex trafficking ring with my hands bound behind my back, standing next to a man I used to love who kidnapped me but is pretending that he bought me.

"You sure have grown up." His eyes fall to my tits.

My eyes narrow on him.

He laughs. "I think your slave is jealous, Avery."

I take a step forward, about to knock his ass out when Avery yanks me back to his side by the back of my upper arm. His fingers digging into my skin.

"Don't fucking call me that!" I snap. The people who stand around us gasp, but I ignore them.

"Jealous?" Tristan asks with a smile.

"Slave," I hiss.

Before he can respond, a hand wraps around the front of my neck, and I'm shoved into the nearest wall. My head hits with a thud, and I hiss in a breath before it tightens around my throat. Avery stands in front of me, looking down at me with pure rage in his blue eyes. His fingers and the choker digging into my skin.

I try to wiggle free of his grip and use my hands to help me push away from the wall. I'm unsuccessful.

"What is going on here?" I hear the man's voice from earlier, think his name was Conway, as he comes to stand next to Avery. He wears a cold

smile, staring at my chest. I realize I lost my coat that was over my shoulders, and now I'm exposed to what my tight dress shows off. My nipples harden when I feel the cold breeze, and I hate that I couldn't wear a bra with this dress.

"My *slave* forgot her place," Avery growls, using that word and daring me to argue.

My eyes narrow on his.

The man laughs and pats Avery on the shoulder. "That's the best part." His voice drops. "When you get to remind her she belongs to you."

I swallow roughly as his hand tightens. I press up to my tiptoes in my heels. "Take her downstairs. Teach her a lesson," he says simply. "Come. I'll show you the way."

"No—" He cuts off my air before I can protest any longer. I beg Avery not to do it with my eyes, but he yanks me from the wall before wrapping his hand around my upper arm and walks me next to him as we follow the man.

I take a deep breath and catch Tristan winking at me as we walk by. I want to slap him.

I lower my head without being told like a dog in trouble as we're led down a set of stairs and through a door that has locks on the outside.

"Take all the time you need," he states before turning his back to us and walking out.

He shuts the door, and I feel my chest tighten when I look around at the chains that hang from the walls and ceiling. A metal cross leans against the far wall with straps lying open to bind your wrists, ankles, and neck to it. A black padded table on my right has thick black leather straps hanging open from it as well. A wooden bench on my left has hooks bolted to the floor in places where a person can be tied down or chained.

It reminds me of the room where Avery threatened to leave me. Panic starts to rise.

I turn and stare at the back of Avery as he still faces the closed door. "Please don't ..."

He spins to face me, and I take a step back at the look in his eyes. He looks as if he wants to murder me. He rips his bow tie from the collar of his shirt, and then he's undoing his buttons. The fabric is ripped from his broad shoulders and hard chest. His muscles flex as he breathes deeply.

"I am not your slave!" I shout at him, finding my anger. *How have I ended up here?* We both swore we would never be a part of this life.

He storms up to me and slaps me across the face. My head snaps to the side as I take in a shaky breath. "I warned you, Bunny."

I taste blood, and my eyes narrow on him. I refuse to back down. Not this time. Not in this house. And not even for him. "You are pathetic." I spit in his face. A muscle clenches in his jaw. "Gonna hit a restrained woman?" I snap. "Then fucking hit me," I shout.

He slaps me again, and I find myself laughing like a mad woman. "Go ahead, Avery. Make me black and blue." I hate that I'm egging him on. I hate that my body feels something when he treats me like a whore. Maybe this is how it was supposed to be all along. Him destined to be a fucking bastard and me a worthless slave.

I've been with him for what, a week? Maybe two? I honestly don't know. The days all run together. He has yet to kiss me on the lips, but the slaps, they feel like a kiss in the most intimate way.

I'm so fucked up!

He grabs me by my collar and yanks me forward. I trip over my feet but manage not to fall on my face. He brings me to the center of the cold and dimly lit room and spins me around. He undoes one of my wrists and then turns me to face him again. Before I can get my balance, he's locking my hands in front of me.

Then he's yanking them above my head. I look up to see a chain hanging from the ceiling with a hook on it. He places the chain that link my wrists together over the hook and then yanks on the one dangling next to it.

I cry out as it pulls me up onto my tiptoes. My shoulders and back pulled tight.

He places a finger in the hook of my collar and yanks my neck forward once again. I refuse to cry out at the pull in my arms. "You wanna learn the hard way, Bunny, then that's exactly how we'll do it."

He lets go, and my body sags in defeat. He turns away from me, and I watch the muscles in his back move like waves as he rolls his neck. He opens a door. Whips and chains of various lengths hang from hooks along with pieces of leather. Some look like belts, others like paddles. Ball gags and full face masks along with ropes and collars. *A sadist's dream.* Our fathers would be impressed.

He grabs a long, thin black leather belt and turns back to face me. My heart races as I pull on my restraints even though my pussy throbs.

He walks behind me, and I feel him lift the back of my dress, exposing my

bare ass. I whimper.

He steps into my back, and I feel his hard cock press into me, his hand going to my thighs. I try to pull away when it slides between them to cup my pussy.

“Tell me you don’t want it,” he whispers roughly in my ear. “Once again, you’re fucking wet, Bunny.”

I wiggle my hips and tears start to sting my eyes. “I hate you.” Because of what he makes me feel. Makes me want.

He ignores it. “You’re gonna count. To ten. Do you understand?”

“Bastard,” I whisper, feeling my hands start to go numb from being pulled tightly above my head.

He takes a step back from me, and I bite my inner lip. Waiting for that hit, I refuse to show any sign I like what he’s about to do.

“Wanna know something, Bunny?” he asks, and the first tear runs down my cheek. “I like doing it to you as much as you like taking it.”

Then the belt hits my ass.

My body jerks in the restraints, and I cry out, unable to hold it in as the leather strikes my skin. So painful it takes my breath away for a second.

“Count!” he orders.

“One.” I gasp, and my pussy tightens at the feel of his power behind it. He’s not holding back.

He strikes me again, and this time, it’s lower, across my upper thighs. My skin burns as it feels split open, and I bite my bottom lip to keep from screaming out at the pain, but at the same time, it has me panting with need.

“Two.”

He hits me again, and my hips jerk forward, making my arms stretch above my head, and I bury my face into my upper arm. Tears slowly run down my face at the pain, and I sniff.

“Three,” I mumble into my arm.

“I can’t hear you!” he growls.

“Three!” I repeat, pulling my head out of my arm, trying to suck in a breath.

My head falls back, and I look at my hands hanging from their cuffs above me, and he hits me again.

“Four,” I say through watery eyes as wetness runs down my inner thigh.

I’m not sure what he wanted to accomplish by spanking me, but I did, in fact, learn a lesson. I like to be whipped. By him. And the shame

accompanying that thought has the tears falling faster.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

AVERY

I WHIP HER OVER AND OVER. Her ass and upper thighs are red. Her head sags forward, and her hair has fallen out of its bun. Long dark curls cascade down her exposed back.

I tighten my hand on the belt and hit her one last time. The sound bouncing off the dark walls.

“Ten,” she cries out roughly. Her shoulders shake while she sobs.

I drop the belt, and it hits the floor with a thud. Then I yank her dress down to cover up her exposed, reddened flesh. I pull my cell out of my pocket and send a quick text to Darrell, telling him to get his ass ready and be waiting on us.

I walk around to the front of her and reach up, loosening the chain and her body falls into mine. I catch her and slide my free hand behind her knees. She whimpers when I pick her up off her feet. I then proceed to carry her out of the room, and I don't stop until I'm walking out the front door and into the cool night. Darrell opens the back door for me, and I crawl in with her in my arms.

He gets behind the steering wheel and pulls us out onto the road. “You did well, Bunny,” I say, running my hand through her hair while she quietly sobs against my chest. And for the first time since she entered my life again, I hate that I hurt her.

I carry her in my arms, entering the bedroom back at my house still in Rio. I lay her sleeping form on my bed, and I go to the bathroom, throwing some cold water on my face.

My phone rings in the pocket of my slacks, and I pull it out to see it's my brother. “Hello?” I answer roughly.

“You did it, man,” Tristan says with too much excitement in his voice.

“Yeah?”

“Oh, yeah,” he assures me. “He did exactly what we wanted him to do. As soon as you left, he had me watch the tape. It doesn’t matter what Preston tells anyone. That tape proved she didn’t mean anything to you.”

I run a hand through my hair. “Good.”

He sighs heavily, picking up on my mood. “It had to be done, man. If you took her there and just showed her off, it would have been suspicious. They think you love Presleigh and that will put her in much more danger than you whipping her.”

“I know.” The men who are after her know who I am but not Tristan, so we set him up with a fake name. They never suspected him because he stays behind the scenes.

“How is she?”

I walk to the bathroom door and look at her sleeping on her side. “She cried herself to sleep on the way back to my place.”

“She’ll only hate you for a little while.”

“She already hates me.” Now for more than one reason. “But I knew what was going to happen before we went there. I knew it would only end one way.”

We say our goodbyes, and I remove my shirt followed by my slacks. We set her up. My brother knew exactly what to say to tick her off, knowing damn well she wouldn’t be able to keep her mouth shut, and that I would have to punish her.

I look up when I hear a sniff to find Bunny now standing in the doorway of the bathroom. Her eyes red from crying, brown hair a disheveled mess, and still wearing her black sequin dress. Black smears her face from crying off all her makeup.

My chest tightens that I hurt her. That I had to hit her as though she didn’t mean a fucking thing to me when she still means everything. Even after all this time, I can’t hate this woman no matter what she put me through.

She wraps her arms around her chest and lowers her eyes to the floor. “May I shower?”

I hate how she asks as if she needs permission—as if she is a true fucking slave—but I say, “Yes, but the water will hurt your backside.”

She just stands there, so I walk over to her and cup her chin, forcing her to look up at me. Blue eyes full of sadness.

She sniffs, unfolding her arms from around her chest, and surprises me with a hug.

I slowly wrap my arms around her, waiting for her to punch me. Stab me. Something to show me anything but affection. And I feel a pain in my chest when she buries her head into it. Her brother is fucking shit up even more. I should have shot that bastard in the face instead of the leg when I had the chance.

“I’m so ashamed,” she admits softly.

“Why?” I pull away from her.

Fresh tears slowly roll down her face, and I wipe them away with my thumbs. “Because I liked it.”

My fingers pause on her cheeks. “Liked what?”

She licks her wet lips, tasting her own tears, and whispers roughly, “What you did to me.”

I release her and take a step back, giving us space. I think she’s talking crazy. “What I did—”

“You have to understand,” she interrupts me. “I’m fucked up, Avery.” She drops her head in shame. “I’ve gone so many years with nothing but emptiness. Not able to feel anything.” She lifts her head, and her eyes look into mine. “You make me feel something. It may be pain, but it feels like love. It feels like life. I don’t feel dead. And I welcome that.”

I stand there staring at this woman confused. That *felt like love*? I used to show her love every fucking day of my life. How can she compare what we used to have to how I treat her now? When did she start to like being treated like nothing? When did she lose her self-worth? For her to like the way I punished her? It wasn’t like it was a mind game. Or tying her up and not allowing her to come. I physically beat her. Hurt her. Made her bleed. All because I had to show the world that she meant nothing to me.

When I don’t say anything, she reaches down and grabs her dress at the thighs and pulls it up. I reach out and help her get out of it.

“Will you take a shower with me?” she asks softly.

I nod and go over to open the shower door and turn it on. I hold it open for her, and she walks past me to enter, and my chest tightens when I look at her ass and thighs. Red marks run across them from where I took the belt to her flawless skin. Ten strikes. And I hate to admit that they made me hard. That I liked the way she cried. The way she panted and how I marked her. Guess I could argue that I’m just as fucked up as she is.

I enter and shut the door. She walks under the sprayer, hissing in a breath and stepping back away from it. Her eyes meet mine, and fresh tears form from the pain.

I should tell her that I'm sorry, but my eyes land on her bare breasts. All she wears is the collar around her neck. I place my hands on her tits, and she hisses in a breath for a new reason. "I wanna fuck you so bad, Bunny," I admit shamelessly. If she can admit she liked the way I hit her, I can admit that I still fucking want her.

She places her hand around the base of my hard cock. "Then fuck me, Avery."

My eyes search hers. They glisten with her tears. "It'll hurt. Your ass ..."

"Good." Her hand runs up and down the length of my dick, and I groan, leaning forward to place my face in the crook of her neck. "Hurt me," she whispers. "I want you to hurt me, Avery. Please," she begs as her hand picks up its pace.

I grab her hand from my cock and slam her back against the cold tile wall. She lets out a sob when her ass and thighs hit the unforgiving surface. I then pin both of her hands above her head, and my free hand goes between her legs. She spreads them the best she can for me, and I thrust a finger into her soaked pussy, immediately adding another one.

She sucks in a ragged breath, and her head falls back into the wall. "Please let me come."

"I'm not sure I want you to," I say honestly, even if she has earned it.

She whimpers. "I need it."

Fuck, she just needs to be used! She has become my perfect little slave without even knowing it. "What are you going to do for it?" I ask.

"Anything," she answers desperately.

As I pull away from her, she sags against the wall. "To your knees."

She does and flinches due to the kneeling position, making her ass and thighs stretch the already sensitive skin. "Open your mouth, Bunny," I order, taking my cock in my hand. She obeys, looking up at me. And I press myself between her lips. "Touch yourself," I tell her, and she almost sobs around my cock that I gave her permission to play with her pussy. "But don't come," I tell her, and she whimpers. "I'm gonna do that."

I push my hips forward, and she takes me while her fingers work between her parted thighs. My hand slides into her hair, and I grip it tightly as I fuck her mouth like I've been wanting to do for days. Hard and fast.

It doesn't take me long to come with her name on my lips, and she pulls back after swallowing. Her breathing ragged.

I grab her arms and yank her to her feet, and her body trembles with need as she removes her fingers from her pussy.

I push her back against the wall, my hands going between her legs, and I give her exactly what she wants.

I wake to a phone ringing. I grab my cell off the nightstand, pulling away from a sleeping Bunny. "Hello?" I ask roughly.

"We have a problem," my brother greets me.

"What is it?"

"Seems I wasn't the only one who saw that video, and now Damon wants her even more."

"Fuck!" I groan.

"He offered three million for her."

"She's not for sale," I snap.

"I know that," Tristan says, and I can hear him rolling his eyes. "But to them, she's a slave."

I run a hand through my hair.

"We knew this was a possibility."

"No," I snap, standing from the bed and glancing over at her to make sure she is still asleep. "We knew he wanted her after Preston was running his mouth. What I did was supposed to make everyone realize she belonged to me."

He lets out a long breath. "I don't know what to tell you, man, except get her back to Vancouver. Or you could hand her over—"

"Why the fuck would I do that?" I shout, interrupting him.

"Use her as bait," he replies calmly. "When you hand her over, we'll intervene, then take him down."

"Too risky."

"It's an option."

"No, it's not. Don't suggest it again, Tristan!" I growl.

"Look, man. I love you, and you know I always liked Presleigh, but you're in too deep. I told you this would happen. That you couldn't handle her. Now

they've seen her firsthand and liked how she got off on you hitting her."

"Watch it," I warn him.

"I'm not gonna sugarcoat it for you, Avery," he snaps. "She liked the way you hit her. Even I could see it ..."

"Shut up!" I roar into the phone.

PRESLEIGH

I wake up and bite my bottom lip to keep from crying out from the pain on my backside. Slowly sitting up in bed, I see Avery on his phone. His back tense while he barks into his cell. He pulls it away from his ear and hangs up as I hear a voice still talking but not loud enough to make out what they are saying.

His hand falls to his side, and he turns around to come back to bed but stops when his eyes meet mine. "What's wrong?" I ask when he just stares at me.

"Nothing," he growls.

"You're lying."

He tosses his phone onto his nightstand and then crawls in next to me. "How do you feel?"

"Fine."

"Now you're lying," he snaps back, and I frown.

"Avery ..."

He jumps on top of me, pinning me down on the mattress. I hiss in a breath when my sensitive skin rubs against the sheets. He reaches down, hooking his finger into my collar—the only thing I'm wearing—and yanks my head off the pillow by it. He lowers his head, drilling his blue eyes into mine. "Who do you belong to, Bunny?"

"You," I say without thought.

"Whose slave are you?"

My eyes narrow on his. "No one's."

He lets go of my hook and slaps me. And just like before, wetness pools between my legs at the sting. "Wrong answer."

My lips part, and my breathing hitches.

"Whose slave are you?" he asks again.

I take a deep breath. "No one's."

“Bunny, I won’t ask you again.”

My anger for him grows even though my body tingles. “What are you going to do to me? Slap me? Whip me?” I snap. “Do your worse, Avery. I will never call myself your slave.” I won’t do it. Not for him. Not for anyone.

His phone starts ringing, and he groans. “Goddammit.”

“What is wrong?” I ask, truly worried about him.

He ignores my question, and his eyes fall to the collar around my neck. “You are never to take this off. I’m gonna put a lock on the back and throw away the key. And hook a leash to it. You will go everywhere I go. And everyone will know you belong to me.”

“You are talking crazy,” I say breathlessly. The fact he never wants to let me go has my heart pounding. I’ve got to get away from him. My life depends on it.

“You make me crazy,” he snaps.

“Avery...” I place my hand on his face, but he pins them both down by my head, and my pussy begins to throb.

“You are my slave, Bunny. You always have been and always will be. It’d be best if you remember that.” His words are spoken evenly, but a fire burns in his dark blue eyes.

“Stop calling me that!” I snap. “I’m not a slave, Avery. I’m a person.”

“Not anymore,” he states simply, and it makes my stomach drop at the coldness in his tone. “You are my property. My trophy.” He lowers his lips down to mine, but not close enough to touch. “And I will do with you whatever I please.”

His phone rings again, and with a growl, he gets up and answers it. “Hello?” he snaps.

I sit up and watch him pace back and forth, running his hand through his hair. “I appreciate the offer, but the answer is no.” He comes to a stop, and his eyes lock with mine. “Is that so?” he asks slowly, and my heart picks up, wondering what he is talking about. “Well, you were misinformed,” he assures whoever is on the other line. Then he hangs up without saying goodbye. Before he puts his phone on the nightstand once again, he powers it down completely. Then he walks into the closet. He returns with rope dangling from his right hand, and I know he intends to use it on me. Possibly punish me. But I don’t care what he plans on doing because I will never tell him or anyone else that I am his slave. I can’t voice those words out loud. I fought too long to escape that world. I won’t allow him to drag me back in.

I stand in the foyer of his house in where I now know is Rio with the same black duffel bag by my feet. Darrell stands to my right, and Avery faces me. “It’ll only be a couple of days. Max,” he says, running a hand through his hair. He is still on edge. Whatever that phone call was about last night was not good. Even after we fucked, he turned distant and left me alone in his bed. I don’t know where he went or what he did, but I ended up passing out. I woke to him crawling in bed with me to fuck me again this morning.

“Then why can’t I stay here with you?” I ask. I’ve spent my entire time trying to get away from him, but now I don’t want to be without him. Just like when I was a teenager, I’m starting to depend on him again. I have a feeling this was his plan all along.

“Bunny—” He growls.

“Please?” I interrupt him. “It’s just one more day.” I don’t want to have to take a plane ride to who knows where with Darrell.

“I said no!” he roars, fisting his hands down by his side. “And that is fucking final. Get your ass outside and in that fucking car before I make you!”

I spin around and exit the front door, making sure to slam it in Darrell’s face when he turns to follow me. I hear him let out a curse and then yank the door open. I walk down to the black Town Car and get in the back seat, tossing my bag over to the seat beside me. And I wait.

Darrell gets in and starts it up after Kayn crawls into the passenger seat. At least he is here with me. I look over at the house to see if Avery is watching us leave. He’s nowhere in sight.

We pull up to the private airport, and I’m guessing it’s Avery’s private jet that sits there looking sleek and expensive, but it makes my heart rate speed up. I lick my lips nervously, and my hands starts to sweat. How could he not come with me? Or not let me stay? He knows I hate flying.

“Let’s go,” Darrell snaps.

I see he is holding my back door open. Kayn is already walking onto the plane. I slide against the black leather and get out on shaky legs.

I walk up the steps to the plane, and it feels as if I’m walking the plank to my death.

I come to the top and step onto the plane. It seems too small. The ceiling too low. The aisle too narrow. The air too stuffy.

My breathing picks up. “Move it, Presleigh,” Darrell orders from behind me. When I don’t obey, he shoves me forward.

My legs wobble, and I fall to my knees. “Goddammit.” He sighs. Then I feel his hand in my hair. I scream out as he drags me by my hair down the aisle. My body hitting a seat here and there.

He kicks the door open to a small bedroom at the end and tosses me onto the bed. Then he’s on top of me. I scream bloody murder while clawing at his skin and shirt. Anything that I can get a hold of. He grunts but manages to flip me over onto my stomach, then pins my hands behind my back with one hand. And I buck wildly, not giving up. Then I feel a prick in my neck.

“Nooo.” I choke out the word. *He drugged me.*

I feel his weight on me as he leans over my back and whispers in my ear, “No chance of stabbing me this time, bitch. I gave you a little extra.”

My eyes grow heavy. My breath starts to even out. I stop fighting and my body physically relaxes under him.

His weight is then gone, and I hear the door shut as my eyes close.

CHAPTER TWENTY

AVERY

“HOW DID SHE DO?” I ask Kayn on the other end of the phone.

“It was a rough start. She freaked out once we got to the plane. But Darrell took care of it.”

“How did he take care of it?” I snap.

“He drugged her,”

My chest tightens. She probably fought him. And he probably had to hurt her. “Good,” I say, knowing that at least he got the job done. She would have been a ball of nerves if she had to stay awake for the flight.

“We’re just pulling back up at the house. I’m gonna get them all inside and settled, and then I’ll be on my way back to get you, sir.”

I hang up and take a drink of my scotch, standing in my living room in Rio. The burning fireplace provides the only light in the room as I think over what I am about to do. I had to send Bunny away because she’s unpredictable. I need to have complete control of this dinner. I could have let her stay. I could have tied her hands behind her back, put a blindfold over her eyes, and a gag in her mouth while making her kneel beside me at the table. But what if she moaned? What if her nipples had gotten hard? What if he liked her more in person than when he saw her on the video?

All too risky. She had to leave.

“Sir?” I hear Marvin enter the room behind me. “Dinner is ready. And your guest just pulled into the drive.”

I take another drink. “Thank you, Marvin.”

Pulling out my phone, I send a quick text to my brother. *He’s here.* And then slip it back into my pocket. Usually for a meeting like this, I would not allow my best men to leave me alone, but I felt Bunny needed the support more than I did. Plus, my brother is just right outside with ten of his own men. The house is surrounded.

Taking another drink of my scotch, I smile over the rim. We’ve been trying to find this man for years. And thanks to Bunny, he’s willingly walking right

into my home. I'm gonna give her an endless amount of orgasms as soon as I see her. She has earned them, after all.

I sit at the head of the table when Marvin enters once again. A man dressed in a three-piece charcoal gray suit stands next to him. His silver hair is combed to the side to hide the fact he's balding. The buttons on his button-down strain from his stomach, and he wears a smile that makes even the villain look like a hero.

I stand and reach out my right hand. *He can come to me.* "Damon. I'm surprised you were able to meet me on such short notice."

"I was in the neighborhood," he says, shaking my hand.

We both know he was in Cuba when he called me last night after I spoke to my brother on the phone. "Please, have a seat." I gesture to the one across from me, and he takes it. His black eyes look around the table at all the empty chairs, and then his eyes fall to the floor beside me.

"Where is your slave?"

That, right there, is why I made Bunny leave. She would have ruined everything. "She won't be joining us tonight."

His black eyes narrow on me. "I thought this was a business meeting?"

"It is."

"Then why is the merchandise not here?" he snaps.

My jaw tightens, but I hide it quickly. "She is a little tied up right now," I lie.

A slow smile spreads across his face, and the corner of his eyes crinkle. "That I would love to see."

I grab my fork and wish I could stab him like Bunny stabbed Darrell. Only I'd stab him in the eye. Over and over.

"Why do you want *my* slave?" I come out and ask.

He places his silverware down, no longer interested in the food that Marvin spent three hours cooking. "Her brother killed my brother. I think I am owed compensation."

"Her brother?" I play stupid.

He nods once. "Preston. I hear you know him."

"I do," I say, lifting my glass of scotch and taking a drink.

"You guys grew up together." He doesn't ask, but I nod.

"I also shot him two weeks ago." His brows lift in surprise. "The same time I bought his sister."

He takes a drink of his scotch and sets it down. He folds his hands on the

table. "I've been informed that you loved his sister. You guys were engaged once."

"That was a long time ago," I say tightly. Preston is running his mouth more than I knew.

"How long?"

"Eleven years."

He sits back in his seat. "I'm not a man who loves, but I find it hard to believe that you loved this girl enough to marry her, and now she's your slave."

"People change."

"How so?" he digs farther.

I take another drink of the scotch. "I have my reasons." That's all he's gonna get from me.

"I see," he says softly.

"I have a lot of unfinished business with her. And I don't intend to sell her. No matter what the price is."

"That's a shame. I wanted to have the set," he mutters before taking a drink.

I arch a brow. "What do you mean by *the set*?"

He smiles that smile that makes even my skin crawl and nods once. "I have her mother. I love having mothers and daughters."

I stare at him, unable to keep the surprised look off my face. "Her mother is dead," I say slowly.

He shakes his head. "She's very much alive."

I swallow. My throat all of a sudden dry. "You must be mistaken." Her parents died when Presleigh was fifteen. Preston seventeen. I remember it very clearly because I worried about her for weeks afterward. She didn't show much grief for either of them. She never was close to her dad. She hated that man, but I expected her to feel something for the loss of her mom. She closed off and shut me out for a while, but the breakdown I kept waiting for never came.

That was also when they moved in with us. They had no other family. Nowhere else to go. Since my father and hers were best friends, he took them in to live with us.

"Presleigh wasn't the only one who her brother tried to sell."

My mind is foggy. My chest tight. "Wait," I say, waving a hand. "What do you mean sell?" *Who said he was trying to sell Presleigh?* I thought he

wanted her for revenge?

His smile disappears, and he huffs as if he is dealing with an idiot. I am at the moment because I'm confused as fuck.

"Their father owned slaves just like your father." I nod. I know that much. "Their father died in a plane crash. The news broke and said that the mother was with him, but she wasn't. She was back at home. Preston was in debt. A lot at the age of seventeen. He already had a gambling problem and was into slaves just like his father. It's no secret their dad was one of my worst enemies, so Preston sold his mother to cover all his debt."

No fucking way this is true. "I don't believe it," I say, shaking my head.

He digs into his suit jacket pocket and removes his cell. He presses a few buttons and then slides the iPhone across the table. I pick it up when it comes to a stop in front of me. "Just press play."

I do as he says, and a woman comes into view. She kneels in the middle of a carpeted room. Her hands are tied behind her back with rope from her wrists all the way up to her upper arms. Her head is bowed, brown hair shielding her face from the camera. Whoever is holding the camera walks around her slowly, giving a three-sixty view of her. Damon stands in front of her, his hands behind his back, staring down at the woman.

"I have some good news," he says cheerfully.

She slowly lifts her head, but the camera is now behind her, and I'm still unable to see her face. "You're dying?" she asks dryly.

He laughs at her insult and then smiles down at the woman. "No. I was just informed that your daughter has been kidnapped and sold for two million."

"No," she whispers.

"Yes." He brings his hands around and claps once. "But I'm gonna offer three. Wouldn't that be fun? Me, you, and her. I'd love to watch her scream like I have watched you all these years."

The woman jumps to her feet and runs right at him as a scream erupts from her lips.

He reaches out and wraps his hand around her neck and slams her back onto the floor. "You ..." He cuts off her air while she thrashes under his hold.

And I feel the breath leave my lungs when I get a clear view of her face. Those same blue eyes that Presleigh has. Her dark hair has quite a bit of gray in it, and it is all different lengths as though someone just started cutting away and not caring about how it would look after it's done. But there's no mistaking ... It's her.

“Carl, get the paddle and chains,” he orders. “It’s time to play.”

I turn off the video unable to watch any more of it. I feel sick. I shove his phone back across the table to him. He laughs, not seeing the look of disgust on my face. “She’s always been a fireball, but since then, she’s been a fucking match.”

I feel my cell vibrate in my pocket, and I dig it out.

Three-minute warning.

It’s a text from my brother. “I need to make a call,” I say. Standing from the table, I walk out of the room, not caring how disrespectful it is.

Tristan picks up on the first ring. “What are you ...?”

“Call it off!” I snap.

“What?” He sighs. “Avery, she’s not here. Nothing will happen to her. All you gotta do is duck ...”

“Fucking call it off, Tristan!”

“No. This is our only chance.”

“Preston and Presleigh’s mother is still alive. She’s Damon’s slave.”

“What?” he asks, sounding just as confused as I was two minutes ago. “That’s not possible ...”

“I just watched a fucking video on his cell, and it was her,” I snap.

“Maybe it was old.”

“No. It was just recently. He told her that Bunny was sold.” *She’s hasn’t even been with me for three weeks yet.*

“Fuck,” he hisses, finally coming around.

“If we kill him, we’ll never find her, and Bunny will never forgive me,” I say, shaking my head. Some things I can come back from with her but not this. Bunny is my main priority right now, but I have to do something to get her mother.

He lets out a long breath. “She doesn’t have to know. And why do you fucking care? You hate Presleigh, remember?” he snaps, getting irritated.

I don’t know why, but I do. I can’t let this happen. “Goddammit, Tristan. I’m calling it off. Don’t you dare bring one man into my house or I will shoot you my-fucking-self,” I growl, and then I hang up.

Walking back into the formal dining room, I find him scowling up at me from his seat. I take mine and place my forearms on the table. “Now explain to me what you meant by Preston was selling my slave.”

He sits back and wads up his napkin, slamming it down on the table, showing his anger. But he says, “He’s in debt.” No surprise there. “Owes a

friend of mine money and offered up Presleigh.”

“How much?”

“Five hundred grand.” He shrugs. “I must say, it’s a much better deal than what you paid for her.”

Preston was trying to sell her for five hundred thousand dollars? But why?

Make sure to grab the goods. That’s what Preston had told his men when he was about to leave after he ordered them to kill me in New York. I never paid much attention to what he meant. Until now. He was going to run with her. Sell her.

Over my dead body!

He nods to me. “Who did you buy her from anyway?”

“Jensen.” I answer and hope he believes the lie. Jensen is the fake identity we had given Tristan.

“And how did he get his hands on her?” he asks, taking a sip of his drink.

I sit back in my seat and glare at him. “I never asked. All that matters is that she’s mine now. And she’s not going anywhere.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

AVERY

I STEP OFF MY PRIVATE JET with my brother back in Vancouver as Kayn walks over to the parked Town Car with Marvin and gets in, starting it up.

I'm fucking tired. I haven't slept a wink since I had dinner with Damon last night. He has Presleigh's mother. I can't let her know that. She'll try to do some kind of trade—her for her mom. She may have not felt much when she died, but if she knew her mother was a slave, she would do anything to get her out of that world. But that's not what Damon wants. He wants them both, and I refuse to give her up. No matter who else's life is at stake. She is mine. And mine only.

I get in the car, and Kayn drives us to my house. I can't wait to see her. I'm gonna pick her up and carry her off to my bed. I'm gonna wake her up with my head between her legs and then fuck her as though I haven't seen her in years. My cock is craving her.

"You can't save them both, Avery," my brother whispers.

"I don't plan on it." Bunny is the only one worth saving to me. But I will try to pull strings for her mother.

We pull up to my house. "What the fuck?" Kayn barks out.

"What is it?" I ask, looking at him.

"The front door is open."

My eyes go to the door and see it wide fucking open. It's three in the morning.

"Why would the door ...?"

I don't even wait for my brother to finish that question before I jump out of the back seat and run up the stairs into my house. I've got my gun drawn before I step inside.

"Bunny?" I yell, looking around the house. It's pitch black. I turn on the lights. "Bunny?" I shout, then take off up the winding staircase and barge into her room. Her sheet and comfortable are tangled on the floor. Her nightstand

turned over. Her fitted sheet is still on the bed but bunched up, ripped from the corners. And there's blood on them.

My heart stops.

I walk over to the bed and run my fingers through it. It's not a lot, but enough to make panic rise. I rip the sheet off the bed and storm into her bathroom. "Bunny?" I shout. *What has she done?*

"Avery ...?"

"Bunny?" I scream out for her, interrupting my brother entering her bathroom. It's empty, and everything is in its place. Just how it was before we left for Rio. "What the fuck did she do?" I ask more to myself than him.

"Avery, the cameras," my brother reminds me

I run back down the stairs and into my study. He follows me. "Did you find Darrell?" I ask Kayn when he enters.

"Yeah. He's been shot."

"What? Please tell me Bunny did it." I'd rather her gone crazy and escaped than the alternative.

He shakes his head with a heavy sigh. "No. It was recent. Said they just left twenty minutes ago."

They? No. No. No.

I pull up my camera feed on my smart TV that hangs on the wall. I set the time I want it to start and go to the camera at the front door. A black two-door sedan pulls up and two men get out. They have their guns drawn as they make their way to the front door. They're dressed in all black with black masks. They kick in the front door, and then you see the flash of gunfire.

I move to the cameras inside the house. They split up. One man runs up the stairs while the other goes to the back hall. You see Darrell come out of his room and is immediately shot in the arm.

I watch the man climbing the stairs two at a time. He enters Bunny's room, and I see her jump when the door hits the interior wall with a bang. She shoves off the covers and goes to crawl off the other side of the bed, but he reaches over and grabs her by the ankle, yanking her back. She manages to kick him in the face, but he recovers quickly. He pulls a pair of handcuffs from his back pocket, and I watch helplessly as he grabs her hands and pulls them behind her back, securing them tightly.

He then flips her over onto her back, pinning her arms underneath her, and she thrashes on the bed with her mouth opening and closing in screams. He slaps her across the face, snapping her head to the side. I fist my hands. Then

he punches her in the face, and she spits blood onto her sheets.

He crawls on top of the bed and straddles her hips. He pulls a pocket knife out of his jeans and flips the blade open. His free hand pushes down on her face holding it to the side, facing the camera. Tears run down her cheek and her body shakes from sobs when he pushes the blade up against her neck. He cuts her open like a fucking fish, and she screams from the pain. And then he reaches in and digs out her tracker. He throws it to the floor and then tosses her over his shoulder and walks out of her room.

I continue to watch him carry her out my front door and throw her into the trunk of the car. He waits for his friend to return, and then they drive off.

PRESLEIGH

My head pounds, and my body aches. My arms are still cuffed behind my back, and I feel the blood slowly run out of the cut by my neck. I'm dizzy. Weak.

I feel like I'm back in the bathtub all over again.

I thought he was going to slit my throat.

My head bounces as I'm carried over someone's shoulder. It's dark outside, and my vision comes and goes, so I can't see much.

I'm placed on my feet, but I sway. My hands are uncuffed, and I'm pushed onto a cold, stainless steel table. My head falls to the side, and I blink, seeing a few instruments on another table. But it's blurry. I can't focus on anything.

I've been drugged. Was it Avery? No ...

My hands are brought down to my sides, and thick straps are wrapped around them. Holding me down as if my body could even fight them. I try to open my mouth to speak, but nothing comes out. My shorts are ripped down my legs, and my legs are spread.

"Nooooo." I choke out, my heavy eyes closing.

Then that same leather feeling wraps around my ankles, securing them apart.

I hear a door open, and then a bright light comes on above me. It's harsh even with my eyes closed. I crack them open and look up. It reminds me of a hospital. An operating room. But I know that's not where I am.

"Hello, Presleigh." I hear a man's voice. "Long time, no see," he says cheerfully, and I cringe at the smell of cleaner and vodka. "I'm just gonna

stitch up your cut and then give you an exam,” he informs me.

Exam? No. I try to fight the restraints, but I can't.

My backside still hurts from what Avery did to it days ago, and tears come to my eyes.

Just like before.

I feel a poke in my arm, and my eyes grow heavier than they already are. I fade in and out of consciousness. I don't feel the prick of the needle stitching me up, but I feel pressure there as my head is held down, pressing my right cheek against the cold metal table. Then I feel my underwear being cut away. Tears roll down my face. I cry out when I feel fingers covered in rubber gloves roughly enter me.

Then I black out. When I come to again, I'm being carried to another room. It's darker than the last, and I welcome the darkness. I just wanna sleep.

I'm laid down on a hard surface and then feel my shirt being pulled over my head. I feel coolness wrap around my neck that makes me shiver.

My heavy eyes unable to open and focus on anything.

“I'll be back when this has worn off.” I hear another familiar voice, but it wasn't the same as before.

Then I hear a door shut followed by the sound of a lock being slid in place. I lie down and curl up in a ball as my body begins to shake. It's so cold.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

AVERY

“IT HAS TO BE HIM,” I SNAP, fisting my hands down by my side while pacing back and forth in my study.

My brother shakes his head. “Damon had no way of knowing where she was at.”

“He could have had someone follow us home from the party.” It has to be him. If not, how will I ever find her?

“Then waited until you sent her off to Vancouver?” He shakes his head. “Plus, how would he have known where the tracker was?”

I run a hand through my hair. The door opens, but I ignore whoever it is. “I don’t know,” I snap, frustrated. I’ve got to find her. She’s still injured from what I did to her ... Fuck, I whipped her. I slapped her. Then I fucked her out of rage. I didn’t want Damon to get my little toy. Now he’s stolen it from me.

I’ll get you back, Bunny!

“It has to be an inside job,” he offers.

“No. No one would betray me like that. They know I’d kill them,” I growl, looking at the floor. Still pacing.

“Maybe they don’t expect to get caught.”

“Oh, I’ll catch him ...” I trail off, still pacing my study while he stands in front of the fireplace.

“How many knew about the tracker?” he asks.

“I don’t know,” I snap.

He grabs my shoulders and yanks me to a stop. “You do too know. Calm down. Take a deep breath. We will find her,” he promises.

“Sir?”

“What?” I growl, turning around to see Kayn standing in my study. “Anything?” I ask.

He and my men have been out looking for any trace of the car. Of her. I told him not to return until he had something helpful. If it’s Damon, as I think it is, she could already be on a jet and heading toward Cuba. The realization

of that has my knees buckling.

He shakes his head. "But I need to speak to you."

"Then get your ass back out there!" I bark, pointing at my closed door. "I don't have time ..."

I pull my cell out of my pocket.

"Who are you calling?" Tristan asks.

"Fritz. I want wheels up in twenty."

"Where the hell are you going?" he demands.

"Cuba ..."

Tristan snatches the phone from my hands. "You're not fucking thinking clearly."

"I'm thinking that the fucking bastard ..."

"I agree with your brother. It has to be an inside job." Kayn interrupts me.

I run a hand through my hair. Fuck, Bunny! Just hold on. I'm gonna find you.

"You have an idea of who it is?" Tristan asks.

"I do."

I walk over to him and grab him by the collar of his shirt. "Then fucking spit it out!" I shout.

He stays calm. "I need you to promise you won't act ..."

"I'll rip his fucking throat out!" They all know I don't make promises!

"Right away. If I'm right, he will take us to her. But you have to be patient."

How the fuck am I supposed to be patient? Someone could be raping her. Beating her. She could have already been sold. And I'll never see her again. The thought is paralyzing. I release Kayn and stumble back a step. My brother grabs my arm, but I pull away.

"Who is it?" Tristan asks.

He takes in a deep breath. "Darrell."

"No!" I say, shaking my head. "He wouldn't touch her." I know he had hit her, but he knows firsthand what I would do to a man who would dare take her from me.

"Sir, please. Just hear me out."

The plea in Kayn's voice makes me pause. I've never heard him ask please before. The man is six-foot-four and almost three hundred pounds of solid muscle. He takes what he wants. He doesn't beg or plead.

"Why him?" I ask, and my throat tightens. Kayn's been by my side for years, and he doesn't fuck around. If he thinks Darrell is behind it, then he

has reasons. He wouldn't make that accusation lightly.

"By the way he is with her."

"What the fuck does that mean?" I snap.

He doesn't flinch from my harsh tone. "Have you watched the tape from yesterday?"

"Yes. I've watched it fifty fucking times, but what does that have to do with anything?" I can't watch them cuff her, cut her, and take her anymore. I can't do it.

"No, I mean the tape when we all returned home."

"No," my brother answers, but I'm already going over to my screen to pull up the surveillance from when I know they arrived.

Kayn walks into my house first followed by a sleepy looking Bunny, then Darrell. She comes to a stop inside the foyer, and Darrell shoves her forward. She falls to her knees, and my jaw tightens.

Kayn turns around, hearing the commotion and her small cry, and helps her to her feet. "Hey, take it easy. The drugs haven't worn off yet," he tells him.

Darrell shrugs carelessly. "If Avery was smart, he would keep her drugged twenty-four seven. The bitch is much more tolerable when she's unconscious."

She sways, and Kayn doesn't release her. "How much did you give her anyway? She should be more lucid," he comments, looking down at her.

"Enough!" He squares his shoulders. "I wasn't taking the chance of her stabbing me with a fork again."

Kayn sighs. "I have already spoken to Avery. You guys get settled in, and I'm gonna go get him. Keep the place together until I get back," he tells Darrell and then releases Bunny.

She wraps her arms around her chest and looks at Darrell. "May I call him?" Her voice is rough from sleep.

"Who?" Darrell snaps.

"Avery. I want to talk to him." She rubs her eyes.

"No." He snorts. "You're not allowed to use a phone."

"I don't think that rule applies when it's him I want to call," she says angrily. Finding that fire I know she has. I hope wherever she is right now, she is fighting. *Hang on, Bunny.*

He slaps her across the face, and she stumbles back into Kayn. Kayn leans down to whisper into her ear, and then she turns and walks up the stairs to go

to her room.

Kayn grabs him by the back of the neck and yanks him forward. “Keep your hands to yourself,” he orders.

“We’re allowed to do what is necessary to keep her in line.”

“I’m allowed to do that. You’re just a fucking overpaid babysitter. So keep your fucking hands to yourself,” he snaps, then shoves him away. “Now go upstairs and let her use your cell to call Avery. I’ll be back soon.” He walks toward the door but turns to face a pissed-off Darrell. “I mean it, Darrell. Keep your hands to yourself, or I’ll cut them off myself.” Then he walks out.

“She never called me,” I say more to myself, lifting the remote to turn off the video.

My brother stops me. “Stay on him. I wanna see what he does next.”

We watch him walk into the formal dining room. The same one where I had Bunny bent over the table, and my anger rises that I allowed her out of my sight when I knew she was already in trouble.

He pulls his cell out and sends a quick text and then he looks up at the camera before turning his back to it and walking right out the front door.

“Goddammit!” I yell, throwing the remote across the room.

“We’ll find her,” my brother assures me.

“I’m sorry, sir,” Kayn says, squaring his shoulders. “I should have never left—”

“You had orders!” I snap, interrupting him. It’s no one’s fault but mine.

“Yes, sir. But I could have sent Mason to come and get you.”

I look at him. “Go get Darrell. Bring him to me. Now!”

They both shake their heads. “We have to play this smart. He doesn’t know we’re on to him. I can watch his every move. Listen in on his phone calls but he won’t just come out and tell you what he’s up to,” Kayn announces.

“You expect me to sit on my ass?”

“Avery?” my brother snaps, and I narrow my eyes on him. “We expect you to be smart about it. If he was a man who you wanted information from, how would you get it?”

“Torture it out of them.”

“It won’t work with him, sir. I know Darrell. We need to wait for him to go to her,” Kayn offers.

I turn my back on them, running a hand down my face. I know they’re right. But what if he never goes to her? How long will she survive out there without me? I don’t want to find out.

It's been forty-eight hours since she was taken, and I've done nothing but pace. And drink.

My hands itch to tear Darrell's head off, but every time I go to make a move, my brother or Kayn get in my way. I'm about to rip both of their heads off just because I can.

I'm in my study, sitting at my desk. I open the top drawer and see her cell sitting there. I haven't looked at it other than that one time. And it's dead. Plugging it in, I turn it on. After a few seconds of it vibrating, it shows over fifty texts and ten voicemails.

I open it up and go through her pictures again, but instead of looking at the ones in the front, I scroll to the older ones. When I come to one that has me in it, my heart instantly stops. We're young. She was sixteen and I was eighteen. It was taken sitting outside by my pool in the house I grew up in. You can tell it's a picture she took of the original. She's standing between me and my best friend. The guy she left me for. The one she chose. When there should have never been a competition to begin with. I should have seen it coming. I always found him too close to her. He would go out of his way when he came over to talk to her. She told me they were just friends, but I should have known better.

Twelve years ago

She sits at the outside bar, sipping on some lemonade in a pink two-piece. I promised her we would go swimming after I finished playing basketball. She has half her short blond hair up in a high ponytail. Her white sunglasses cover her face, and she's smiling right at me.

"What?" I ask.

"Just admiring you," she answers.

I look away from her, bounce the ball, and then jump up and shoot it. When it hits nothing but net, she claps.

"Best two out of three?" Tristan whines.

"Nope. Promised Bunny I'd go swimming with her."

He picks up the ball and rolls his eyes.

I turn to walk over to her but stop when I see my friend Mitch standing beside her. I punched him in the fucking face a few weeks ago when I walked

in on them playing pool and he had his hands all over her. I warned him to stay away from her, but he hasn't listened. She takes a step back from him, and he matches it. Lowering his head, he looks her up and down, and my blood starts to boil when he reaches out for her. Her eyes meet mine, and she smiles nervously. "Avery. I'm ready when you are." Then she turns around, giving both of us her back, and walks off, heading toward the pool.

Mitch walks toward me and winks before passing. "Tristan, I'll play you," he calls out.

I fist my hands and ignore the desire to punch him again. She assured me last time that nothing was there. He can try all he wants, but nothing will come of it. Instead, I remove my sweaty shirt and head toward the pool to be with my girl.

I power off her phone and drop it back into my desk drawer before slamming it shut. I stand, needing to move.

Promises. She's the reason I quit making them. She's the reason for every decision I have ever made.

How dare she do this to me! She fucking plays me. Leaves me. Ruins me. Then eleven years later, I take her with every intention to ruin her in return and then this happens!

She makes me feel again!

Makes me fucking love her again!

You never stopped loving her.

"FUCK!" I grab the nearest thing I see, which is an empty glass that held my scotch from earlier, and throw it across the room. It shatters into a million pieces when it hits the brick fireplace.

I turn to face my desk, grip the edge, and turn it over. My computer goes crashing off it to the floor along with my keyboard, cell and office phone. The drawers I didn't have locked fall open, and the contents come falling out. My gun hits the floor with a clank.

My door swings open, and Kayn comes running in, gun drawn, followed by Tristan.

"Avery, man, you have to calm down." My brother sighs when he sees my mess.

Fuck calm! I've never been rational when it came to Bunny. Why start now? No matter what she had done to me in the past, she is everything to me.

My rage.

My love.

And my sanity.

I took her in the first place to protect her, and she made me fail at that!

“I’m done waiting,” I say, walking behind my tipped over desk and grabbing my gun off the floor along with my cell.

“Wait!” Tristan says, jumping in front of me. “You need to wait—”

I point the gun at his face and cock it. “You have two options—move or die.” My voice is even and so is my breathing.

His jaw sharpens, and his dark blue eyes glare down my barrel at me. Kayn stands off to the side, silently watching us.

“Which is it?” I’m not bluffing. I never do. I will kill anyone who stands in my way of getting Bunny back. And I’m about to prove it.

He lets out a long sigh, holds up his hands in surrender, and steps aside. *Good choice.*

I walk out of the study. “Where the fuck is he?” I ask when I hear them following me.

Kayn responds. “He’s at the warehouse.”

The fucker has been moping around here pretending to be fucking injured from a gunshot wound. It was a graze. He staged her abduction and took a bullet to make himself look innocent. There won’t be much left of him when I’m done.

I walk through the house and out the front door. I’m jogging down the stairs and to my car that is parked over to the side of the driveway when Kayn stops me. “I’ll drive, sir.”

I turn around to see him heading to my Escalade, my brother following suit.

“How are you going to get him to confess?” Tristan asks, getting into the back seat behind me.

“Whatever it takes,” I say, looking out the bulletproof window but not really seeing anything as we pass.

“Come on, Avery. You have to have a plan,” he insists.

“I do. Torture him until he tells me where the fuck she is.”

The car falls silent, and I close my eyes while my right foot taps on the floorboard. My gun rests in my hand on my thigh.

I’ll find you, Bunny! Nothing could possibly stop me.

“Avery, there’s always the chance that ...”

“If you value your life, you will not finish that sentence,” I warn my

brother.

He lets out a growl of frustration. “We should wait. We don’t even know why he did it in the first place,” Tristan continues.

Why did he even fucking come? “It doesn’t matter why he did it.” I shrug my tight shoulders.

“But what would he want with her?” he continues. “If he was involved, he didn’t take her for himself.”

“Shut up, Tristan!” I shout. “I told you I don’t give a fuck why he did it! If he’s involved, he will take me to her!”

Even if I have to carry him to her because I’ve cut off his arms and legs, I will find her. I smile, knowing the smell of blood is in my near future. He’s gonna bleed until he tells me where my Bunny is.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

AVERY

WE PULL UP TO THE BACK of the warehouse and walk in the double doors. Darrell stands with his back to us and his cell to his ear. “Yeah, it’s all good here,” he says, nodding once. “They don’t suspect a thing.”

Fucking bastard!

My blood starts to boil, and I see red. I lift my gun and place it on the back of his neck. “Actually, I do.” My voice vibrates with my anger.

His body stiffens, and I yank the phone from his hand. I place it to my ear. “Who the fuck is this?” I demand.

Click.

I hand the cell to my brother. “Find out who that number belongs to.”

He takes it and walks away, heading to the office in the front of the building. He’s our tech guy. If there’s a trace, he’ll find it. I have no doubt. Now I’m glad I didn’t shoot him in my study.

“Where is she?” I demand.

“I don’t know ...”

“Don’t play fucking dumb!” I shout and then hit him on the back of the head with my gun. He falls to his knees. “Next time, I’ll shoot you.”

He turns on his knees to face me and Kayn. He too has his gun pulled and trained on Darrell, and he starts to laugh. “You think you two scare me?” He shakes his head. “You’re not as big as you think you are, Avery.”

I start to pull back on the trigger, my gun still trained at his head.

“Dead men can’t speak, sir,” Kayn announces, getting my attention.

“Injured ones can,” I say and fire the gun.

The power behind the bullet sends him falling back onto the concrete floor. The sound bouncing off the open warehouse, momentarily deafening me. He grabs his right arm, screaming out as blood starts to pour from the wound.

Then I pull the trigger again and shoot the other one. “Now. Talk,” I order. His lips pull back, hissing in a breath. “She’s as good as dead.”

“You better hope that’s not the case.” I will set this town on fucking fire! I

will burn every person until I get to one who tells me where the fuck she is! The devil himself would be impressed with how determined I will be.

He looks up at me, eyes narrowing. “If she’s not already, then she’s praying for it.”

I kick him in the face, and his head snaps back. “Fucking tell me where she is!”

He moans, falling onto his side. The smell of his blood getting stronger by the minute. I usually revel in it. Savor it. But I don’t have the time right now. He is right. Is she fighting to live? Has she already given up?

“Did you give her to Damon?” I demand.

He lets out a strangled laugh. “Why do so many of you guys want that bitch? Is she that good of a fuck?”

My jaw tightens, his words letting me know that it wasn’t Damon. *Who else would fucking want her?* And what do they plan on doing with her? I lower my gun and look at Kayn. “I need a few things.”

“I won’t tell you where she is,” he snarls, shaking his head. “Never.”

“We’ll see,” I say, removing my Rolex from my wrist. Then I undo the buttons on my sleeves and roll them up to my elbows.

He sits in a metal chair in the center of the warehouse with his wrists tied to the back legs. Blood runs down both arms to the floor, and his head hangs forward.

“You’ve lost a lot of blood,” I inform him in case he doesn’t already know.

His only response is a grunt.

“Kayn, why don’t you help him out? Don’t want him to bleed to death before we’re done.”

Kayn walks over to him and digs his hands into the bucket by Darrell’s feet. He grabs a hand full of the contents and then places them on his arm over the bullet wound.

Darrell’s head falls back, and he grits his teeth, refusing to make a noise while Kayn presses salt into the wound—packing it tightly. He then takes the plastic wrap and wraps it around his upper arm to keep it in place. “The salt helps stop the bleeding and closes the wound faster,” I inform him. “It hurts like a bitch, but it allows me to torture you longer.”

“Fuck ... you,” he says through clenched teeth while Kayn does the other. I don’t have time for this! “Tell me where she is.”

He shakes his head, and I walk over to him, yanking his shoes and socks off his feet. I grab the bucket of water and place his feet in it. Then I take the car battery off the table and place it on the floor along with the jumper cables.

I shove a rag into his mouth and connect the cables to the battery and let it shock him for ten seconds.

His body jerks, and he makes unintelligible noises into his gag. I unplug it and rip the rag from his mouth. “Ready to speak?” I ask.

He looks up at me. His eyes narrowed with rage. A vein pops out of his head. “I hope you enjoyed fucking her while you had the chance ...”

My hand shoots out and wraps around his large neck with so much force it knocks his chair back. I go down to my knees while the chair slaps the floor. He lies on his back looking up at me as I squeeze his large neck.

His mouth opens but nothing comes out. I grind my teeth, squeezing so hard my hand fucking shakes.

His body jerks, trying to fight the ropes binding him to the chair. His face red, eyes large with fear. “I’m gonna kill you so fucking slowly,” I growl, “you’re gonna wish I had just shot you in the head.” I release him and stand to my full height.

He coughs, and his body jerks. He spits, and the blood splatters over his face. “If you wanna shoot someone ...” He wheezes. “Shoot yourself. You did this to her.”

I take my gun and press it into his kneecap. “Last chance. Where is she?”

He starts to laugh, but it turns into a cough. “Where she belongs.” His lips turn into a sadistic smile. “Being a real fucking slave.”

I pull the trigger, and it takes out his right knee.

He throws his head back, and it hits the concrete floor, growling through gritted teeth.

“He ... came to ... me ...”

“Who came to you?” I snap, already pressing the gun to his other kneecap.

He opens his mouth to speak.

“Avery!”

I look over my shoulder to see Tristan running toward us from the front office. His eyes wide, and his cell in his hand.

“Did you find out who the number belongs to?” I growl. He interrupted whatever Darrell was about to tell me. *It better be worth it.*

He nods, then looks at Darrell lying on his back tied to the chair. His eyes come back to mine. "It's Vaughn."

My blood runs cold at that name. The sadistic son of a bitch will treat her exactly like a slave. He'll rape her. Torture her. He'll make her scream again and again. He's like me; he likes to watch things bleed. But eventually he'll grow bored with her and just leave her chained up to die of starvation and dehydration. Then he'll throw her out with the trash.

I take a deep, calming breath, trying to get my head on straight. Thoughts of her tied down and bleeding keep entering my mind, but I have to push them aside. I have to get to her. And now.

"Avery." My brother's voice rings out. "We need to go ..."

I block him out as the blood rushes in my ears. Even Tristan knows she may already be dead. We may already be too late.

I kneel and look at Darrell, trying not to fucking shoot him in the Goddamn face. "Why the fuck were you talking to my brother?" I demand.

Vaughn is our oldest brother. The only son our father cares to acknowledge. 'Cause he wanted to own slaves. Just like our dad.

He gives a rough laugh. "Because he pays better than you."

I press the gun to his temple, and he lets out a whimper. Not so fucking tough, are you? "You're gonna take me to her."

"She's already dead." His head falls to the side. He's starting to lose consciousness.

I stand, the gun resting against my thigh. "Did you get a location on the phone?"

"Yes. But he could already be on the move ..."

I look at Kayn. "Leave him here." Then I turn my back on them and walk past Tristan. "Where is she?" I demand.

"Vancouver."

I stop dead in my tracks and turn to face him. "Here?"

He nods. "About twenty minutes out."

I look at Darrell's body and then back at Tristan. "That doesn't make any sense. Why take her and not run? He's had her for forty-eight hours."

"My thoughts exactly," Kayn says. "It could be a trap."

I run a hand down my face. *Think*. Vaughn has never been a sane man. Even as a child, he needed help. My mother tried to get it for him before she left us, but my father wouldn't allow it. He found him and his twisted fucking mind to be perfect.

I look at Tristan. “Call your men.”

He nods. “How many you want?”

“At least ten.” I’m not gonna go in there blind, and I’m also not going to take my men. One of them is currently dying in my warehouse. I can’t trust the others at the moment.

“You’re wasting your time,” Darrell wheezes. Kayn has untied him, and he’s lying on his back next to the chair. “You’re not listening.” He swallows. “She. Is. Dead.” His head falls to the side while he lies in a puddle of his own blood. “Even if you get to her in time ... she’ll need ...” He coughs, and his body jerks. “Medical attention.”

My chest tightens at his words. He knew exactly what he was doing and still just handed her over.

“Call Lance,” I snap to Tristan. “He can go with us ...”

Darrell starts to chuckle roughly and rolls onto his side. “The only men ... you can trust ... are in this room.” His voice is barely a whisper.

“How do you know that?” Tristan snaps.

His eyes close, and I run over to him. I kick him in the side. “Wake the fuck up!” He doesn’t move.

“He’s lost too much blood.” Kayn sighs. “You’ve killed him.”

Leaning down, I check his neck and I grind my teeth when I feel no pulse. He’s dead. “Motherfucker!” I hiss.

Kayn pulls out his phone. “I have someone. He’s a trauma surgeon. But it’ll cost ...”

“Fucking call him! Tell him to meet us back at my house. Then call Marvin and inform him that we are expecting a visitor,” I order, heading toward the door.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

AVERY

IT TOOK US A TOTAL OF AN hour to get all of Tristan's men rounded up and in position. And in that hour, I have gone from angry to explosive. I can't quit imagining her lifeless body lying on the ground, looking up at me. I can't quit thinking of all the horrible ways he could torture her. Her screams as tears run down her face. She's so fragile. So small. I haven't made sure she's eaten well. It wouldn't take much to break her. And my brother likes to use his fist. He was always a fighter.

"Avery?" A hand lands on my shoulder, and I jump. "We're ready," Tristan says; his blue eyes stare into mine with worry while we sit in the back seat of my SUV. He knows I'm probably minutes away from going postal on anyone and everyone. Just then my phone dings that I have a message, and I pull it out. It's from the last person I thought I'd hear from.

Damon: *Call me.*

"I don't have time for this ..."

Tristan yanks my phone from my hands and types.

What do you want?

The reply is instant.

Damon: *We need to talk.*

Tristan throws me back my phone, ignoring his reply, and I pocket it. "I was just curious to see if it had to do with Presleigh," he adds. And I forget all about it. I'm here on a mission. To save her.

The back of the hatch opens, and I see Kayn placing blankets and bottles of water back there. I had Tristan tell his guys to bring some supplies, not

knowing what kind of condition she will be in.

I hate the unknown!

“Let’s go.” I open the door and get out. I look around the property. It’s dark outside. The sun just set on our way here, so I can’t see much. But what I can see is dead grass and trash. Everywhere. We’re walking on it.

“The back is clear, sir.” I hear a guy by the name of Brian in my earpiece.

“Don’t move until I give the go,” Tristan orders him.

“Yes, sir.”

We come up to the house, and there’s no lights coming from within. The once white shutters are now black and rotted. One hangs from its hinges. The paint is an ugly brown that you can tell was once yellow. Windows busted out and shingles missing. It looks like something from a horror movie.

“Are you sure this is it?” I ask Tristan. This doesn’t seem like somewhere our brother would take her. I mean, the fact she was only miles away is a red flag. Then to bring her here. My brother likes expensive mansions and villas. It doesn’t make sense.

“I’m positive,” Tristan answers.

“Take the side,” I tell him, and he takes off around the house. Kayn and I make our way up the old rotted steps.

I walk up the three stairs and see the brown door is cracked. Another bad sign. I place one hand on it, holding the gun raised with the other.

I step in and flip the light switch, but nothing happens. The house is cold and deserted. The floors cracked, walls missing. No furniture or appliances anywhere.

Please be here.

I tiptoe down a hall and come to a door. Turning the knob, I open it. I walk in, gun raised, but it’s clear.

I repeat the process with two more doors, opening all of them.

The last room has two metal tables in it side by side and a big light above one of them. That table has thick leather belt like straps on it, and my jaw tightens as I think of what they did to her while she lay there helpless. The light is also on, so the house obviously has power.

I walk in and over to it, lowering my gun when I see the small room is empty. It smells of disinfectant and blood. It’s smeared all over the table, and I know it’s from her neck. They must have sewn up her cut from the tracker being removed.

Kayn whistles softly, and I turn to look at him still standing by the door.

He nods his head to the hallway and mouths *someone's here*.

"Standby," I whisper into the earpiece.

I make my way over to him and continue walking down the hallway, raising my gun once again. I hear a familiar male's voice, and my jaw tightens. "Yeah, he went out. He should return soon. Yes, sir. I'll stay until you get back."

My hand tightens on the gun. Who the fuck is he talking to? And where the fuck is my brother? His phone signal put him here. Has he left since then? Or did he just leave his phone behind? If he left, did he take her with him? She has to be here. If not, I may never find her in time. If she's not already dead.

I step into the small room. It has a desk in the middle, and that's all. I watch as the man hangs up his phone and places it on the desk. I walk in with my gun trained at his head. "Where the fuck is she?" I ask Lance. The very man who saved her for me just weeks ago helped take her from me. My jaw tightens.

The only people you can trust are in this room. Fuck, even Darrell knew he was in on it too.

He spins around and comes face to face with the tip of my gun. "Don't make me ask again."

"Avery ...?"

I press the gun into his mouth, cutting off his words when I shove his head back at an odd angle. He mumbles around it, and I pull it out just enough for him to talk. "Downstairs." He goes to open a drawer in the desk.

"Don't!" I snap. He may have a gun in there.

He sucks in a breath. "The key. You're gonna need a key to get into it."

"Kayn," I say, and he opens the drawer and hands it to me.

"Last door on the left," Lance rushes out.

"Who else is here?" I demand.

"No one. Just me." He shakes his head frantically.

"Put him in a car," I tell Kayn. I need answers, but I need Bunny more right now. I can torture him later.

I make my way to the last door on the left and see my brother when I descend the five stairs. "It's locked," he says, trying to jiggle the handle. "Stand back," he orders, pointing his gun down at it.

"Stop. I have a key."

I put it in, and the lock clicks. Pushing the door open, I lift my gun once again, not sure what I will find. At first, I see nothing. It's too dark. Pitch

black. “Bunny?” I call out.

No response.

I blink rapidly to adjust my eyes when I hear my brother enter and come to a stop beside me. That allows a little light to filter in behind us.

The room is cold with concrete walls and floor. Smells just like my cellar—death. “I can’t see anything ...” My words trail off when something comes into view, a small frame huddled up in a corner.

I lower my gun and run over to it. The more I’m in the room, the more I smell the blood. My jaw tightens at the thought of my brother making her bleed.

Dropping to my knees, I place my hands on her bare legs. Her skin feels ice cold to the touch just like when I found her in the bathtub.

“Bunny?” I ask softly.

Her knees are pulled to her chest, and her forehead rests on them. Her dark hair is matted and falls over her body. It’s hard to see her because it’s so dark in here. “Is there a light?” I ask Tristan.

“I’m looking ...” Seconds later, the room is lit with a single bulb dangling from the middle of the ceiling.

“Bunny?” I ask again, placing my hands on either side of her head and lifting it up. It falls back against the wall, and I shove the hair away from her face. I see her eyes shut. There’s a cut on both her upper and lower lip along with one across her nose. A stream of dark red blood runs down her parted lips to her bare chest.

“Presleigh?” I ask, watching for any kind of response. I get nothing. There’s a big knot on the right side of her head. I pry open her eyelids and find her pupils dilated. “She’s drugged,” I say through clenched teeth.

They kept her sedated.

Fucking bastards.

They’re no different than you!

A part of me hopes she’s been this way the entire time. I don’t want her to remember what happened to her while she was here.

“Goddammit,” my brother hisses.

“What?”

“Her neck.”

“What the ...?” I ask, placing my hand on the two-inch-thick steel shackle around her delicate skin.

“She’s tried to get it off,” he observes, seeing the scratch marks that run up

and down her neck. The skin is bruised blue and purple. Dried blood covers her bare neck and chest. She has stitches where her tracker was.

“Hang on, Bunny,” I say, panic rising. I remember what she did to herself in the bathtub with that tracker. I can imagine her sitting in here, chained to the wall and screaming while she tries to free herself. Her mind set on it no matter what it cost her. Even if it’s her life.

My hand goes to the back of the collar, and I feel a lock on it. Then a chain. “Hold her head up,” I demand. Tristan places his hands on either side of her head, holding it in place as I push her forward so I can see where it goes. “The chain is bolted to the wall,” I tell him.

“Does that key work?”

I try it. “No,” I snap.

“Fuck!” He growls.

My eyes drop, and I notice her hands are cuffed behind her back. “Fuck!”

“What is it?”

“Her hands are cuffed.” Fuck, Bunny! What did he do to you, baby?

“Motherfucker ...”

“Go find out what we need from Lance. Kayn has him in the car.”

He nods and then takes off.

“Av ... er ... y.” Her broken voice breaks my heart.

I look down to see her eyes are still closed. “I’m here, Bunny.” Her body starts to shake, and she sniffs. “Hey. I’m here. You’re safe now,” I say and hate the words as soon as I say them. She should have been safe the entire time she was with me.

She starts to fight her restraints, and a soft cry comes from her busted lips. I kneel in front of her. “Bunny, look at me,” I say, holding her head again. “Come on, baby. Look at me.”

Her long dark lashes flutter open, showing me a little of her beautiful blue eyes. “That’s it.” They close again.

“We’re all clear,” I hear a voice in my ear.

“Stay alert,” my brother barks out to them.

“Try again, Bunny,” I say gently. “Open them up and look at me.”

They flutter open, but I know she’s not really seeing me because they’re glazed over. She blinks slowly. “That’s it, baby.”

“Got them,” my brother says, returning.

“Hold her head again,” I demand when he hands me the keys. He takes my place kneeling before her while I undo the lock on the back and slip it

through the hole and remove it from her neck. Then I undo the cuffs from around her wrists. They're bruised and covered in dry blood. She fought hard to get free, but it was never going to be enough.

I stand and remove my bulletproof vest, then grab the back of my shirt before ripping it over my head. I look down at her, and her eyes are closed again. Taking the shirt, I place it over her before lifting her up into my arms where she belongs.

"We've got her," Tristan calls out into the earpiece. "Get your shit together and ready to go," he orders his men.

I carry her out the front door to see Kayn standing outside by my SUV speaking to a few of Tristan's men. "Where is Lance?" I demand.

"In the back of Jake's SUV. Knocked out," Kayn answers.

"Let's go," I order.

We all climb in, and Tristan immediately hands me the blanket his men brought for her, and I wrap her up in it.

"Here," Tristan says, handing me a new bottle of water from the front.

"Drink this, Bunny." I unscrew the lid. She doesn't respond. "Bunny, you need to drink ..." I shift her in my lap, attempting to wake her, but her head falls back, exposing her delicate neck covered in scratches, bruises, and blood. "Presleigh. Look at me. Come on, baby. I need you to wake up," I say softly, but she keeps her eyes closed. "Look at me," I demand this time.

My chest tightens when I get nothing. I drop my forehead down to hers and close my eyes. "I wasn't too late," I whisper, reassuring both of us that she isn't gone. As if that will make it more believable. When my mind is telling me I failed her.

I pull back and readjust my arm under her head. "You need to drink this." I press the bottle to her lips. Water runs down the side of her face, but some makes it into her mouth. She coughs, and her body jerks from the invasion of water filling her mouth.

Her eyes spring open, and she looks up at me through watery lashes. Eyes still dilated but wide. "Drink, Bunny. I need you to drink." I press the bottle to her lips again and pour some more into her mouth. She reaches up her right hand and tries to push the bottle away, but she's too weak. And she isn't coordinated enough to fight me. I press it to her lips, avoiding her hand, and pour more down her throat. She swallows this time but still coughs as some runs down her face. "Good girl," I say, handing the bottle to my brother, who is watching us. "That's enough for now," I tell her, running my hand over her

matted hair.

She looks up at me, eyes wide in fear. “Av ... er ... y ...”

“It’s me, Bunny,” I say roughly. My throat tightens at the way she choked out my name. “I’ve got you, baby. You’re safe now.”

She shoves her face into my bare chest, and I feel wetness, then her body shakes, and I know she’s silently crying. I hold her tightly, rocking her back and forth.

Thirty minutes later, we pull into my roundabout drive followed by five cars. My brother jumps out and opens the back door for me, and I crawl out with her in my arms. She went back to sleep. And this time, I didn’t try to shove water down her throat or make her open her eyes. I know she’s alive, and that’s enough for now.

“What do you want to do with Lance?” Kayn asks.

“Put him in the cellar,” I order. “I’ll take care of him later.”

PRESLEIGH

Everything hurts! There’s a ringing in my ears. So loud, it’s deafening. The pounding in my head is so hard it’s hard to think. Fuck, it’s hard to breathe. My lips feel swollen and dry. My limbs heavy.

I hear voices, but they’re hard to make out over the ringing in my ears. So much pressure ... I moan.

A man’s voice is far off in the distance. I recognize it. Where is it from?

I feel something grab my hand, and I try to pull it away, but I’m too weak. Too slow. Always overpowered.

I’m so cold. I swallow and flinch from the pain. My throat is raw. My tongue too big. I taste blood. A lot of it. The coppery taste overpowers everything else. I’m gonna get sick ... I start coughing. The act making my already sore chest worse.

“Bunny?”

Too much pain.

So much blood—the taste being too strong.

My chest starts to heave, saliva building in my mouth mixing with the coppery taste ...

“Sit her up,” someone orders.

Fingers roughly dig into my sensitive shoulders, and I’m yanked upward

just as the bile starts to rise. And then I'm vomiting. My body starts to shake uncontrollably while it rejects all it has inside. I can't stop it. My eyes open and tears sting them, looking into a trash can that sits on my lap. I'm bent over at an odd angle, and my muscles scream in protest.

"You're okay," I hear a soft voice say. "Here, take a drink ..."

I shake my head quickly, and it makes the already blurry room tilt on its side, causing me to heave again. The tears now run down my cheeks and my hands fist. I suddenly break out in a cold sweat. My heart pounds in my chest, and I suck in a deep breath. It makes the pain in my chest explode again. Dots cloud my vision, and I blink rapidly.

"Nnn-ooo," I choke out. "Pppleeeasse," I beg, wrapping my arms around myself. Just make it stop.

"Bunny." That voice calls out over the ringing in my ears.

I close my stinging eyes tightly and begin to rock back and forth as that feeling of nausea takes over again.

Deep breath ... I flinch. "It hurts," I cry out, bending over more at the waist. Needing to try a new position. My forearms now resting on the small trash can.

"Where?" that familiar voice demands.

"Everywhere." I gasp. "I ... can't ... breathe," I say through gulps of air.

I feel a sudden shift on the ground underneath me. My arms go wide to help catch myself, and my eyes spring open. The trash can ripped away. Dark blue eyes meet mine. I've dreamed about them. They helped me escape the pain. Why isn't it working now?

"Bunny?" Warm hands cup my face.

I flinch from the contact and close my eyes.

"Look at me." His voice is rough but commanding.

I do as I'm told. His eyes go back and forth between mine. The room sways, and I blink rapidly.

"Bunny. Look at me."

I am. He has two heads. Four eyes. The wall behind him seems to move in a circular motion.

"Focus on me, baby," he urges as if he knows. "Look at me." He lowers his voice. I blink once. Twice. That ringing is still loud but no longer overpowers his voice. It seems to ground me. "That's it, baby. Look at me." He nods his head once. His eyes go back and forth between mine so fast I can't keep up with them. "Take a deep breath for me."

I try to do as he says, but it hurts. I whimper.

“It’s not working,” he barks, looking away from me for the first time.

“It will. She needs to relax. The more she fights it, the more pain it will cause,” someone says. “Help calm her down.”

I’ve quit fighting. I’m so weak.

My head is so heavy. It falls back, and the new position makes it hard to breathe. So I don’t and the pain lessens. And the light ... so harsh that it hurts my already sensitive eyes. *What happened to the darkness?*

“Bunny?” he snaps, and my head is brought back to face him once again.

I take in a breath, and the pain returns.

His lips part while he stares at me with those pretty blue eyes. “Come on. I need you to look at me. Listen to me. You’re safe, baby.” I blink. That ringing still loud in my ears. “Do you understand? You’re safe.” He nods once. “I got you, Bunny.”

He’s wrong. So wrong. The pain I feel proves that. I part my lips to speak, but nothing comes out.

“What is it?” he asks. “Tell me, baby.”

I part my lips and try to ignore the pounding behind my eyes. I need to tell him. He should just leave me wherever we are and run away as fast as he can, or neither one of us will make it out alive. He should save himself. I’m not worth dying for.

“What is it?” he repeats with urgency.

I blink, my eyes growing heavy. So tired. But I have to tell him. If it’s the last thing I do. I open my numb lips and warn him. “He’ll come for me.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

AVERY

“BUNNY?” I SNAP WHEN HER eyes close. “What the fuck did you give her?” I demand Franklin as he stands next to my bed. We’ve been back for three hours now, and that was the first glimpse of anything from her.

He shakes his head. “It’s not the meds. She has a concussion. She’s gonna go in and out of consciousness.”

Her head starts to fall forward, so I gently place her on her back. I stand from the bed and start to pace next to her.

“She needs to be admitted. Twenty-four-hour care. I can make a call. They can have a room ready for her when we arrive ...”

“No!” I snap.

He’ll come for me!

He fucked with her mind. Told her that even if she got away, he would get her again. And he made her believe it. Made her doubt my ability to keep her safe. Why wouldn’t she believe him? I failed her.

I don’t want her in a hospital. There are too many opportunities for someone to slip in and slip out. Too many ways for Vaughn to pay off some nurse or doctor to administer her the wrong drug, killing her instantly. If I have her admitted, she’ll have a chart. A room number. No privacy. I need her at my house with guards. Lots of them. She may have been taken from my home, but I wasn’t thinking clearly. I didn’t understand the real threat. Now I do. I’ll use Darrell as an example and then build a fucking army around her.

Franklin lets out a growl, getting my attention. “You hired me to help her. But you’re not taking my advice.”

“Because your advice is shit!” I shout.

The door opens, and Tristan sticks his head in. He looks at her lying there passed out still in my shirt, the covers pulled up to her stomach. Franklin redid the stitches in her neck ’cause they were half-assed at best.

“What?” I snap, fisting my hands down by my sides.

His eyes go to mine. They soften, and he lets out a long breath as if he has bad news to deliver. Like anything could be more heartbreaking than finding her naked and tied up like an animal. “May I speak to you ...?”

“Get out!” I order to Franklin. He does but mumbles something at me under his breath. The old man doesn’t wanna fuck with me today. “What is it?”

Tristan walks over to me. His eyes drop to her sleeping form before returning to mine. He opens his mouth and then shuts it as if he’s not sure what he wants to say. “What do you want to do about Darrell?” Tristan finally asks.

“Is he still at the warehouse?”

He nods. “Kayn was going to go and get him. Dispose of the body.”

“No. Tell him to keep him there.” He frowns. “I want to make an example of him.” I look down at her. “Things have changed. Damon is no longer a threat.” I run a hand through my hair and look back at him. “Vaughn wants her, and for some fucking reason, he didn’t kill her. He’s playing some sick game.”

He opens his mouth, and I pause, waiting for him to say something. Then he shuts it. “If you have something to say, then you need to spit it out,” I snap.

He shakes his head, and whispers, “It can wait.”

I don’t know what the hell he’s talking about, but I can agree. She is my main focus right now. “Call up all of our men. I want them at the warehouse in two hours.” He frowns. “I’m gonna show them what happens when you betray me.”

He nods and then leaves without another word.

PRESLEIGH

The ringing has dulled to an annoying hum. The pain in my head is now a throbbing. The taste of blood still lingers in my mouth but not as bad. I open my heavy eyes and try to blink away the harsh light.

“She needs rest. A few days and she should be better.” I see an older man who I don’t know over by the door talking to Avery. His back toward me. “This could have been a lot worse—”

“I fucking know that,” he snaps, interrupting him. He wears blue jeans and

a black T-shirt. I can see how tense his shoulders are, and he shoves a hand through his dark hair.

“As far as I can see, the mild concussion is the worst of it. She has cuts and bruises, but nothing that won’t heal over time. I’m giving her a prescription for antibiotics to fight infection.” Ripping my own skin open with dirty nails and lying on a dirty concrete floor isn’t very sanitary. “And pain meds. She should be feeling much better in a few days.”

I lick my cracked lips. “Avery.” It comes out rough.

He spins around, and his narrowed eyes instantly soften when he sees me. “Bunny.” He rushes over to me and crawls onto the bed. “Hey, baby. How do you feel?”

“Tired.”

“You need lots of rest,” the older man says, coming to stand at the foot of the bed. His eyes go to Avery and then back to mine. “You were very lucky. I’ve given you some meds that will help. If you experience any more vomiting or dizziness, you need to let me know.”

Avery gets off the bed and walks toward the door. The man takes the hint. He is being dismissed. “I’ll be right back,” Avery tells me before they both walk out.

I roll over onto my side and realize I have to use the restroom. It takes me a second to shove the heavy covers off me, but then I sit up on the side of the bed and place my feet on the red rug. The room sways a little bit, but I push up onto my feet. My legs are heavy, and my vision kinda blurs for a second. I place my hand on the bed and take my first step. It takes me longer than usual, due to dehydration and starvation. Plus the beatings I took didn’t help.

Walking into the bathroom, I shut the door behind me and close my swollen eyes. Taking a deep breath, I move to the front of the mirror and open them to look at the damage.

My eyes aren’t nearly as bad as they feel. One is a little swollen but not to the point I can’t open it. I have a bruise on my cheek along with cuts here and there. My neck looks the worse from the collar they put on me. And my hands shake when I run the tips of my fingers over them. Making me flinch.

I wake to a dark and cold room. My hands come up to grip my head as it pounds. Sitting up, I look down at my body to see I’m naked. Fear creeps up my spine.

“Avery?” I call out.

What happened? Where am I?

I look to my left and squint in the darkness. I try to even out my breathing, but it grows frantic when my vision adjusts to the lack of light, and I see a concrete wall. Then to my right. Another concrete wall. That fear intensifies, taking my breath away.

Did I do something for him to have to punish me? Is he still mad at me for the way I spoke at that party he took me to? Or what I said at his house? When I didn't want to leave him?

"Avery?" I shout, standing on shaky legs. I start to walk over to the only door I see when I'm yanked back by my neck.

My hands fly to it, and I feel a thick steel shackle wrapped around it.

My breath hitches as I feel around, and my worst fear is true when I find a padlock on the back of it. Then a thick chain. I turn around to see the chain connected to a hook bolted to the wall.

"AVERY!" I shout frantically, wrapping my hands around the cold metal chain and start to yank it. Trying to free it from the wall. It doesn't budge.

Then I remember his words from the night before about my collar. "You are to never take this off. I'm gonna put a lock on the back and throw away the key. And hook a leash to it. You will go everywhere I go. And everyone will know that you belong to me."

"AVERY!" I shout out again. "No, no, no, no, no."

What the fuck? Tears burn my eyes as my heart pounds in my chest so hard, I can barely breathe. What is he doing? Why can't I remember anything? My eyes catch sight of a red blinking light up in the right-hand corner. "Avery, this isn't funny!" I scream. "Let me go!"

I reach up and touch the sensitive skin again, thankful it is gone. It was heavy and thick. Suffocating.

I rip off Avery's shirt. I have bruises on my hips and ribs. Then my eyes land on the two letters that they branded on me.

The door opens with a loud creak, and I spin around to face it, fully prepared to give Avery a piece of my mind. But my breath gets caught in my lungs when I see the two men walk in. Neither one of them Avery.

"Hello again, Presleigh." The man who ruined my life. The man who took everything from me says with a fucking smile on his face.

I cover myself, remembering that I'm naked, and he laughs. "It's nothing I

haven't seen before, Presleigh," he says, and my body begins to shake.

I look at the other man and pull my lips back in disgust. "Vaughn. How could you ...?"

"Enough chitchat," Victor interrupts me.

Vaughn drops a bag at his feet that I now realize he is holding, and I take a step back.

Bending down, he grabs a blowtorch out of the bag along with a long piece of metal that is twisted into some kind of design at the end. "Stay away from me," I whisper as horror takes over.

He hands it to Victor, then steps toward me.

"Stay the fuck back!" I shout.

"It's gonna happen with or without your cooperation, Pres."

I place my hands out in front of me. The thought of me being naked no longer matters.

He reaches me, then yanks me to the ground by the steel collar around my neck. It temporarily takes away my breath and digs into my skin.

He shoves me onto my back and straddles my hips. "Get off me, you piece of shit!" I shout, punching his chest.

He fights me effortlessly and pins my wrists down by my head.

I hear the blowtorch come on, and I fight harder. The tears build in my eyes. "Fuck you! You sick fuck!" I scream, bucking my hips. The tears start to slide down the side of my face.

Then I feel weight on my legs as well, pinning them down. I lift my head, trying to see over Vaughn, who straddles me, but I can't. He's too tall. Too wide.

"This is gonna hurt, Pres," he says with an evil grin on his face.

I tighten my hands and buck my hips again. He sits up and then slams back down onto me. The cold concrete digs into my sensitive backside from where Avery whipped me. I cry out.

"Keep her still," Victor demands.

"I am," he growls, sliding both of my hands above my head effortlessly. They've drugged me. They've had to. That's why I can't remember anything. And why I'm weaker than usual. He crosses them at the wrist and then takes his free hand and grips my hair, pulling my neck back at an odd angle. The shackle around my neck pinches my skin, and I feel it tear.

"I can't wait to hear you scream," he whispers, leaning down and running his nose along my jawline.

“Please don’t ...” I sob, not knowing what they are about to do to me.

“You never belonged to Avery,” Victor tells me. “You were always meant to be mine.”

The blowtorch cuts off, and I swallow roughly. I suck in a ragged breath when I hear skin sizzling before I feel the pain. I scream out as the smell of my burning flesh fills the air, then it all goes black.

I taste bile in my throat at that memory and run on shaky legs to the toilet as I fall and puke up what little water Avery made me drink. Until I’m dry heaving and tears roll down my face. It has to come off. The slave mark has to be removed. If Avery won’t do it, I’ll do it myself.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

AVERY

“YOU NEED TO GO FIND HIM,” I tell Kayn while he and my brother stand in my study. “I don’t care how long it takes. Find Vaughn. And bring him back to the warehouse.” I have no clue why my older brother would have taken Bunny, but I will find out!

“I’ve always followed your orders, sir, but I’m not going to leave you here unarmed.” His loyalty is unwavering. Even to a fault.

“He’s not unarmed,” Tristan says, squaring his shoulders. “I won’t leave until you’ve found him. My men will stay as well.”

I leave them and head up to check on her. I walk into her room and see the bathroom door is shut. I open it with a soft knock.

She sits in the bathtub, her back to me just like she was when I found her almost dead. It’s like history is playing some sick joke on both of us.

She sits there looking straight ahead at nothing. She has turned on the water but hasn’t given herself much.

I kneel beside her, pushing ratted brown hair covered in blood behind her ear. Her color looks awful. It’s no longer that sun-kissed olive. Now it’s ashen and dry. I look at her ribs and hollow cheeks, showing her bones. She’s lost weight. He probably starved her.

I take the washcloth from the side of the tub and dip it in the water and begin to wash her. I do her face first, then move to her chest, careful not to touch her neck where she has clawed it. I go to her stomach, making sure to be gentle on the bruises. I move to her legs but pause when I see her left thigh.

“What the hell?” I whisper, feeling my throat tighten.

He branded her?

Just like my father used to do to his fucking slaves.

VD is on her left upper thigh.

My teeth clench, and I fist my hand, the water running out of the washcloth from my tight grip.

I don't want to run the water over it, but it needs to be cleaned. It looks infected. I should tell her I'm sorry. That I blame myself for what she went through, and I swear I'll protect her the rest of my life, but nothing comes out. I can't speak. So much rage inside me. I will make my brother suffer just like I will Lance.

"Take it off," she says.

I look up at her face. She looks straight ahead still at nothing. "What?"

"Take it off," she repeats.

I look down at it, and it's raised off the skin. It's red and caked with blood. There are claw marks through it where she tried to remove it herself. The reminder of being a slave on her body just too much. "I can call someone," I offer, my voice thick. "A tattoo artist. They can cover it up, but it needs to heal first—"

"No," she interrupts me. "Cut it off."

My eyes go back up to hers again, and her head turns slowly and then her eyes follow before they meet mine. They look so cold. Void of any emotion and my chest tightens. "What do you mean ...?"

"I said. Cut. It off."

I run my free hand through my hair. "I heard you, but that isn't an option. I can have it covered up. That's all we can do with it." I growl, not even able to comprehend what kind of pain she must have went through. I remember my father once showed me what he did to brand his slaves.

"Son." He slaps me on the shoulder. "I want to show you just what it's like to have a slave."

"I don't want one," I say, pulling away from him.

He looks at me; we're the same height. I may only be seventeen, but I'm tall for my age. A muscle clenches in his square jaw, and his lips thin for a brief second before he gives me an evil smile. To anyone on the street, he looks like a million dollars in his expensive tailored suit. He's worth that much, but it's blood money. It all spends the same, he once told me. "You will change your mind."

I go to argue, but he unlocks the white door and then opens it up. He shoves me down the stairs and through the tunnel of hell, and I look around at all the torture devices. Chains hang from the walls and ceiling. There's a black wire cage over in the right corner that too has chains in it.

"Sir. Just in time."

I turn to see Lance standing over by a black table. A blowtorch in one hand and an iron rod in the other. “Would you like to do the honors?” he asks my father.

My father walks over to him and takes the iron rod from him and then walks over to the far wall. My chest aches at what I see. A woman. No, a girl. She looks young. Maybe Bunny’s age—fifteen. She stands spread-eagle, her legs out wide and strapped to the padded wall. Her arms raised above her head, making a V. There is a strap around her neck so she can’t move her head either. I can’t see her eyes because she has a black blindfold over them, but I can still see the tears that run down her face. A big red ball gag is in her mouth, and she weeps behind it. Sobs wracking her naked body while drool runs down her chin to coat her chest.

My father walks over to her and grabs her chin roughly. “You belong to me now, slave. And in case you ever forget that, here is your reminder.”

He places the iron rod over her ribcage, right below her left breast, and she screams out in agony. Her body thrashes harder against her restraints as he holds it there longer than needed.

I feel bile rise in my throat, and my knees go weak watching him treat her like she is cattle. Right now, she wishes she was dead. And that’s exactly what will happen. The smell of her burning flesh is too much. I turn, and all but run out of his cellar and down the tunnel with one thought on my mind—I’ve got to get Bunny out of here.

Bunny gets my attention, looking down at the initials burned into her flesh, and tears form in her eyes. She snaps like a rubber band pulled too tight.

With a growl, she leans forward and starts clawing at it. “Cut it off. Cut it off. Cut it off. Cut it off,” she screams over and over, digging her nails into it.

I stand and grab her hands and shove them down. Holding them to her side in the water, fresh blood instantly clouding the tub from her nails breaking the skin. Water splashes both of us as she fights me.

She looks up at me as tears run down her now clean face. “Please, Avery? Please. Just cut it off. I can’t ... I can’t be his slave.” She chokes.

“This is a very bad idea.” Tristan voices his opinion while he paces in front

of the fire in my study.

I don't disagree with him, just take a drink of my scotch.

"She may say that, but she will change her mind. Even if you were insane enough to do it, she's going to fight you." He stops and turns to face me. "Human instinct is to fight. As soon as she feels that first sting of pain, her fight or flight will kick in." That just makes me take another drink, knowing how hard she had fought Vaughn from doing it. But he won. He always does. He's a monster like our father. "You'll never be able to get it done."

"I could drug her," I say, throwing back what's left in my glass. Although I don't want to do that to her. Never again. But if she leaves me no other choice ...

"That could work ..."

"No."

We both turn to see Bunny standing in the doorway, her hair now dry and blood free. All she wears is a white towel wrapped around her tucked under her arms. It's short enough to show the brand on her thigh. My brother stares at it with clouded eyes. I walk over to my couch and grab the black blanket draped over it and put it around her. "You won't even feel it ..."

"I said no."

I grind my teeth in frustration.

"Tie me down."

Tristan lets out a rough laugh as if she's lost her mind. I'm starting to agree. "I won't tie you down and cut you," I say, shaking my head.

"Why not?" she asks, taking a step in and tilting her head to the side as if her plan isn't fucked up in more ways than one. "You tied me to the bed and left me there gagged all night for your own sick pleasure. Multiple times actually," she reminds me, and my jaw tightens. "All because I broke some stupid rule you came up with in the first place."

"Bunny..."

"Then you cuffed my hands behind my back to take me to a fucking business dinner." Her voice rises. "Where you whipped me because, once again, I disobeyed some stupid fucking rule," she shouts. "Why can't you do it now?"

"This is different," my brother tells her. "He's not going to—"

"He will!" she shouts, interrupting him. Then she turns to face me. "If you don't do this Avery, I will. What's it gonna be?" she asks, arching a brow.

"Goddammit," my bother snaps, knowing she has backed me into a corner.

She'll do it.

A part of me is proud of her. To know she is this brave. The other thinks she is fucking crazy and needs psychological help. A padded room. Possible straitjacket. She just admitted she would cause bodily harm to herself. There's no telling what my brother told her. Or what he made her feel. I've seen girls not able to live in their own skin after Vaughn touched them. It was always terrible to watch.

After I witnessed my father brand that young girl, I never saw him do it again. I tried to free her two weeks later and found her dead. She had hung herself from her own chains. She would rather die than be someone's slave, and that's exactly how I see Bunny. She would destroy herself before she would let someone else do it.

And I refuse to lose her. Not again. Not this way.

"I'll do it."

"Jesus." Tristan hisses under his breath and turns to me. "You can't possibly ..."

"I'll do it, Bunny," I tell her again.

She nods once, letting out a long breath, trying to calm her anger. "I'll go get ready." Then she walks out.

"What the fuck, man?" My brother turns on me.

"Why do you fucking care?" I ask, pouring another glass. "You wanted me to kill her, remember?"

"Yes," he snaps. "I wanted you to snap her neck and throw her body into the ocean. I never wanted you to torture the poor thing."

"She's already been tortured," I shout. "By our sick brother."

I hang my head and run a hand through my hair. "You watched the tape with me when she ripped open her wrist with a letter opener to remove her tracker. But you didn't see the way she looked at the brand when she was in the bathtub a minute ago. The way she clawed at it as if it was eating her alive from the inside. There's no telling what she will do to get that off her." I can't find her bleeding to death one more time. My mind and heart won't be able to take it.

PRESLEIGH

I want to cry. I want to run away and hide, but I know that's not an option.

Victor told me. *I've been watching you all this time. And I'll continue to watch. You will never be free of me.*

There's nowhere for me to run. All I can do is hope that the fucker dies before he can get me again. I can't tell Avery. Some things a woman has to take to her grave. This is one of them.

I remember how much he took from me last time, and I refuse to give that bastard this much of my life again.

"Wake up, Pres."

I hear a male's voice, but it seems far away. Distant. "Come on, Pres." I feel a hand slap my face. Then the sting comes again.

I open my heavy eyes and moan out in pain. My thigh throbs and so does my head. But at least it's dark.

Vaughn stands there above me a smile on his face. "I hope Avery kills you," I mumble sitting up.

He frowns. "Why would he do that? You never were anything of importance to him."

"Fuck you ..." He slaps me so hard it knocks me back down face first onto the cold concrete floor. The chain connected to my collar rattles from the movement.

"If you can't be nice, then you don't get fed," he says simply and then turns to walk out of the room, closing the heavy door behind him and locking it.

I pound my fist into the cold concrete floor as tears of anger spill from my eyes. I scream out in frustration. In pain. My entire body hurts, and I'm fucking tired. So tired. It's the drugs they give me. They put something in my water. So it's either eat and drink and pass out, allowing them to do whatever they want to me. Or starve and try to fight them off while I die a slow death.

I roll on to my back, and the steel collar digs into my skin. It's rubbed me raw and pinched my skin. I dig at it, screaming out again, trying to yank it off. Thinking I can be stronger.

I sit up and pull on it, making myself bend downward, and my eyes catch sight of my brand, which just makes me madder.

Tears run down my face along with snot and slobber as I fight with the unforgiving steel. My nails dig into my skin, and I feel the sting when it slices the skin open. Then I feel blood run down my naked chest and stomach.

I let go and cover my face with my hands, sobbing. I can't die like this. I

can't.

My entire body shakes, and I slam my hand over the brand. I scream at the pain, and I scrape my nails over it. No! I will not be his slave! Either way, he will inflict pain on me. I either allow him to do it, or I do it to myself. I choose me any day.

The door opens again, and I see Vaughn's back, but this time, he doesn't have any food. Instead, a pair of handcuffs dangle from his right hand. I sit my back against the cold wall, the chain clanking from my sudden movement.

He walks in and leaves the door open behind him. If I could just get this thing from around my neck, I could run. To where? I don't know. I could be in another country, for all I know. Or back in New York.

"I've always wondered what you would look like chained to a wall," he says when his brown eyes drop to my bare breasts—my nipples hard from the coldness. "You didn't disappoint, Pres."

I sniff as fresh tears fall. "You're one sick bastard ..."

He grabs my ankle and yanks me off the wall, cutting off my words. My back and ass slide against the cold concrete floor, and I cry out when it tears my skin. But it's cut off by the collar around my neck when he pulls it to the point it chokes me, the chain now pulled tight.

I cough and try to breathe when he flips me onto my stomach. The action making it pull my skin and pinch me once again.

I kick my legs against the concrete floor while I dig my nails between the collar and my skin, trying to get enough space to breathe. But he grabs my hands, pulling them behind my back. My heart pounds in my chest and my hips buck, but he sits on them. Then I feel the unforgiving steel wrap around my wrists, and my heart breaks. I flop around like a fish out of water trying to survive.

He leans over, pinning my stomach and chest to the floor. He grips my hair tightly and rips my head back, and my skin splits from the collar as dots dance before my eyes.

Don't pass out. As long as I'm awake, I can fight him. Even if I don't have a chance. "Your father was a sick bastard," he hisses by my ear, and I dig my cuffed hands into his shirt, trying to grip his skin. "I'm a sick bastard." He chuckles "And Avery is a sick bastard."

My jaw clenches at the mention of Avery. "He's ... nothing ... like ..." Those dots get bigger. I blink. "You ..."

"He is, Pres. He kidnapped you. He fucked you. And he whipped you. Just

not enough.”

I try to shake my head, but it's impossible with the chain of the shackle pulled tight and his hand gripping my hair.

“The only difference is you liked being his slave.” He sneers. “Don't worry, you'll learn to like being mine.” He shoves my head into the concrete, and I instantly taste blood as pain explodes.

“What the fuck are you doing?”

He lets go of me, and I roll once to get closer to the wall, giving the chain some slack. I suck in a long and painful breath once I have the option.

“You said she was for me,” he tells Victor. “I did all the work for her. Now I want my payment.”

Victor slaps him across the face, and I wish I could enjoy it, but I'm too busy trying not to puke from the pain in my head. “You'll get what I give you.”

“That's not what we agreed ...”

“Leave us,” he orders, and Vaughn storms out, slamming the door shut behind him.

I cower against the wall, my hands still cuffed behind my back. I want to beg him to let me go. Beg him not to do this to me. But this man took everything I had. He would never show mercy. No matter how much you beg for it.

He crouches in front of me, and I hate that I whimper. He reaches out to cup my face, and when I flinch, he laughs. He runs his hand over my busted lip, smearing the blood. Then sucks on his finger.

Don't puke!

This time when he reaches out his hand, he places it in my hair and plays with a few strands. “Vaughn never did know how to treat a lady.”

I say nothing, still trying to catch my breath.

“Good thing you're not a lady.” And then he tightens his hand in my hair and yanks me to the ground. Before I can even cry out, he's straddling me, his hand over my mouth and nose, and I have déjà vu.

Tears roll down my cheeks as I try to fight him off, but once again, I have nothing. I'm going to die in this basement, chained to a wall with my hands cuffed behind my back.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

AVERY

WHEN MY BROTHER AND I walk into her room, she's sitting on her bed. Her back against the headboard, her knees pulled up to her chest. She looks so young. So frail. And my chest tightens at how much we've missed. If only she hadn't ruined me, things would be so much different.

"I'm not changing my mind, Tristan," she says to him, lifting her chin. I don't know if I should be proud of her or sick to my stomach. Maybe a little bit of both.

"I'm only here to help," he assures her.

She looks away from him and back at me, waiting for an order.

"Lie down, Bunny."

She unfolds her legs and scoots to where she is on her back. She lifts her arms above her and it pulls up the T-shirt of mine she has dressed in. The only other thing she wears is a black thong.

I go to the head of the bed and restrain both her wrists. Then I go to the foot of the bed and do the same with her ankles—spreading them wider than usual. She has to be pulled tight in order for this to work. I don't want her to have slack and jerk her leg, causing me to slice a major artery.

Fuck, my brother was right. This is a horrible idea.

I reach out my right hand, and my brother places the filet knife in it. I sit down on the bed and look up at her. She stares up at the ceiling as if she's cool as a cucumber, but I can see her chest heaving beneath my shirt. Her breathing has picked up.

"I don't have to—"

"Do it," she says flatly, interrupting me.

I close my eyes and take a deep breath. My brother comes to stand beside me. He leans over and places his hands on her upper thigh, pushing her farther into the bed.

"Those ropes aren't gonna be enough," he says simply.

I nod and place my hand on her leg. Grabbing the skin, I can feeling her

leg already shaking. She sniffs. “Bunny—”

“Do it,” she snaps.

I look up at my brother, and he lifts a brow as if to question if I can do it. Do I have the balls to hurt the woman I once loved? And still do.

I stand and tell him, “Give us a minute.”

“Avery,” she growls when he walks out. She starts pulling on the restraints, and I go to the bed. Tears run down her face. “Please,” she begs, and I hate how my chest tightens. “I need it off,” she chokes out.

“Bunny, I can’t ...” She starts to sob. “I can’t hurt you. Not like this.”

She closes her eyes tightly. “You’ve already hurt me,” she whispers. “Why is this so different?”

“What do you mean?” I ask.

She opens her eyes and looks up at me. “I know, Avery. I know why I’m here.” I shake my head. She has no way of knowing. “I know Damon wants me.” My heart stops. “I know that a madman wanted to make me his slave. But you got jealous.” Her eyes narrow on me. “I know you didn’t want anyone else to have me, so you took me instead,” she yells, lifting her head off the bed. “You’ve been hurting me this entire time. I told you in New York I never wanted to see you again, but you didn’t fucking listen! You should have walked away, Avery. You should have never brought me here,” she yells, her face slick from tears and red from anger.

“Bunny ...”

“You’ve beat me. You’ve fucked me! All for your own sick pleasure! Now I’m asking you to do something for me, and you don’t have the fucking balls to do it!” she shouts.

My hand tightens on the knife, and my jaw clenches. How does she know all this? Darrell must have told her. He must have spoken to her before she was taken. Because I know it wasn’t afterward. We had eyes on him all the time, hoping he would take us to her. And Vaughn wouldn’t know all that.

Her head falls down onto the pillow, and she closes her eyes. “I’m tired,” she whispers. “Either cut off the mark or untie me.”

She’s right. If I was being honest with myself, I’ve been hurting her every day since the moment I took her. This will cause her a lot of pain, but in the end, it removes a piece of pain. Because it will always be a reminder. Even covered up by a tattoo. But I think she is missing the point. It will still be a reminder. Even if I cut off the skin, we will both have to look at it until we die and see that I cut her. Maybe that’s how she will see it. She will see it as a

time I was able to take away something so terrible. Maybe she'll see me as her hero and not her villain.

I walk over to the door and open it up. My brother stands there and looks at me with no emotion, but I know he heard what she said. And we both know it's all true. He walks in, shutting the door behind him and sits back down, placing his hand on her thigh.

Tightening my jaw, I take the blade and slice through her skin.

PRESLEIGH

Tears run down the sides of my face, and my body shakes uncontrollably. But I don't make a sound. I can't. It's as if my mouth is paralyzed.

My arms and legs are freed from the restraints by Avery as Tristan goes to work on my leg. He rubs something on it, and I hiss in a breath when he starts wrapping it tightly.

Avery moves onto the bed next to me and pulls me into his arms. I go willingly, burying my head against his chest. He holds me tightly, running his hand down my hair.

It hurts like fucking hell, but it hurt worse knowing it was there. As if it was alive. I needed him to kill it. To save me again. And I knew he could do it. I had to bait him, but it worked. Avery never could deny me, and I played off that.

The sick part is he could have drugged me, but I wanted to feel the pain. Knocking myself out would only let that sick bastard who hurt me win. I am stronger than Victor. I'm a motherfucking survivor. And I needed that reminder that I could still feel.

Avery did it like the man he is. One slice and it was gone.

Tristan gets up and leaves without a word, and Avery kisses my hair.

"Thank you," I whisper, and I feel him stiffen underneath me.

"Please don't thank me, Bunny," he says, and his voice is pained. "Don't thank me for hurting you."

I sniff as my bottom lip starts to tremble, and his hand stops moving in my hair. "You're safe now," he assures me, and I bury my head into his chest to muffle the sob that I can't hold back.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

AVERY

I STARE UP AT THE CEILING, not really seeing anything. Her body is soft against mine, and her breathing has evened out. She passed out in my arms. Silent sobs shook her body, but she never made a sound. She's stronger than she needs to be. I don't know if she feels she needs to be tough around me, or if she thinks showing me how she truly feels will make me think she's weak, but she's anything but.

I haven't given her a chance to speak up about anything since I brought her here. That's going to change. I want her to tell me what she is thinking. What she needs. What she wants. It's all my fault, after all.

I slide out from underneath her and then lift her in my arms and carry her out of this bedroom where I've kept her locked up. She's light. Too fragile. I carry her down the stairs and down the hallway, passing my study and take her to my room. This is where she has always belonged. I was just too stupid to see it. Once I have her under the covers, I leave her be, knowing I have to take care of something.

I pull up to the warehouse and enter. My brother and Kayn stand in the middle. They both turn to face me when I shut the door. Tristan crosses his arms over his chest, and Kayn places his hands in the front pockets of his black slacks. Both men have no clue what I plan on doing. "They're all here, boss."

I nod. "Where is ...?"

He moves to the side, and I see Darrell's dead body lying on the concrete floor. His clothes covered in blood, and the smell of rotting flesh beginning to fill the large space. I clap my hands together to get everyone's attention. "I have called you all here tonight because it seems we had a rat," I start. "And Darrell told me that the only people I could trust was myself, Kayn, and Tristan. So, which one of you knew what he had planned?"

Mason is the first to speak up. "Sir, I had no clue. I swear. I wasn't even here. You had me in New York looking for Preston ..."

I raise my hand, and he silences immediately. “You are correct, Mason.” I take a step toward him. “But that doesn’t get you off the hook.” I start to walk back and forth in front of the twenty-five men. “Kayn,” I call out, and he pulls a cell out of his front pocket. He looks over it for a few seconds, his fingers working the keys. Then his eyes meet mine, and he nods his head. I take the phone from his hands and read over the message typed out on Darrell’s phone.

“Get out of the house tonight.” Then I look up to my youngest guy, Jacob. He’s only nineteen. And I thought I would make him a man. Now I’ll make him an example.

He begins to shake his head quickly. “I didn’t know what he had planned.” Jacob swallows. “Darrell sent me that message, and when I questioned why, he said you ordered it.”

I walk over to him. Beads of sweat gather on his forehead. His brown hair hangs in his hazel eyes, and he swallows nervously, making his Adam’s apple bob up and down. “Please believe me ...”

“Turn around,” I order.

“Avery ... I didn’t know ...”

“Turn around!” I snap.

He sucks in a long breath and does as I say. His shoulders shake, and he looks at the floor. He thinks I’m gonna kill him right here and now, but he’s wrong. What I have planned will take days.

I hold out my right hand and snap my fingers. Kayn hands me a knife. The same one that I used earlier to cut off Bunny’s brand that my brother gave her.

I step up to the kid and wrap my left hand around his neck from behind, and he whimpers. “I’m sorry ...”

“You will be.” I ram the knife into the middle of his back. Right below his T6, severing the spinal cord. He lets out a cry and falls to his knees, then his face. The knife still stuck in his back. Everyone takes a step back from me except Kayn and Tristan.

“I didn’t do it!” he wails.

“If anyone thinks that they are going to double-cross me, just remember that I don’t take well to traitors.” He sobs and starts to crawl across the floor using his hands. I crouch beside him, pressing my hand to the back of his neck, holding him in place. “This isn’t gonna kill you, but it has paralyzed you from the waist down.” I stand and turn to face the men. They all stare at

me wide-eyed. “Everyone grab a shovel and go out back, where you will start digging.”

Mason pulls his brows together. “Dig what?”

“Two graves.” I turn and start to walk toward the door but stop when he speaks again.

“But Jacob isn’t dead.”

I turn back around to face him. Reaching into the back of my slacks, I pull out my gun and shoot him in the head. The loud bang makes some of my guys flinch, and our ears ring. Mason stands upright, staring at me for a few seconds before his eyes cloud over, blood runs out from between his lips, and then he too, falls to the floor.

“Three graves,” I call out. Then I turn to face all the men. “Anyone wanna make it four?” Silence follows my question. I take that they understand me. “Bury Jacob face down. The knife is not to be removed.” Then I look at Kayn. “Watch them. Make sure they do as they’re told. If not, take care of it.” Then I turn and walk out of the warehouse, heading back to my house.

PRESLEIGH

I lie on the concrete floor. My hands still cuffed behind my back. And I hate it the most. How it takes any chance I have to fight away from me. I hear the door creak open, and I keep my eyes shut.

“I know you’re awake.” I hear his voice and whimper. It’s Victor.

He grabs me and pushes me onto my back. My eyes spring open, and I try to fight him. I lose.

He straddles my hips and places his hands on my face, holding it in place. Then he slaps me. I bite my inner cheek to keep from making any kind of noise. He likes it when I scream.

“I must say, Presleigh, I like you much better this way. Even though you have no chance, you try to be strong.”

“He’ll find me,” I say through gritted teeth. I have to keep hope. If not, I’ll be a crying fucking mess. Just like he wants. Any fate I have with Avery is better than in Victor’s hands.

He laughs. “So naïve. I thought you grew out of that. The only reason Avery took you is because someone else wants you.”

I shake my head. He said it was because of Preston. “You don’t know

anything,” I snap. Keep him talking. He can’t rape me if he’s too busy running his mouth.

“I know everything,” he says, lifting his hand. I flinch, thinking he is about to slap me, but he just laughs and places it on my cheek. I pull away, trying not to puke at the thought of him touching me. “A man by the name of Damon wants you.” I start shaking my head. “Oh, he does. Your brother fucked him over, and he wants you for payment.”

“Preston?” I ask, and my chest tightens. Avery told me it involved my brother.

He nods once. “But Avery wouldn’t have that. He couldn’t imagine another man having you as their slave, so he decided to take you instead.” He places his hands on my ribs, and I thrash underneath him when they begin to run up my sides. He cups my breasts, and I cry out as if he hit me. “Then he took you to that party and strutted you around like a fucking trophy.” Tears burn my eyes. “He set you up, you know. Him and Tristan. They knew you would act out, and he would have to punish you.” He chuckles. “I watched the tape of him whipping you. I must say I didn’t think Avery had it in him to touch you like that.”

“Stop.” I choke while his hands massage my breasts.

“I watched the way you got off on it, Presleigh. And I like to think I had something to do with that. My intentions were to ruin you for anyone else, but I guess it did the opposite. Considering you’ve fucked your way through New York.” His hand lets go of my right breast, and he reaches up, grabbing a fist full of hair, and yanks my head back. It causes the shackle around my neck to pinch my skin. He lowers his mouth to my cheek, and whispers, “Did you like the way I beat you before, Presleigh?” I whimper, trying to struggle with my cuffed hands underneath me. They’re numb. “The way I fucked you?” His other hand slides between our bodies, and I struggle harder when he cups me between my legs.

He doesn’t move any further. He’s toying with me. Last time, he raped me hard and fast. Now he knows there’s no one here to interrupt us, so he’s gonna fuck my mind too.

“But I do believe he will come for you. Because, as I said, he wants you to be his slave. No one else’s. Avery is no different than anyone else in this world you were born into. He’s gonna come for you guns raised and with an army. And you’ll be here, chained and bloodied waiting for him to take you home and nurse you back to health.”

“What do you want from me?” I scream; he’s playing some sick game.

He pulls back and looks down at me with a smirk on his face. “I’m gonna let you go back to send a message.”

“Message?”

His sits up and removes himself from straddling my hips. I almost cry in relief. Then he spreads my legs apart. “Nooo.”

He places himself between them and spreads them further with his knees. Then his hand runs over the brand on my thigh and I bite my lip to keep from crying out as the tears run down my face. “A message that he may have you, but he’ll never own you.” He slaps me, and my head whips to the side. “You were always meant to be mine, and that will never change.” He grips my chin and leans his face down to mine. “He’ll never fucking own you.”

Gasping for air, I sit up and blink but see nothing but darkness. My body starts to shake, and my hands go to my neck. I cry out when my fingers feel the sensitive skin.

“Bunny?” A light comes on. “You’re okay.”

I look over to see Avery sitting up. He wraps his arms around me and pulls me to him. I push him away, and he allows it.

“Where am I?” I ask with a shaky breath.

“You fell asleep in my arms, so I brought you to my bedroom.” He lowers his voice. “I didn’t wanna leave you alone ...”

His words trail off, and I understand them perfectly. In case I have nightmares.

He stays silent beside me while I try to take a few calming breaths. After a while, he breaks the silence. “Do you wanna talk about it?”

“No,” I say, shaking my head. I can’t. I didn’t tell him what happened eleven years ago, and I won’t tell him what happened now. “I just ... need a shower,” I say, getting out of his bed and making my way to his bathroom on shaky legs.

“Do you need some help?” he asks, getting out of bed.

“No,” I answer, not looking back at him.

“I’m sorry, Bunny.”

His words make me stop, and I turn back to face him. He now stands beside the bed, his hands in the pocket of his dark jeans, and his dark blue eyes travel up and down my body. He flinches as if he fucking cares what happens to me when he gets to the bandage on my leg. “For what?” I ask,

fisting my hands down by my side.

His eyes meet mine. “For what Vaughn did to you.”

Vaughn? I throw my head back, laughing as though I’m losing my mind at the mention of his brother. When my eyes meet his again, they show their concern for me. “Why am I here, Avery?” I ask. I’ll give him one more chance to tell me the truth. If he does, I’ll tell him everything. He already knows that I know. I yelled it earlier before he cut off the brand. But he didn’t say anything about it. Confirm or deny it. Now it’s time for shit to come out. And after that, he has to let me go. There’s no way around it now. I’m not afraid of this Damon guy because I know no matter who is after me, Victor won’t let them come near me. But as long as I’m here with Avery, I’m dead. And after being around Victor again, I’ve decided I want to live.

“I told you. Preston ...”

“Stop lying!” I shout. His eyes narrow on me. “I know, Avery! I know that you took me as your fucking slave because Damon wants me. Or did you forget that already?” His lips part, but I don’t let him answer. “I also know that you set me up at that house in Rio.”

“Did Darrell tell you that?” he snaps.

“Is it true?” I ask, feeling my anger fade. A part of me wants to believe that Victor was lying. That a part of him was just fucking with me. Trying to get me to hate Avery because he seems to be the only one who cares for me at all. Even if it is out of jealousy.

His eyes drill into mine, and his jaw twitches. My stomach drops like a boulder off a cliff. Tears instantly sting my eyes. “You’ve been lying to me?” I choke out. For some reason, knowing that hurts worse than anything Avery could possibly do to me.

“Bunny.” He takes a step toward me.

“No!” I say, and my voice cracks on the single word. “Don’t, Avery. Just ... don’t.” Then I turn around and run to his bathroom. Shutting the door behind me, I allow myself to cry.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

AVERY

“WHAT ARE YOU DOING UP?” my brother asks when I enter my study.

“I could ask you the same?” I say, running a hand down my unshaven face. “Did the guys get it done?”

He nods and changes the subject. “Is she okay?” he asks, dropping his eyes to the drink in his hand.

“No.” Then I grab a drink. “She knows about us setting her up at Conway’s.”

His eyes widen. “She what? How?”

I shrug. “He showed you the video. He showed Damon. Who knows who else he showed. Or maybe Darrell told Vaughn. Who the fuck knows.”

He bows his head and lets out a long sigh. I take another drink. She went into my bathroom and started to cry. I wanted to take her into my arms, but I couldn’t. She hates me. And she has every right to. I betrayed her. But I didn’t owe her shit! She should be thanking me. I saved her twice. Once from Damon and then from my psychotic brother.

I take another drink and look at Tristan.

He leans forward and places his elbows on his knees, swallowing nervously. “What is it?” I ask him, knowing something is up. Maybe he’s been down to see Lance, and he gave him some information. I haven’t gone to see him yet.

“I need you to see something.”

“Okay,” I say slowly.

His eyes meet mine. “And I need you to promise me something.”

“You know I don’t make promises.” I sigh, tired. I just wanna crawl back into bed with Bunny, but she pushed me away. *She’ll never let you touch her again.*

“I won’t show you until you promise me you won’t get mad.”

“Who will I get mad at?” I ask.

“Yourself.”

“Just fucking show me!”

He stands, downing what is left of his drink. Then he turns on my flat screen that hangs on the wall above the fireplace.

A video starts to play. It looks like a home video camera, and it’s shooting in the house we grew up in. It comes to a stop outside my dad’s study. “I need you to take care of it.”

We hear his voice as the door opens slightly, and the camera looks inside. I see my father’s friend and personal doctor, Lance, standing there before my father.

It’s older. I can tell by the way my father has his study painted. And he hasn’t lived in that house in over eight years.

“I’m not sure what you expect me to do,” Lance says.

My father huffs. “Take care of it. What is so hard for you to understand about that?”

“You’ve knocked her up?” Lance asks.

My father shakes his head. “Not me.”

“I can’t terminate a pregnancy unless you are the father.”

“You’ve terminated them for me in the past.”

“Yes, that was because they were your slaves. She is not your slave.” My father sighs frustrated. “The difference is that your slaves have no way of escape. No way to tell the outside world what you did. Or what I did.”

“Trust me, she won’t speak,” he assures him.

He shakes his head. “I said no. And I’m not gonna change my mind.”

“I don’t understand ...” My voice trails off when the screen goes black, and after a second, another pops up. “What is this ...?” It’s my old bedroom. My bed sits in the middle of the large room. My dark blue comforter on the floor. The matching sheets are tangled. There’s blood on the fitted sheet.

My father stands on the opposite side of my bed. Lance stands in front of him once again. The bed obscuring the view from their knees down.

“What the fuck did you do?” Lance demands.

“I did what needed to be done. Now you do your part,” he snaps.

Lance looks over at my bathroom door that is open, but you can’t see the floor because my bed is in the way due to the position of the camera. “I want no part of this,” Lance says, throwing his hands up and taking a step back.

“You will fucking do this!” my father demands. “If you don’t, I will make sure this town knows just how fucked you are.”

Lance hangs his head. His eyes focus on something on the floor. “The

hospital will have questions. Even if I bring her in.”

My father shrugs. “Tell them you found her in a ditch somewhere.”

“They’ll do a sexual assault exam ...”

“I raped her,” my father admits with no shame.

“Did you use a condom?” Lance snaps.

“Of course not.” My father scoffs.

“Fuck ...”

“I made her bathe,” he says, and Lance runs a hand through his hair. “I need you to make sure the baby is dead,” my father presses. “Then once that is confirmed, I’ll have my men pick her up and take her away. She needs to disappear.”

“Why not just kill her?” Lance asks, shaking his head as if he would rather dispose of a dead girl than a damaged one.

He rolls his eyes. “Because that’s too easy. I have a plan, and you’re fucking it up. So do your part!” he snaps. “If *he* thinks she just left him, he’ll be angry. And anger is a great motivator.”

Lance runs a hand down his face and lets out a sigh. “You killed your grandchild.”

My heart stops at those words. Up until this moment, I was a little confused. Now it’s clear what I am watching. I take a step toward the TV.

“No, she fucking killed it the moment she got knocked up!” my father snaps. “Now make sure it is done,” he demands.

Lance looks over at my adjoining bathroom again. He walks into it and then bends at the knees, my bed cutting everything from his neck down. After a few seconds, he stands, and my chest tightens when I see an unconscious Bunny in his arms. She’s naked. Blood covers her beautiful face and neck. Bruises dot her body and between her legs.

My father steps toward them and brushes short blond hair from her busted face. “I can see why my son was obsessed. But she was never his to take.”

Then the camera shuts off.

I watch the black screen waiting for more. Waiting for anything but nothing comes.

All this time. For eleven years, I thought she left me and had an abortion. But the truth was my father raped her and then beat her to the point he killed our child.

I fist my hands down by my side. *Why didn’t she tell me? How could she*
...

“Avery?” Tristan calls my name softly.

I look over at him as my heart pounds in my chest. “Where did you get this?” My voice shakes.

“I found these when we rescued Presleigh. When you sent me to ask Lance about the keys. He told me where they were, and these were next to them. They had her name on them.” He looks away in disgust. “I watched them when we got back here. I wanted to tell you but didn’t want to bother you at the time.”

“Did you fucking know about this?” I shout.

He takes a step toward me and growls. “No.”

I run a hand through my hair and take a step back. I feel sick. And pissed. I spin around and yank the door open.

“Avery, don’t,” he calls out, but I ignore him.

I make my way to my bedroom and see she isn’t in bed. I open the bathroom door and find her in my shower, sitting on the shower floor, her leg propped up so the bandage won’t get wet.

“Who was all there at the house with you?” I demand.

She looks up at me with her bloodshot eyes and it fucking breaks my heart. “Vaughn was there.”

“Who else?”

“*No one.*”

“Bullshit!” I snap, and she flinches. “Who else was fucking there?” If Vaughn was there, then so was my father. They’re thick as thieves. Always have been. I didn’t think of it until now. Now that I know what he did to her years ago. “Bunny.” I growl.

She pulls both of her knees up and wraps her arms around them. Then starts rocking back and forth.

I step into the shower, and she cowers back into the wall, a soft sob coming from her lips. “Why didn’t you tell me?” I demand, and she flinches. “Bunny ...”

“Avery?”

I turn around to see Tristan standing in the bathroom away from the door looking right at me. His eyes quickly look down at her before meeting mine once again. “There are other ways for you to find out what you need to know,” he says softly.

I nod. “Give me a second.”

He walks out, and I take a deep breath before crouching outside the

shower. She looks straight ahead. All this fucking time! All the fucking lies! I believed them. How stupid of me. I watch the way she sits, huddled by the wall, rocking. She looks terrified. Of me. I did this to her. I swallow the knot that forms in my throat. Now is not the time for me to become a little bitch. So I ask. "Are you hungry?" She doesn't answer me. "I'll have Marvin make something for you." Then I stand and walk out of my bathroom, not giving her a chance to argue.

I stand down in the cellar, my brother standing beside me. Lance kneels on the floor in front of me with his arms tied behind his back thanks to Kayn. We both look down at him. His chest rises and falls fast as he breathes heavily. He bares his teeth. "Just fucking kill me and get it over with."

Tristan laughs, and I just smile at him, knowing I'm getting ready to play. "Now why would I show you that kind of mercy?"

He growls. "Because I didn't fuck her. I didn't beat her."

"You didn't stop them," my brother snaps, getting irritated.

I rub my chin with my hand, allowing myself to drown in the anger. "And you didn't tell me eleven years ago that my father killed my child while he raped and beat the love of my life."

His eyes widen, and I bend down in front of him. "You lied to me all those years ago. Oh, yeah, I found that out too."

"He wanted me to abort the baby," he says quickly, "and I wouldn't do it."

"That won't get you any brownie points," I say.

His head sags. "Your father is a very sadistic man. If I wouldn't have done what he wanted, he would have made me pay."

"Now I'm going to make you pay," I inform him.

I stand to my full height, and my brother turns to face me. "I think he was the one to tell him she was here," he muses. "I keep racking my brain trying to figure out how Victor knew she was with you. Darrell could have told him or Vaughn, but how would he have known what Victor did to her all those years ago? And Lance is the only one who has seen her who knows."

My brows pull together, and my brother rolls his eyes. "He came when you found her in the bathtub almost dead. He acted strangely about it too." He looks back down at him. "Seeing her here. With you."

I haven't really thought about it. All that mattered was that she was gone, and I needed to find her. How they knew she was here didn't matter until now.

"Is that true?"

"Your father has kept an eye on her, making sure she stayed far away from you, but then he found out she was on Damon's radar. But I didn't tell him. I saw her here with you, and I panicked. When he called me, he already knew you had her and just needed the right opportunity." He squeals like a fucking pig. Much easier than Darrell.

"Was he at the house with you and my brother?" He bows his head. "Was he?" I shout.

"Yes," he says softly.

I grind my teeth and fist my hands. Why isn't she telling me this? This changes things. Vaughn is a sadistic man, but my father was the one who taught him. He plays games better than anyone I know. "What were his plans for her?"

He shakes his head as if he can't believe he has ended up in this situation. "She was to be his slave."

"Until ...?"

"Until he broke her."

I grind my teeth. "Broke her how?" Our father has many different definitions for the word broken.

"Physically. Mentally. He wanted to watch you suffer, not knowing who had her. Or what was happening to her. And then eventually he'd killed her and drop her body off at your front door."

"And what part were you supposed to play?" I vibrate with anger.

"I was to be her personal doctor. Sew her up when needed. Relocate broken bones. Make sure ..."

"Make sure what?" I snap when he stops.

"Make sure she was kept alive."

Keep her alive? What was he gonna do to her? My imagination runs wild with thoughts of him cutting her over and over only to have Lance stitch her up. Then starting the process over again. "Hold him down," I order Tristan.

Lance jumps up to his feet and tries to run toward the door, but my brother grabs him by the collar of his shirt and throws him onto the only table in the room. My brother jumps up onto it as well and straddles his chest, holding him down. Now my brother isn't big, by any means, but he's strong. That

was one thing my father instilled in us. You want to win? Then you know how to take out your opponent. Doesn't matter that they are bigger. That makes them slower. You always be faster, quicker, and smarter.

I walk over to the end of the table where Lance's head is. He struggles to free himself, but his hands are tied behind his back, so he has no leverage.

I pull out the Ziploc baggie in my back pocket and open it up. His eyes widen when he sees what's in it.

"What are you going to do with that?" he asks, his voice laced with fear.

"You're gonna eat it," I tell him.

"FUCK YOU!" he roars.

"Open your mouth," I order, and he clamps it shut just as we knew he would. "Tristan."

Tristan places his hands around Lance's throat and tightens them to the point of asphyxiation. His face turns red, and he tries to shake it.

I stand, looking down at the man I once called a friend who has become one of my biggest enemies. He's gonna pay for not telling me what happened years ago. And for helping my father. In the most horrific and depraved ways. He forgot who taught me how to slaughter those who deserve it. My father. At least he was useful for one thing.

Finally, my brother lets go of his neck, and Lance opens his mouth to take a deep breath, needing air, and I shove the piece of skin that I cut off Bunny's leg into his mouth. Then slap my hand over his mouth. "Swallow," I order.

He shakes his head viciously as his chest starts to heave. Right now, his mouth is filling with extra saliva, and his mind is telling him to spit it out. I don't remove my hand. I hold it over his mouth, pressing down while my brother continues to straddle him. Tears form in his eyes, and his face turns red.

His chest convulses, and he closes his eyes. Then we see his neck work as he swallows it.

My brother climbs off him, and I remove my hand from his mouth and tap him on the face. "Good boy."

"You're fucking sick!" he shouts while his body shakes.

"Tristan," I say, holding out my hand. He places the black ball gag in it. The same one I used on Bunny the night I tied her to her bed and gagged her.

Lance goes to cuss me out once again, and I shove the black ball gag in his mouth and quickly fasten it behind his head. "Now, don't go and puke. You'll drown yourself in your own vomit. And I'm not done with you yet," I

say, rolling up the sleeves to my shirt.

PRESLEIGH

I sit up against the wall, my hands still cuffed behind my back. My knees are pulled to my chest, and my forehead rests on them. My eyes are closed, but I'm not sleeping. Instead, I'm wishing I would die.

I don't know how long I've been here, but I know they visit me often. Well, Victor does anyway. Vaughn hasn't returned since he got kicked out earlier. And I'm thankful. I can't even fight off one, let alone two.

The smell of sweat and blood makes me want to barf. But I've swallowed the bile more times than I can count now. Afraid they may make me lick it up.

My leg still throbs where he branded me with two letters, and every time I look at it, I wish my hands were free so I could claw it off.

It stands for everything I said I'm not—slave.

I don't know why I never just told Avery I was his slave. Because being his toy was nothing compared to belonging to his father.

The door opens, and I whimper, unable to take anymore. "St ... op." I don't even recognize my own voice. It's scratchy, and my throat's raw. So many tears and so many screams. I've lost it.

He crouches before me and grabs my hair. He yanks my head back, and I look at him through watery eyes. No matter how bound I am, he still likes to hit me.

"I want you to know that it was never personal. It would have been any daughter your father had."

"What?" I ask closing my heavy eyes.

"I won you in a poker game. When you were ten. But by the time you were old enough to be my slave, my son had fallen in love with you. And then you got pregnant with his child." He sighs as if disappointed. "If I would have taken you to be my slave, he would have fought me for you, and although he would have never won, it was just easier to let you go. Until I found out that he had you. And that you were his slave."

I grind my teeth. "I'm not ..." I cough. "A sla ... ve."

"You're definitely not free, Presleigh."

"Fuck you!"

He shoves my head into the wall so hard that my vision blurs. Then he

pulls me down to my back by my hair, and I no longer cry out. My throat too raw, my body too numb. There's no reason to fight. Maybe if I give up, he'll kill me sooner rather than later.

“Bunny?”

I blink, pulling myself out of that memory and look up to see Avery enter the shower. His clothes are gone, but his hands and arms are covered in blood. He places them under the shower, and the water washes them away, letting me know that it wasn't his.

I look down at my hands, and my throat tightens. I know he got the answers he wanted. Lance is fucking weak. He always was. “I'm sorry.”

He kneels in front of me and places his hand under my chin, forcing me to look up at him. “Never apologize.” He growls. “You did nothing wrong, you hear me?”

I say nothing.

“Answer me, Bunny.”

“Yes,” I whisper.

He places his forehead on mine and sighs heavily. “I should have been there ... I should have tried ...”

“Stop,” I say, wrapping my arms around his shoulders. “You were here this time.”

He sighs. “Because I put you there. I'm sorry, Bunny.” He falls to the shower floor and pulls me into his chest. “I'm so sorry for what I've done to you. The lies.” I sob. “Never again,” he whispers, holding me tightly.

It's been four days since Avery and the guys found me. I look better, and I feel better, but Avery doesn't see me as such. He still makes me take my pain pills and says that if I stop, it'll be too late to catch up on them. I don't argue.

I lie in his big king-size bed. Dark sheets and a dark comforter envelop me, keeping me warm. My body finally feels normal. Almost my own.

I stay silent and lying down when I hear the door to his bedroom open and watch him enter his room. He closes the door behind him and heads straight to the bathroom. There's no light on, and the sun set hours ago.

I sit up and push the covers off me and open the bathroom door without

knocking.

He stands in front of the shower. The door is open, and he's already turned it on, but he's still getting undressed. He stops unbuttoning his shirt and looks up at me.

"Bunny. What are you doing awake?" he asks surprised.

I ignore his question and look over his white button-down. It's covered in blood. And so are his pants and shoes. I know he's been somewhere in this house with Lance. He's gone all day and then returns late at night. Just like this. He takes a shower and then crawls in bed next to me. Usually, I pretend to be asleep but not tonight. He doesn't say much to me since he found out that his father is involved.

"Did you kill him?" I ask, referring to Lance.

"No."

"Are you going to?" I need to know he won't come back to hurt me anymore. It's been four days, and I still feel the threat, especially since he is in the house.

"When I'm done with him," comes his answer.

I sigh and run a hand through my hair. We haven't talked about what happened while I was gone. And since I never went to a hospital, I never had to tell the police or anyone. What he doesn't understand is that it's not hard for me to discuss it. Not with him. Not this time. I need to get it out. I need to talk to someone about it. I've allowed what happened to me eleven years ago to eat me alive. Slowly. I won't allow Victor to do that to me again. "I don't remember much when I first arrived," I say, and he tenses. "I was out of it." His eyes meet mine, and they are void of any emotion. I know it's taking all his power to mask it for me. "I was placed on a table. My arms and legs tied down with leather straps of some sort." I swallow, trying to remember. "They injected my arm with something. I was too weak to fight them. I know they sewed up my neck, but I didn't feel it. I did, however, feel my shorts being pulled down. And then my underwear was cut away." The anger he tries to hold back seeps out through his burning eyes. "I felt fingers." My brows pull together. "They were wearing gloves. He said he needed to check me ..."

"Enough!" he snaps and starts to button his shirt back.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm going back down there," he growls.

I'm guessing he is referring to the cellar, but I don't want him to leave me. He's been so distant since he found out about what his father did. And we

haven't discussed anything regarding this Damon guy or my brother. He's here but not really. He stays in this angry place all the time. "Don't," I say, stepping up to him and placing my hands on his chest. The blood doesn't bother me. He's making them pay for what they did to me. To us.

But he's leaving me all alone. I need him to hold me. I need more ...

I can feel his heart racing, and his breathing ragged. "Stay with me."

"Bunny." He growls.

"I need you, Avery. Please," I beg, knowing that will get me what I want.

Being naked and chained to a wall will change you. It made me realize that I have been chained for eleven years. Ever since I was forced to leave him. Ever since I was beat enough to lose our child.

He lets out a long breath and lifts his hand to cup my face. "I'll make them pay."

"I believe you. But can you do it later?"

He sighs heavily, lowering his forehead to mine. "What do you want, Bunny? Tell me what I can do to make it better." His voice is full of pain.

I hide my smile by biting my lip, knowing I can get what I want. "I want you to fuck me."

He pulls back as though I slapped him. He stares down at me with a mixture of concern and total shock. "What?" he asks as if he didn't hear me right.

"I want you to fuck me," I repeat, but my voice lacks the confidence I had the first time I said it.

He takes a step back from me, raising his hands as if to keep me away. "No," he says.

My chest tightens, and I take a step toward him. "Avery ..."

"I said no, Bunny," he snaps. "Jesus, what is wrong with you?"

"Nothing." *Everything.*

He snorts, not believing me, and I wrap my arms around my chest. "Get out," he demands, pointing at the door. I just stand there, staring at the floor. I'm exactly what I didn't want to be. Damaged. He sees me as a victim rather than a survivor. "I said get the fuck out!" he roars.

I drop my head to my chest as my eyes fill with tears, then turn around and walk out of his bathroom and bedroom, heading upstairs back to my room.

CHAPTER THIRTY

AVERY

I SIT ON MY COUCH IN MY study, holding a bottle of scotch in my hand. I skipped the glass, knowing that I would need more. The fire crackles in the fireplace, and I watch the flames, thinking how I would like to see Lance's body burn. Maybe that's how I'll end his life. Set him on fire in the front yard.

"Didn't think I'd find you in here," my brother announces, entering the room.

"I needed a drink."

He sits down in the high-back chair. "How is Presleigh doing?"

I take a big gulp from the bottle at the mention of her name.

"She's just gonna need time, Avery. I know you have no patience, but ..."

"She wants me to fuck her," I state.

"What?" He gapes at me.

I take another drink. "That's what I said." I thought I had heard her wrong, but then she repeated herself. *I want you to fuck me.* My stomach twists at that thought.

He sighs heavily. "She needs to see a professional. Someone she can talk to about what happened to her. Besides you."

"Do you have one on speed dial who makes house calls? Because I don't." I take another drink.

"Yes."

I look at him, waiting for a punch line. Instead, he pulls his cell out of his pocket and dials a number. He leans back in his chair and lifts his right foot, placing his ankle on his left knee. "Hey," he says gently when the person answers. "How are you doing?" he asks in a soft voice. "Yeah, I'm still in Vancouver." He nods to himself as a soft smile spreads across his face. "I was wondering if you could make a house call?" he asks and runs his finger over his lips. "Yeah. It's ..." He looks up at me. "Complicated." Then looks away. "I need to stay here, but I can send the jet for you." His smile grows.

“Thanks. See you soon.”

He hangs up and drops the phone to his lap. His eyes meet mine, and the stupid grin on his face drops off. “What?”

“Either I’m drunk, or that was a woman who you have a thing for,” I say.

“It’s nothing.”

“Bullshit.”

He sighs. “I called her because she is the best at what she does. She deals with cases that involve women like herself and Presleigh.”

“She’s a victim?” I ask slowly.

His eyes narrow, and he throws back a drink. “Yes.”

I didn’t sleep at all that night. I actually never left my study. I sat there until the flame went out and the bottle of scotch was gone. I actually got a buzz. And that hasn’t happened in years. I started drinking when I was fourteen. My father found me and my friends sneaking his fifteen-year-old scotch and made us drink the entire bottle. We were sick for days, pretty sure we had alcohol poisoning, but it got me hooked. And the more I drank, the more my tolerance grew for it. I’ve never been one to drink to get drunk.

I sit up on the couch and rub my sleepy eyes, wondering what Bunny is doing. Did she sleep well? Did she have nightmares? Is she in pain? I don’t think she would tell me even if she was. Last night was the first night since I found her that we didn’t sleep in the same bed together. And I hate it. We haven’t spoken about what happened while she was taken. I don’t wanna hear her tell me what she went through, and I know that makes me a fucking asshole.

The door opens, and I watch Marvin walk into my study. “Good morning, sir.”

“Morning, Marvin.” There’s nothing good about it.

“I just wanted to let you know that Presleigh had a cup of coffee in her room but didn’t eat much of her breakfast. And that I fed Lance his piece of bread and water as well.”

I hate that I have to feed the fucker, but if I want him to survive longer so I can continue my torture, I gotta give him something.

I nod. “Thank you.”

“Would you like your breakfast now, sir?”

“No. I’m not hungry,” I tell him, and he nods before walking out and closing the door behind him.

“Knock, knock.” I hear my brother’s voice on the other side of the closed door.

“Come in,” I mumble, placing my elbows on my knees, and take a deep breath, letting my head fall to my hands. I hear the door open, and I dig my palms into my eyes. “I need to call Kayn. See if he has made any progress,” I say more to myself than Tristan. “That fucker needs to die ...” I look up and stop talking when I see he is standing in my study with a beautiful blonde next to him. He has her tucked into his side with his hand on the small of her back.

“Avery. This is Chloe. Chloe, this is my brother, Avery.” He introduces us.

I stand from the couch. “My apologies. Nice to meet you.”

She nods as she places her small hand in mine to shake. Her dark green eyes widen when she looks at my shirt. The same shirt that I wore last night when I tortured Lance. I hope that fucker hasn’t bled to death yet.

She removes her hand from mine and swallows nervously. “Is he the one I’m here to see?” she whispers to my brother.

“No. Although he needs help, but that will have to wait until another day,” he says, making her give a nervous laugh.

“Bunny is up in her room.”

“Bunny?” she asks.

I open my mouth, but my brother speaks. “That’s a little nickname he calls Presleigh.”

She nods once.

“I’ll show you to her room,” I say, walking around them and out the open door.

They follow me up the winding staircase and down the hallway. I come to her door and go to barge in like I always have but then decide to knock first this time. She doesn’t tell me to enter, but I open it anyway. I find her sitting up on the bed, the covers pulled up to her neck, just staring down at her nails.

“Bunny.”

“What, Avery?” she asks flatly, not even bothering to look up at me.

“I have a visitor for you,” I say.

“Tell them to go away.”

“Excuse me,” Chloe says to me and shoves me out of the way as she enters

the room. "Hello, Presleigh," she says softly.

Bunny's head snaps up, and she looks at Chloe. Her eyes run over her black skinny jeans and pink blouse. Then they drop to her black heels, and she looks longingly at them as if she wishes she could dress up and go somewhere. She used to go out and party every fucking night. I'm sure she misses that kind of freedom. Even if I wanted to give it to her now, I can't. Not while my father is out looking for her on top of Damon.

Chloe turns to face me and Tristan. "Give us some time."

I nod and then shut the door. When I turn to walk away, I find my brother still standing, watching the door.

"You sleep with her?" I ask. It's obvious.

"No." He turns and faces me. "I fuck her."

"She looks familiar. Have I met her before?" He shakes his head. Then I realize where I recognize her from. "She's the blonde you brought to Conway's party."

Instead of confirming it, he turns around and walks off.

PRESLEIGH

"May I?" the gorgeous blonde asks, gesturing to the end of the bed.

"Sure," I answer, wondering how she knows my name. And why she is here to see me. I haven't been able to use the phone or internet, but now I'm allowed to have visitors?

She sits down and crosses her right leg over her left, and I feel nothing but jealousy. Her blond hair that I know comes from a bottle is pulled up into a perfect, yet messy bun. She has black rimmed glasses that sit on her little nose, and she has a big smile on her face. Her makeup is done light. All she has on is powder because I can still see the light freckles around her nose and a little bit of blush and mascara. That's it. And she still looks runway ready.

"They didn't tell you I was coming?" she asks with a frown.

"They don't tell me much." Practically nothing.

She gives me a warm smile. "I'm Chloe."

This is where I tell her my name and say nice to meet you. But she already knows my name, and I'm not sure how this meeting could be nice. "Do you sleep with Avery?" I ask. Maybe he sent me one of his whores to talk to me. Maybe it's just another trick where he sets me up for a fall. I don't put

anything past him at this point.

For the first time, her smile drops, and her eyes widen in surprise. “No,” she answers, shaking her head quickly as if that was the stupidest question I could have asked her. “I just met him.”

Ah, I get it. “You sleep with Tristan.” From what I remember, he always preferred blondes.

She claps her hands together and places them in her lap. “I’m not here to talk about me. I’m here to talk about you.” My brows raise. “How are you feeling?”

My jaw tightens. “You’re a shrink?”

“Presleigh ...”

“I’m sorry you’ve wasted your time.” I stretch my legs out and throw the covers off before getting out of bed. I start to walk toward the bathroom to shut her out and lock the door, but her gasp stops me. I turn to face her, and her green eyes are large, staring at my neck and chest exposed by Avery’s overly large shirt. She couldn’t see them when I had the covers up to my neck. Then her gaze drops to the bandage around my leg, and she swallows.

I raise my arms out wide, and her eyes meet mine again. “Now you know all you need to know.” Then I turn back to walk toward the bathroom.

“Did Avery and Tristan do that to you?” she asks in horror.

I don’t answer.

She bows her head and sighs. “I’m sorry,” she whispers. “Sorry for what they did to you.”

Her words make me stop, and my teeth grind. I spin back around. “You have no idea what they did to me,” I shout as tears sting my eyes. I’m so tired of people looking at me like that. Like I’m fucking broken, even if I do feel it.

“I know they hurt you,” she says softly, lowering her eyes to the floor. “I know they treat you like you’re nothing.” She swallows.

The sad part is that even though Avery and Tristan weren’t the ones who did this to me, they have still treated me like nothing. Well, Avery has anyway. Tristan just helped him set me up.

I go to walk away again, but she stops me. “Please?” she begs, and I turn back around. “Take this.” She stands from the bed and offers me a card. “Call me whenever you need to just talk to.”

My eyes meet hers. “That won’t do me any good.” She frowns at my words. “I’m not allowed to use the phone.” Then I turn and walk into the

bathroom, shutting the door behind me and hoping she won't follow.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

AVERY

WHEN TRISTAN AND I WALK back into my study, I grab the scotch and pour us each a glass. “So what’s up with you and Chloe?” I ask.

“Don’t,” he says in warning.

“Just curious.”

“Well, don’t be,” he snaps.

She means something to him. I saw it in the way he spoke to her on the phone. The way he smiled when he heard her voice. But he had said she went through something similar to what Bunny went through, and it makes my chest tighten. Is that why they aren’t more? ’Cause she can’t have more? Is that how Bunny will be now? Will she ever be able to forgive me? I know I’ll never be able to forgive myself for not getting to her sooner. For not seeing that Darrell was a fucking lying bastard who betrayed me and my men.

“Hello?”

We both look up to see Chloe entering the study. Her eyes go straight to mine, and I straighten my shoulders at the look of judgment in them. “How did it go?” I ask her.

“I’m not allowed to discuss—”

“I think this is a little different than your other cases,” my brother interrupts her.

“It is,” she agrees.

“Then why don’t you help him out?”

She narrows her eyes on him, and he takes a drink of his scotch, eyeing her back. I’ve seen my brother in action with women. I’ve walked in on him fucking one of his whores before. And believe me when I say they fall at his feet. They lick his fucking shoes. But this one—I have a feeling she does no such thing.

She turns her murderous glare on me. “Do I need to call the authorities?”

“What?” Tristan barks out.

“No!” I answer.

She places her hands on her narrow hips. “Is she being held here against her will?”

I don’t answer.

“Did she tell you that?” Tristan demands.

She turns to face him. “She didn’t have to. The way he just totally ignored my question answered it.”

He lets out a long breath, running his hand through his hair. “Things with Presleigh ... are complicated.”

“No, it’s not,” she argues. “She is either here on her own free will or she is not.”

“She’s not,” I state.

“That’s what I thought.” She reaches into her back pocket and pulls out her cell. “I’m calling the police ...”

Tristan yanks the phone out of her hand and growls. “I didn’t have you come here to save her.”

“Then why did you have me come here?” she snaps.

He takes a step back from her, shaking his head as if he refuses to answer that question.

“Look, I don’t know what you two are up to or what you’ve done to her, but that poor woman has been physically and mentally abused. She refuses to talk to me, and I think that is because she is terrified of you two.”

“We saved her,” Tristan informs her. But I don’t feel that way. If I hadn’t brought her here, then she would have never been taken from me. I’m at total fault.

She gives a rough laugh. “Who did you save her from, Tristan? Because I know when I was *saved*, I was grateful.”

They begin to argue, and I remove myself from the situation. I couldn’t care less at this point what they have to say.

PRESLEIGH

I step out of the shower and grab the towel to dry off with.

“We need to talk.”

Looking up, I see Avery standing in the bathroom, leaning against the countertop with his hands in the pockets of his slacks. It reminds me of a few weeks ago when I first saw him in here. So much has changed since then.

“I don’t want to talk,” I say flatly.

He sighs. “You should have spoken to Chloe.”

I narrow my eyes on him. “A heads-up would have been nice.”

“You need help—”

“Excuse me?” I snap, interrupting him.

“No one can go through what you did and be okay. I saw the look in your eyes. You were beaten down. And now that I know he hurt you eleven years ago ...” His words cut off, and he looks away from me. As though it’s too painful to face me.

My anger rises. “I don’t need help!” I’m in denial. We both know it, but I refuse to admit it.

He removes his hands from his pockets and crosses his arms over his chest. A sign that he’s getting irritated as well. “What is so wrong with admitting that you need to talk to someone?”

“I don’t need someone asking me if I dressed too slutty. Or if I had led them on only to change my mind at the last minute,” I snap.

“Chloe said that to you?” he demands.

I shake my head. “Forget it, Avery.”

“I won’t forget it.” He sighs. “I can’t forget it.” He runs a hand through his hair. His eyes plead with mine. “Please help me understand what I can do for you, Bunny.”

Tears start to sting my eyes. “You can’t do anything for me,” I say, and my voice breaks.

“There has to be something,” he urges.

I bite my bottom lip and then let the towel drop to the floor. “You can fuck me.”

His eyes stray from my neck down to my ribs. They still show. I haven’t eaten much. The pain pills have taken away my appetite. His eyes go to the bandage around my upper thigh. “I can’t ...” he says through clenched teeth.

“Is it because it was your dad who raped me?” I ask, and he flinches.

“No.” He growls.

“Was it because ...?”

“It’s because you’re not ready,” he interrupts me.

“Who are you to tell me what I feel?” I demand. “I’ve allowed you to control everything I do for three weeks now, but you’re not gonna tell me what I feel!” I shout.

“Oh, you’ve allowed me to have control?” he asks, arching a brow.

“Yes.”

He takes a step toward me. “I never gave you the chance, Bunny.”

My chest tightens because that is true. “You never gave me a chance at anything.”

“What does that mean?” he snaps.

“A chance to explain myself a long time ago.”

He uncrosses his arms and turns toward the door. “Forget it.”

“No!” I shout following him. “You wanna talk. Let’s talk.” I jump in front of him, blocking his way out of the bathroom. “After I was released from the hospital, after your father raped and beat me, I had one voicemail and it was from you.”

“I don’t need—”

“It was from you,” I shout, interrupting him, “telling me that it was over. That Mitch would treat me like the whore I am.” I shake my head as I look at him with disgust. “You never even asked.”

“Bunny ...”

“You never fucking asked!” I scream so loud it hurts my own ears. “I knew you loved me. I knew there wasn’t anyone else, but you didn’t even bother to ask me what happened. If I was okay? How I could want to do that to our baby.” My voice breaks. “Do you know what that’s like?” I don’t allow him to answer. “No. You don’t.”

“Want me to say I’m sorry? ’Cause I am.”

“That’s not good enough!” I shout. “Where the hell were you, Avery? Where were you when I needed you?” Tears sting my eyes. “You said you loved me. You said you would always be there for me, but you weren’t.”

“You should have told me!” he shouts, getting angry.

“You wouldn’t have believed me.”

His eyes widen, and his lips part. “Of course, I would have.”

I snort. “Now, you’re just lying.”

He takes a step toward me, pressing his body into mine. “I would have believed you. Not one doubt. All you had to do was tell me.”

He makes it sound so simple. As if all I had to do was say hey, your father raped and beat me. I shake my head and wrap my arms around my chest. “I called you, Avery.” His hard eyes soften. “I didn’t know what I was going to say, but I called you. And you had already moved on. And changed your number.” He runs a hand through his hair. “I had to tell someone,” I say softly. “I went and saw a therapist after a year had passed. But I only went

once. He asked me what I wore.” His nostrils flare. “He asked me if I led him on. And I started to think maybe I had.”

“It was never your fault, Bunny.” He growls.

“I let you touch me all over that house. We fucked in your pool. The couch. In the media room while we would watch movies. And he told me that he watched us.”

“That still doesn’t make it your fault,” he snaps. “This, right here, is why you still need help.”

“Quit acting like I’m fucking broken.”

He takes a step back from me. “You are,” he shouts. “It’s not hard to figure out that what my father did to you is the reason you drink like a fucking fish. Or why you spread your legs for any guy who looks your way.”

“Fuck you!” I scream.

“It’s true, and you know it,” he says coldly.

I slap him across the face so hard the sound bounces off the walls. When his eyes come back to mine, they don’t have the normal rage I see after putting my hands on him. Instead, they are soft. “Bunny, I just want to help you ...”

“Quit calling me that! I’m no longer you’re *Bunny*, remember? I’m your slave,” I shout until my lungs hurt.

“You know that’s not true,” he says softly.

I slap him again.

“I know what you’re doing, but it’s not gonna work,” he says, shaking his head.

I slap him again. And then again. “Fucking hit me back,” I demand.

“No.”

Tears run down my face, and my body physically shakes with need. I fucking cut myself open and bled for him, and he’s giving me nothing in return.

“I don’t want to hurt you,” he says, reaching out and wiping away the tears from my face. And it makes my knees shake with nervousness at the look in his eyes. He’s gone soft. He’ll never look at me the same. To him, I’m ruined. “I don’t want to be like them.”

A sob bubbles up, but I swallow it down.

“I love you, Bunny. I always have and always will. I can’t see you in pain anymore.” He leans in, gently kissing my forehead, and turns to walk out.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

AVERY

“**HAVE YOU EVER FELT LIKE** you were trapped in a nightmare?” she asks me.

I stop and turn to face her. Tears run down her beautiful face, and it makes my chest tighten at what he has done to her. “No.” *Yes, when you left me I did.* But I can’t tell her that now. Not after what I found out.

“Do you know what it feels like to shower and still feel dirty?” she continues.

“No,” I answer, not knowing where she is going with this.

“Or how you can’t stand to look in a mirror because you can’t stand the sight of yourself?” She doesn’t let me answer. “I had a nose job because he broke it. I had my boobs done because I wanted to be different. Feel different.” She closes her eyes and sighs. “I quit highlighting my hair and grew it out. I wanted to be anyone but me. Because there was nothing left. I had panic attacks. The drugs and alcohol helped. They made life tolerable.” She licks her lips. “You’re right,” she says, dropping her eyes to the floor in shame. “I did drink a lot, needing the liquid courage to allow men to touch me.” Her eyes meet mine again, and I want to pull her into my arms and hold her, but I don’t.

“I needed to prove to myself that he hadn’t ruined my life. That I could still be loved. Wanted.” She wraps her arms around herself. “I could still feel him on top of me. I could still feel his breath on my neck. I could still smell his scent on me.” Tears stream down her face. “But none of them took away the pain. The memories.” She sobs. “Until you walked back into my life and things were different. You erased it away and made me feel like me again. And then he shows up again. And everything comes back like a fucking wave. And I’m drowning. I need you, Avery, and once again, you walk away.”

“Bunny, it’s not because of what you went through.”

“Then what is it?” she asks, arms out wide. “Because you look at me like

I'm a used-up whore."

"I don't see you that way." How could she possibly think that? I see her as a strong woman who survived something horrific. And the sad part is that she went through it all on her own.

"You make me feel that way. Just like he did." She sniffs, and I flinch at her words. "He took me into your bedroom and threw me onto the bed." My jaw tightens. "I screamed for you. I yelled for you to help me." Angry tears come to her eyes. "But you weren't there. He placed his hand over my mouth and then pinched my nose closed with his fingers. I couldn't breathe."

"Bunny ..." I swallow, "I don't need ..."

"I had to fucking live it!" she shouts. "You can fucking listen to it. He ripped my shorts down my legs with his free hand and fucked me! Telling me that I belonged to him. That I was a whore that needed to be used like the others. When he was done, he grabbed the nearest thing he could get to." She swallows. "Which was a flashlight that you kept on your nightstand. He fucked me with it. To the point I bled." I look away from her. "Then after he was done with that, he dragged me to your fucking shower and washed me. I sobbed as he told me that I needed to abort our baby, but I refused. I refused to do that! I'd rather die than kill ..." Her voice breaks. "So he beat me. I remember every kick to my stomach. Every punch to my face. He beat me until I was unconscious." There are no words to take her hurt away. "Look at me," she shouts, and my eyes find hers. "Is that what you wanted to know?" she demands.

I say nothing.

"Huh? Does that make you feel better? Answer me!" she shouts. "Because I don't feel any better!"

"No!" I snap, and then release a sigh. "I'm so sorry I wasn't there for you, Bunny, but I'm here now."

"Prove it!"

"What do you want from me?" I demand.

"I want you to fuck me! I need to know that you still want me." She lowers her voice as if ashamed to admit that.

"I ... I can't, Bunny."

"He didn't rape me this time," she whispers.

I let out a long breath because I've thought about it. That's why I wanted her to talk to Chloe.

"He just wanted to fuck with my head." She sniffs. "He knew that you

wouldn't want me afterward."

I walk up to her and wrap her in my arms. Her body shakes against mine while I lean down and kiss her hair. "I still want you, Bunny." I place my hands on her head and pull her face back to look at me. "Nothing will change that. Do you understand?"

Tears run down her pretty face. The cut along her nose and lips starting to heal. "Answer me."

"Yes." She gives her broken answer.

I'm trying to keep it together. My muscles are tight, and my body rigid. I wanted to puke when she described what my father had done to her, but I had to be strong for her. Then I wanted to punch the fucking wall. What she went through ... How selfish I was to believe my father and Lance.

I walk into my study and grab the empty bottle of scotch on my desk.

"I didn't expect you ..."

I throw it into the burning fireplace, interrupting my brother's words. The glass shatters, and the flame gets bigger for a brief second.

"Whoa." He jumps to his feet.

I place my fists on my desk and lean over it, giving him my back, and take a deep breath.

"What's wrong?" he asks.

I start to laugh, a deep, chest-shaking laugh, and turn to face him. "That is the fucking dumbest question I have ever heard."

He frowns, tilting his head. "Something happened in the past fifteen minutes?"

"No, it happened eleven years ago," I snap.

He sighs. "Avery, you can't change the past. All you can do is help her now."

"She doesn't want help." I shake my head. "Not the kind she needs." I'm gonna find that doctor who told her it was her fault and kill him.

"It just takes time."

"Quit acting like you fucking know what she went through. Quit fucking acting like you know how she feels because you're fucking a woman who was sexually abused," I shout, thanking God that Chloe is no longer in here.

His eyes narrow on mine. “I know exactly what Chloe went through. Don’t be pissed at me because Presleigh didn’t tell you.”

“She couldn’t tell me!” I shout. “Because I wouldn’t have even answered the Goddamn phone.” I was so mad at her. So hurt. She had ripped my heart out by killing my child and then leaving me for another man—she might as well have shot me. Then I find out it was all a lie. And what she went through ... makes me feel that rage all over again.

“I told you to go to Mitch and beat the fuck out of him. Hell, I offered to help you. But you said fuck both of them. If she was willing to leave you for him, then he could have her.”

“I thought ...”

“You thought fucking wrong. Be mad at yourself.” he snaps. “Quit blaming everyone for once and blame yourself!”

I punch him in the face, and he stumbles back, spilling his drink over the rim of his glass. I do it again before he can recover. It feels good to hit something. And as much as Bunny wanted me to slap her, I couldn’t. I can’t be that man for her right now.

“Fucking bastard ...” He drops his drink to the hardwood floor, and it shatters, scotch going everywhere, and then he punches me. I taste blood, and I smile. This is what my brother and I do. We make each other hurt. Bleed.

He goes to punch me again, but I duck, then as I stand straight, I clock him in the jaw. He runs toward me and picks me up at the waist, letting out a scream. We both go barreling into my desk. It turns over, and he lands on top of me.

He rolls off me and onto the floor. We’re both breathing heavily, staring up at my ceiling.

“I know you’re mad, Avery,” he says softly. “I know you want Victor and Vaughn dead.” I look over at him as he licks the blood that runs down the side of his lip. “And I stand by you a hundred percent.” His head turns to look at me as well. “I will do whatever you need me to do. But you’re taking your anger out on the wrong people.”

I sit up and flinch from the pain in my back from hitting my desk.

“Presleigh didn’t do anything wrong.”

“She should have told me!” I say through gritted teeth.

He hangs his head and runs a hand through his hair. “I don’t pretend to know everything because of Chloe, but I know that sometimes the victims feel they have no choice. No voice. And it’s not like you crawled after her on

hands and knees begging her to take you back when you thought she left.” He sighs heavily. “There is no telling what Victor told her in order for her to keep her mouth shut. She was seventeen and had no one. Her parents dead. Her fiancé gone. And her brother ... no girl wants to explain to their brother that they were raped and beaten. They never were really that close to begin with. All she had back then was you.”

“She still has me.”

He nods. “There’s a man down in your cellar who is there for you to take your anger out on. I mean, I’m more than willing to let you knock me around, but I’ll fight back.” He gives me a smile. “Lance deserves your anger. Because you love her.”

I stand and turn to face him, then hold out my hand. He takes it, and I pull him up. He follows me out of my study and to my cellar. I open the door and walk in to find Lance on his stomach. He’s asleep. Passed out from blood loss. I grip the chains in my hand and roll him onto his back. I wrap them around his wrists and then drag him over to the center of the room. I slap his face.

“Wake up!” He moans. I slap him again. “Get the fuck up!” He stirs and then his eyes open slowly. “Stand up,” I order, and he closes them again.

I sigh, not having the time for this. I’ve waited long enough. I need answers.

I yank on the chain wrapped around his wrists and drag him to his feet. He slumps forward, and I lift the chain, placing it over the hook that hangs down. He sags, and his head falls forward.

“We’re gonna play a little game.”

He whimpers.

“I’m gonna ask you a question, and every time you don’t answer, I’m gonna throw a knife at you. And I won’t miss.”

He lifts his head slowly. His eyes narrowed. “Just kill me.”

“We’ll get there.”

He spits out blood onto the concrete floor, and I smile. Grabbing the knife I got from my study, I feel the weight in my right hand. I toss it into the air and catch it. “Where are my brother and father?”

“I don’t kn—”

The knife lands in his right upper arm. Right where I wanted it to. He throws his head back, howling out like a wolf.

I walk up to him, and he’s panting. I yank it out, and he grinds his teeth.

Blood starts running down his arm.

Walking back to where I stood before I flip it once again in my hand. Blood now covers the blade. “How about an easier question. Don’t want to kill you too soon. What happened while you guys kept her in that house?”

I don’t want to know but need to find out. I need to know what Bunny went through. What kind of horrors she had to suffer at the hand of the devil. With my father and brother, the thoughts are endless. I know firsthand how cruel they can be. Just because he didn’t rape her didn’t mean he didn’t touch her.

He coughs. “Your dad and Vaughn got in a fight.”

That’s interesting and not what I expected him to say. “About?”

His head bobs up and down for a second. “Vaughn planned the entire attack with Darrell’s help, but he wasn’t helping get her for your father. He wanted her for himself.”

I tap the blood-stained knife against my thigh. “Vaughn wanted her?”

He nods quickly and sucks in a breath. “The second day, he went down there with every intention to rape her.” My jaw tightens. “He took a pair of handcuffs.” He pauses taking a breath. “Your father and I were up in the office. We heard her scream, and we ran down there. He was on top of her.” My hand tightens on the knife. “Had her across the room, the collar around her neck pulled tight and choking her. Her hands already cuffed ... your father ripped him off, and your brother started throwing a fit like a little child.” He shakes his head. “Said your father had promised he could have her. And he told him he would get what he gives him and then slapped him. Vaughn stormed off.” Deep breath. “Telling me he’d be back later.” His eyes start to fall shut as blood continues to run down his arm.

I throw the knife, hitting him in his thigh. His eyes snap open, and he screams out again. “I ans ... wered,” he wails.

I ignore him, and like last time, I walk up to him and yank it out, enjoying the stream of blood that runs down his leg. “Keep going.”

He licks his chapped lips. “I don’t ... know. Victor told her some bullshit, and she screamed fuck you. Then he hurt her.”

I walk up to him, grab his hair, and yank his head back. I get right in his face, and yell, “What exactly did he do to her?”

“He shoved her head into the wall and then slammed her onto the concrete floor ...”

I release his head, and it falls forward while I start to pace. I’ve never felt

so much anger. Not when she left. Not when she was taken. Not even when I found her. My muscles are tight, and all I want to do is rip his fucking head off with my bare hands. “Go on.” I know there’s more.

“He was undoing his pants when his cell rang ... He pulled it out of his pocket and cussed. Then he kicked her in the stomach as he stood and walked out, ordering me to close the door and lock it. He left ten minutes later, after his phone call, and then you all showed up.” Drool runs down his chin and mixes with the blood on the floor. “I overheard him tell someone on the phone the day before that they were going to be moving her soon.”

“To where?”

“He never said.”

My jaw clenches. “You know nothing of value.”

His head sags, and he coughs. I’m losing him. He’s dying. I’ve played with him too much. I take the knife and toss it up in the air before catching it. The blood now covers the handle as well as the blade, making it slippery.

I hear the door open behind me, but I keep my focus on Lance. He lifts his head, looking up, and I throw the knife for the last time.

It lands right in his throat. His body jerks, and he makes a gurgling sound as blood pours from his wound down his neck, chest, and stomach before hitting the floor. His eyes close, and his head falls forward, his chin resting on top of the blade, and I watch the life drain out of him like the sorry piece of shit he is.

Turning around, I see Kayn standing with my brother. “What?” I snap, removing the towel from my back pocket and wiping off my hands.

Kayn enters. “Did you find them?” I ask.

“No, sir. Sorry.”

“Then why the fuck are you here?” I growl.

“I have something you need to see.”

We make our way back up to my study, and my brother takes a seat on the couch. Kayn stands by the door. I pour a glass of scotch and hand it to my brother, then make myself one.

“What is it?”

“We found these at your brother’s house.” He gestures to a box sitting on my desk that I now notice is upright.

I walk over and open it up, finding some keys, a wallet, pictures, and a USB drive. “What is on it?” I ask.

Kayn clears his throat before answering. “Home videos.”

My brother's eyes widen, and my jaw sharpens. Our brother Vaughn was always recording shit. "Did you watch it?" Who knows what the fuck is on it.

Kayn nods. "I started but did not finish, sir."

Which tells me this USB drive holds something very bad. I tighten my hand around it, and then plug it in, unable to stop myself.

The video starts to play, and it's me and her sitting on the couch at my father's house. She has to be sixteen, me eighteen. She has on my T-shirt and sweatpants. Her face free of makeup, and she has a huge smile on her face while she cuddles up next to my side.

"What are you two doing?" Vaughn asks, filming us.

"Get the hell out of here," I growl before tossing a throw pillow at him. "We wanna be alone."

He does as I say, turning around, leaving the living room and entering the hallway. But then he stops and turns back around, continuing to film us. He's out of sight, and we're not paying attention.

I lean into her, my hand cupping her face and turning it toward me. She licks her lips and then leans in for me to kiss her. I do. Passionately. She moans, and I release her face and slide my hand into my sweatpants she wears. Then she's moaning into my mouth, her hips bucking while I finger fuck her right there for all to see on my father's couch. Her head pulls away from mine.

"Avery." She gasps, her head falling back to the cushion. She comes, her hands in my hair, her body bucking wildly. Then I'm laying her down, removing my sweatpants and her underwear from her waist and tossing them to the floor. I push mine down to grab the base of my hard cock, and then I'm pushing into her while our lips find one another's once again.

The screen goes black.

I look around my study, and Kayn is staring down at the floor, and Tristan is downing what is left of his scotch. "What is this ...?"

The screen comes back on, interrupting me. Bunny sits in my father's kitchen at the breakfast bar. She has her head down, and she runs her fork through her eggs.

"Hey, Pres." I hear my brother's voice.

"Hey, Vaughn," she says, not bothering to look up at him. "Have you spoken to Avery?" she asks. "I called him earlier, and he didn't answer."

"No. But it's not even nine a.m. in California yet. He's probably still asleep."

California? This is when I was gone. When I came back only to find out she left me.

“He always answers my calls.” She looks up at him and frowns.

He doesn’t say anything, and she runs her hand through her blond hair before pushing her full plate of eggs away. I can see the stress written all over her face. Her blue eyes full of worry and brows drawn down. “Maybe I’ll call him again ...”

My father enters the kitchen and comes to a stop when he sees her. “Hello, Presleigh.”

“Hello, Mr. Decker,” she says with a nod of her head.

He looks at Vaughn, and orders, “Leave us.”

He walks out, and the screen goes black. I take a step closer to my large TV and then the camera comes back on, and you can hear her screaming in the background.

“Avery! Avery!” her voice shouts. The camera walks up to my room and opens the door. My father is dragging her across the floor by her hair. “Avery!” she cries out again.

I pause it.

She’s on her side, her hands up in her hair where he grips it. Her face turned away from the camera. He looks at the bed, his lips in a thin line and jaw sharp.

My heart slams into my chest knowing exactly what this is.

I screamed for you. But you weren’t there.

Is what she had said to me.

“Avery ... man. Maybe you shouldn’t ...” Tristan goes to take the remote from my hand, but I pull away and press play.

“He can’t fucking save you!” he growls and lifts her up off the floor before slamming her onto my bed. When she tries to crawl away, he grabs her shorts and yanks them down her legs.

“No,” she shouts. “Please don’t ...”

He slaps her across the face, and she grabs her cheek, crying into her hands.

“You’re like all the others. Fucking begging. Just take it like the whore you are,” he snaps.

“Nnooo.” She chokes.

He pushes his pants down, wasting no time. Her struggle turns him on, and he’s already hard. Then he shoves her onto her stomach. She tries to crawl

away again, but he pins her down. He brings her arms behind her back and hold them parallel across her back. Then he spreads her legs with his effortlessly. He takes a hold of himself and tries to enter her but growls. “Does my son go easy on you?” She sobs as her head faces away from the camera, her body still trying to fight him off. Her legs kicking the comforter and sheets. “That’s disappointing. I taught him better than that.”

He spits on his hand and then runs it over his hard dick. She yells out when he pushes into her with one hard shove of his hips.

“Stop it!” she cries “Please ... stop ...”

He takes his now free hand, grips her hair, and shoves her face first into the pillow. She struggles, but it doesn’t do her any good. He fucks her. His hips pound into her as though he hates her. Every now and then, he picks up her head to allow her a breath before he buries it back into the pillow. Suffocating her once again.

“You fucking whore, you belong to me. Just like the rest of them!” he grinds out. “You walk around flaunting your body in a bikini, teasing everyone because that’s what you are. A cock tease.”

He lifts her head up, and I hear her intake of breath before he shoves her face back down. He slows down his pace. “Feel my cock, Presleigh. See how hard you’ve made me? That’s all you, baby. You’ve done this to me over and over for too long now.”

Her head shakes in his grip, her arms trying to fight him to no avail. “You like it, don’t you? The way I fuck you. Like a man. Like you should be treated.” He pulls out and slams into her; her leg comes up and kicks him in the arm, and he spreads his legs wider, making it harder for her to fight. “You’re stronger than I thought,” he muses and chuckles. “But not strong enough.”

He lifts her head back, and she cries out as she sucks in a breath. He holds it in place while she sobs, and he leans over to whisper in her ear. “You think I haven’t seen you and Avery fucking? I have, and it pisses me off. No one’s dick should be in this cunt but mine.” She tries to pull her head away from his grasp, but he holds her tightly. He pulls his hips back and then slams into her while she sobs. His tongue comes out and licks the tears off her face. “Stop crying. You know you like it because you are a whore. My little whore.”

He pushes into her one last time, then grunts as he comes before crawling off her. He grabs her arm and pulls her onto her back, and she sobs, closing her legs tightly. Her hands hiding her face while her entire body shakes

uncontrollably.

He strokes his now soft cock. “Now I understand why he wants to keep you. Why he won’t give you up.” A new sob wracks her body. “But he won’t after I’m done with you, Presleigh. Not anymore. No man will ever want you.”

He grabs the flashlight off the nightstand and moves back between her legs. She reaches up to fight him off, and he places his right hand over her mouth while he clamps his fingers over her nose. She bucks. She tries to kick. Her nails scratch his face, and he lets go of her long enough to slap her. When that doesn’t stop her, he punches her. Her hands fall to her sides, and her body stops moving. He sits there between her parted legs, gently running his fingers over her pussy. Just watching her. Bruises already begin to form on her face. As soon as she starts to stir, he takes the flashlight and pushes it into her, and she screams. She tries to crawl away from him, but her head is at the headboard, so there’s nowhere for her to go. He places his hand back over her mouth and nose while he fucks her with the flashlight just as he did with his cock. Over and over. Her face turns red from lack of oxygen. You can hear her muffled screams behind his hand and see the tears run down her face. Then there’s blood. A lot of it. It covers her thighs, his stomach, and the bed. He finally stops and moves away from her. He looks down at her with a satisfied smile on his face.

He grabs her by the hair and yanks her off the bed and onto the floor. And then proceeds to take her to the shower.

The camera moves into the room, then the bathroom. She sobs over and over while he washes her. Then he shoves her out of it. She falls to the tiled floor, soaking wet. Her legs unable to hold herself up.

I pause it.

I turn my back to the TV, my chest rising and falling fast with every breath. My body physically shaking.

My eyes sting with tears. I’ve never cried. Not when my mother left us and not when I thought Bunny left me. The only emotion I ever show is rage.

I fist my hands down by my side when the first tear falls. I reach over, grab the glass coffee table, and throw it up against the wall. It shatters to a million fucking pieces, and I scream.

I fall to my knees in the middle of my study, glass crunching under my knees, and bend over. My hands grip my hair, and I welcome the sting to my scalp. Needing the pain. “I’m so sorry I wasn’t there,” I say to no one. “So

Goddamn sorry.” My hands fall to my legs as I let out a pained breath.

“Avery ...” I hear my brother. I had forgotten he and Kayn were in here with me. His eyes look devoid of any emotion, but his fists are clenched. His jaw tightens as he looks up at the paused scene on the TV. “You don’t need to see this.”

“Shut the fuck up or get out!” I bark.

He bows his head and runs a hand through his hair, showing me his unease, but he shuts up.

I let out a long sigh and climb to my feet. Not even bothering to wipe my face free of tears, I turn around, square my shoulders, and push play.

He grabs her by the chin, pulling her to a sitting position on the tile floor. “You will abort this baby.”

“Nnnoooo.” She sobs.

He slaps her. “You will do as I say.”

She wraps her arms around her stomach, shaking her head quickly, and blood starts to cover the floor between her legs once again.

“He doesn’t want you or this fucking baby!” he shouts. “You’re just some young teenage whore trying to trap my son!”

“It was a surprise,” she cries.

“Bullshit!” He grips her hair and yanks her head back. “You shouldn’t have been having sex with him to begin with! You belong to me!”

“I ... love ... him ...” She sobs as the tears continue to roll down her face.

“Well, he doesn’t love you or that baby,” he growls. “Abort this baby!”

“I won’t...”

He kicks her. Knocking her to her stomach on the floor in the bathroom. “Then I’ll take care of it for you.”

She gets up on her hands and knees to crawl away, but they slip in the water that has pooled around her along with the blood, and he kicks her in the face. She sprawls out on the floor, and he kicks her in the stomach again. She’s too weak to fight him anymore.

He straddles her and fists his hands before landing punch after punch to her face, chest, and stomach until she is an unconscious, bloody fucking mess. When he stands, he’s breathing heavy. She lies there, looking half dead while the blood pours from her nose and mouth. Her nose is broken and possibly her jaw. Her lips are busted. And she has countless bruises.

He looks right at the camera. “You better make sure no one ever fucking sees this.”

“Of course, Dad,” Vaughn says with excitement. “Can I have her now?”

“No,” he snaps. “She doesn’t belong to any of you boys! She belongs to me!” he shouts, punching his own chest. “Now go call Lance. Get his ass here to pick her up before your brother returns from his trip.” He then points at my room. “And clean up all that mess. Can’t leave any evidence for Avery to see.”

The screen goes black.

PRESLEIGH

I lie in Avery’s bed staring at the ceiling when I hear the door open. I sit up, not pretending to be asleep when he stumbles in. He shuts the door and leans against it. Raising a bottle of scotch to his lips, he greedily drinks, his throat working, but some of it manages to run down the side of his lips and trails down his chin to his shirt.

Once he lowers it, he leans his head back on the door, and it hits with a thud as he closes his eyes.

I look him over to see he has blood on his knuckles, and it’s his because he has a few cuts. Then my eyes drop to his pants, and they too have blood on them. “Did you get hurt?” I ask.

He lifts his head, and his eyes land on mine. He stares at me, not saying a word, but I can see the pain in his blue eyes. His chest heaves, and his eyes are red. I’ve never seen him cry, but he looks on the verge of tears.

“Avery?” I ask, getting out of his bed. “What’s wrong? Are you okay?”

His eyes drop to my stomach. All I’m wearing is one of his T-shirts. Then he looks away. “I can’t even look at you.” He speaks softly.

My stomach drops, and my chest tightens. My arms come up to wrap around my waist. I drop my head to stare at the floor, shame washing over me. He’ll never look at me the same. He’ll never touch me the same. Once again, Victor managed to ruin my life. I’ve dealt with this for the past eleven years. I’ve felt it. It’s why I kept my secret. To avoid this. It’s why I sleep around—to prove to myself that he didn’t win. No matter how much numbness I still felt. “I don’t expect you to understand,” I say and swallow the tightness in my throat. “How I feel. What I need.”

“I have a pretty good idea of how you feel.”

I look back up at him through my hair, and he’s taking another drink from

the bottle. He drops it to his side, and his eyes meet mine briefly before looking away once again.

I feel tears start to well in mine. “I need you to touch me—”

“No!” he growls, interrupting me.

My anger grows. “I’m here because of you!” I snap, and his jaw tightens. “I was fine with my life—”

“Being a whore?” He snorts, interrupting me again. “How was that working out for you?”

“Fuck you, Avery!” I shout, my face turning red.

He drops his head, running his free hand through his hair. “I’m sor ...” He stops himself midway through his apology. “I ...” He looks up at me. “I watched the tapes.”

“What tapes?” I ask, my heart picking up.

“The tapes of what Victor did to you.”

He must be mistaken. Drunk and confused maybe. “I don’t understand ...” I whisper.

“Vaughn taped everything my father did to you. When he raped you in my bed. Then forced you to shower. When he beat you in my bathroom. All of it.”

No. He has to be lying. That can’t be true. I remember Vaughn recording me in the kitchen, but then he left me and Victor alone. He said he had something I needed to give Avery when he returned, so I had followed him up to the second floor. As soon as I hit the landing, he grabbed me. His hands digging in my hair, then he dragged me into Avery’s room. “No,” I whisper.

“I watched him treat you like one of his fucking slaves.” He takes another drink from the bottle. “I watched you call out for me. I watched how he treated you as if you meant fucking nothing!” His voice rises, and tears sting my eyes. “I watched him clean you off and then beat you!” he shouts.

I place a hand over my mouth as a sob comes out. “How could you?” I whisper as the tears spill over my eyes. “How could you watch that?”

“I had to know,” he says with no shame.

“I told you!” I shout, my hands fisting tightly. “My words weren’t enough? You didn’t believe me?” That was always my biggest fear. What would Avery have done if he hadn’t changed his number? Would he have believed me? If so, would he have come to me? He sat back and watched girls be treated no different than how his father did me and did nothing. Why would he for me?

“Of course, I did,” he snaps. “I guess I’m just a sick son of a bitch.”

“I hate you,” I growl. *How could he do that to me?*

His features soften, and I see tears start to well up in his eyes. “Bunny,” he takes a step toward me, and I take one back. He stops.

“Don’t!” I say, my voice trembling just like my body. “Don’t come near me, Avery!” I say and then run around him. I yank the door open and run down the hallway, almost tripping over my own feet. I make a turn and let out a scream of surprise when I run into a hard body.

“Whoa!” he announces when a set of large hands grabs my shoulders.

“Don’t touch me!” I cry, pulling away.

Tristan throws his hands up. And his eyes look over my body as if to check for bruises or blood. And I don’t care that I’m only dressed in underwear and Avery’s T-shirt. “You’re okay. I’m not gonna hurt you, Presleigh.”

I wrap my arms around myself, and his eyes soften, blowing out a long breath. I don’t miss the cut on his lip, and the shiner on his eye. “Did you watch it too?” I ask, my voice wavering.

He runs a hand through his hair, remaining silent. That says it all.

“Give me your phone,” I demand softly.

His brows pull together. “Presleigh, I can’t...”

“Please,” I beg, licking my lips and taste the salt from my tears. “I need to talk to someone.” He tilts his head to the side. “I need to talk to Chloe.”

He pulls his cell out of his pocket and dials a number before placing it to his ear. He turns his back to me and whispers into it. Too low for me to hear what he says. Then he hangs up and turns back to face me. “She’s on her way.”

“Here?”

He nods once. “She is still here in Vancouver.”

I look down at the floor, taking in a deep breath. My heart feeling broken all over again. How could Avery do this to me? “Thank you,” I whisper and then walk away, making my way to the formal living room. Not wanting to go back to his room. Not wanting to be so close to Avery.

I enter the cold room and fall onto the brown leather couch and stare straight ahead at nothing.

I watched the tapes of what Victor did to you.

Fresh tears run down my face. Eleven years and I had moved on. Or so I thought. I was doing better. I had accepted my fate and tried to make the best of a life that no longer meant anything to me.

I was seventeen and pregnant. I was going to be a teenage mother. We weren't ready for a baby because we were babies ourselves. At least that's what I told myself when I found out I lost it. But honestly, that was all I wanted. Avery and our child.

Beep ...

Beep ...

Beep ...

The noise is too loud. The light too bright even with my eyes closed. My head pounds, and my face throbs. It hurts to breathe. And my sides—they hurt so badly. Between my legs ...

Beep ...

Beep ...

“Stop ... it,” I croak.

I feel pain, but I'm also numb at the same time. Lightheaded. Maybe I'm spinning.

“Presleigh?”

I hear my name and then feel a hand on my shoulder. I flinch from the soft contact, causing me pain.

“Presleigh, wake up.”

I open my heavy eyes and moan at the bright light. “What ... happened? Hurt so ... bad.”

“You're okay.”

My head falls to the right, and I see a man I've known for years standing beside a hospital bed. My hospital bed. It's Lance. He smiles down at me softly. “You've had an accident,” he begins. “A bad car wreck ... you're gonna be okay, but I have some bad news.”

“What ...?” I groan. The pain making it hard to speak. Avery? Was he with me? Is he okay?

“We were able to save you, but you've lost your baby. And we had to perform an emergency hysterectomy.”

No! I shake my head as tears instantly sting my eyes.

“I'm afraid so. But you're going to be okay.” He pats my arm, and I cry out from the rough touch.

He looks up from me to the door. I follow his eyes to see Mr. Decker walking in, and the memories come back like a fucking punch to my face.

I sob. “You did this ...”

“I did,” he says, not even trying to deny it. He sits down beside me. “I’ve already spoken to Avery for you. And although he was pissed, he understood that you willingly aborted the baby.”

“Nnnnooo.” I choke out.

He nods once. “He was more pissed than I expected, but he’s over it now. You’ve been in a coma for two weeks, after all. He’s moved on, and you should do the same.”

Two weeks? I’ve been in a coma for two weeks?

He stands and leans over, whispering in my ear, “Stay away from him, Presleigh. Or I will come back and get you. And next time, I’ll kill you like I did that fucking bastard child of yours.”

I sob into my hands, leaning over on the couch. A soft hand lands on my back, and I jump up, almost falling off the cushion. I look up to a set of soft green eyes and blond hair.

“I’m here,” Chloe says.

And I throw myself against her chest as though she’s been my best friend for years. She hugs me while I cry so hard that my sobs shake both of our bodies.

“Let it out,” she whispers, her hands slowly running up and down my back. “I’m here for you, Presleigh. I’m here for you.”

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

AVERY

Nineteen years old . . .

“WHERE IS BUNNY?” I ASK Tristan while we stand in the kitchen of our father’s house. We’re having one of our usual parties. Things get rowdy, and when the cops show up, I’ll answer the door with a smile on my face and assure them that I’ll turn the volume down. But they won’t touch us. Their boss is always over here down in the cellar with my father. There are a lot of fucked-up men in this town.

He’s leaning up against the wall with a girl by the name of Jamie standing between his parted legs. Her head is tilted back with his tongue down her throat. I roll my eyes and yank her from him.

“Hey ...” she protests.

“Have you seen Bunny?” I demand, ignoring her. She gets on my nerves. My brother just fucks her to pass the time, but she thinks it’s love. She’s also an idiot like all the others he takes to bed.

“No.” He wipes the taste of her lips off his. “Well ... I did see her earlier up in the game room. She was playing pool with Mitch.”

I fist my hands and spin around. Mitch. That fucker is still on my shit list. He knows it too, just doesn’t care.

Opening the door to the game room, I look around. “Where’s Bunny and Mitch?” I demand when I don’t see them.

“They went outside.” A girl by the name of Brandie answers me without looking up from her shot at the pool table.

“Motherfucker ...” I slam the door shut and run down the stairs two at a time. Grabbing the banister at the bottom, I leap over the last three. Pushing drunk kids out of my way, I make it to the back door and onto the terrace. More drunk kids litter the backyard. Some already passed out on the lawn furniture. Others playing basketball on the courts. Some standing by the bonfire that we started earlier. “Bunny?” I yell.

“Over on the side of the house,” Scott, a guy who’s friends with my older brother, Vaughn, calls out with a nod of his head.

I take off to the side of the terrace and hear her voice. “Oh God,” she cries out.

“Presleigh ...”

“What the fuck is going on over here?” I interrupt Mitch, jumping over the railing and landing next to them. Before they can answer, I grab the collar of his shirt and yank him back from her, shoving him to the ground.

“What the hell?” he asks, looking up at me.

“Bunny ...?”

She leans over, vomiting into the bushes. Walking up behind her, I grab her blond hair and pull it off her face. “What the hell happened?” I demand.

He throws his hands up in the air. “You deal with her.” Then he walks away.

She falls to her knees, and I go with her while she dry heaves. “Hey, it’s okay. Let it out.” I rub her back. She had too much to drink. I knew I shouldn’t have let her friend make her drinks. Bunny never drinks to begin with, but she wanted to tonight. I should have never left her alone.

When she’s finished, she leans back on her heels and looks at me. “Sorry.”

I smile at her. “It’s okay. If I remember correctly, you have taken care of me plenty of times on nights like this.” She laughs softly. “Come on. Let’s get you to bed.” I stand up and lift her into my arms. She cuddles against my chest.

“I tried to find you,” she whispers, “but when I saw you in the kitchen talking to your brother, I didn’t wanna bother you.”

“You’re never bothering me.” I make my way through the crowd of people and get her up to my room. After she uses the bathroom and brushes her teeth, I help her undress. I lay her down in the bed, and she opens up her arms, inviting me to join her. Removing my shirt, I do so without thought.

She sighs, closing her eyes when I snuggle up to her. “Why did you sound so mad?” she asks me with a yawn.

“I thought ...” My words trail off at how stupid it sounds now.

“What?” she asks, her heavy blue eyes open staring up at me.

I run my hand through her blond hair. “Nothing.”

“Tell me,” she urges.

“It doesn’t matter.”

She sits up, the covers falling to her waist, showing me her bare chest, and

I instantly get hard. "I would never hurt you, Avery."

I smile up at her. "It's not you I worry about."

She lets out a long sigh. "But you don't trust me."

I sit up as well. "That's not it."

"Then what is it?"

"Men ... things I've seen ..." I pause. Her father may do just as much damage as mine, but Bunny has never seen it firsthand. Thank God. Women aren't allowed down in my father's cellar unless they are naked and cuffed. And I would never let anyone hurt her like that. Over my dead body. Letting out a sigh, I cup her warm cheek, and she leans into it. "I just wanna protect you."

She smiles at me. It's lopsided, but it's the most adorable smile I've ever seen. She wraps her arms around my neck and moves to straddle my hips. My hands run up and down her bare back. "Know what I want?" she whispers against my lips. "You to make love to me."

I take another drink from the bottle of scotch and fall onto the end of the bed. That was the night she got pregnant. We were always careful, but that night, we weren't careful enough. Her parents had already passed. She and Preston were living with us to finish out school before we all went on to college. I had this thought in the back of my head that someone was going to take her from me. And in a sick and twisted way, I thought it was going to be Mitch. He liked her. Wanted her. He watched her at school. When he came over. Every time he was in a room with her, his eyes were on her. And I was jealous. I wanted to show them that she was mine even though everyone already knew it.

But I lost her anyway soon after that. I believed what my father and Lance told me because it was my biggest fear come true. And I think they knew that.

A knock comes at the door, but I ignore it. Seconds later, it opens, and Tristan sticks his head in. "She's downstairs talking to Chloe."

Good. I nod and take another swig.

He plops down beside me and takes the bottle from me before taking a big gulp himself. "Do you have a plan?"

"Kill them." They ruined us. They ruined her. I should have known something was off when I saw her at the club in New York. That was not my Bunny. But people change, so I never thought about it. She went from an

angel to the fucking devil in a matter of minutes. Or so I thought.

Nineteen years old

I walk into my father's house with Preston behind me. "Not sure how I feel about going there," he informs me. "I mean, it's got potential, but I'm not sure it has enough to make me happy."

I roll my eyes, removing my jacket. We just got back from a week of looking at colleges, but it didn't matter. Because I'm not going to Stanford like my father wants me to. The only reason I went with Preston was to pacify him so he'll get off my back. He may want me to run the family business, but my father believes a man is nothing without a degree. Good thing I don't give two shits what he thinks anymore. Bunny is pregnant, and I'm gonna be a father. It's earlier than I had planned, but it's all I can think about. Me and her. Our child. My family. I'm gonna lie to my father and tell him I wanna stay here another year and help him out. He's not stupid. He'll know Bunny is the reason, but he'll allow it because he likes to show off to me and my brothers. Plus, Vaughn hasn't gone to college yet, and he's two years older than I am. He just hangs around like a fucking leech. So if my father tells me I need to go, then I'll question why Vaughn hasn't been forced to go.

As far as a career and a future, all that matters is that I'm with Bunny. I'd rather live with her in a box than in this mansion of filth.

My younger brother, Tristan, walks down the stairs. His hair a disheveled mess and all he wears is a pair of gray sweatpants. Our housekeeper's daughter walks behind him. He still fucks her. He says she's a good lay, but I think he's got a soft spot for her.

"Is Bunny upstairs?" I ask him.

His eyes meet mine when he hits the landing and frowns. "Not that I know of."

"Where is she?" I ask. I told him to watch over her while I was gone. I wanted her to go with me, but she didn't wanna miss a week of school.

"I don't know—"

"Last time I saw her was yesterday morning," she interrupts him. "We left for school, and she was in the kitchen talking to Vaughn. We offered her a ride, but she said she wasn't feeling well."

No surprise there. She's had morning sickness. I pull my cell out of my pocket and call her number. It goes straight to voicemail. "Hmm ..." I do it

again. By the third time of the same thing, I start to get nervous. “Bunny?” I call out, running up the stairs. “Bunny?” I enter my room to find it cleaner than how I left it, but again, no surprise. The maid cleans it. I walk into the bathroom and notice her toothbrush isn’t where it normally is.

Rushing out of my room, I run down the hall to the last room on the left to her door. “Presleigh?” I bark out, barging in. And my heart stops. The pink comforter and white sheets are stripped from the bed. All the drawers to her dresser are open and empty. “What the fuck? Presleigh?” I yell, and then I’m running again. Down the hallway, stairs, and to my father’s office. It’s empty. I shove open the door that leads to the cellar, and I jump down those stairs and run through the tunnel. I come to a stop when I see my father standing in the middle with Lance next to him. A woman lies on a table. Face down. She has bruises up and down her legs, and she bleeds from open cuts on her back. My presence cuts off whatever conversation my father and Lance were having and silence follows, letting me know that the girl must be sedated.

My heavy breathing is all that is heard. I take a step toward them. “Where is she?” I demand and immediately look around the cellar to see if she’s in here.

“Son ...”

“Where the fuck is she?” I shout.

Lance looks at my father. “You have to tell him.”

“Tell me what?”

My father turns to me. “She left, Avery.”

I start shaking my head. “She wouldn’t have just left. What did you do to her?” I shout.

“It’s true,” he says. “She left yesterday morning.”

I run a hand through my hair. She tried calling me yesterday morning, but I was asleep with the time difference. I tried calling her back, but she never answered. I didn’t think much of it and just figured she was in school. And then came home to sleep. She’s always tired. “No,” I say. “She wouldn’t—”

“Mitch was here,” he interrupts me, and I fist my hands at my side at the sound of his name. “He came over, and they talked for a little bit. Then she packed up her stuff ...”

“She’s not even eighteen,” I snap. “You can’t just let her leave.” She has to finish school.

“Avery ...”

“No!” I roar. “That’s not possible.” It doesn’t make any sense. I take a

step back and start dialing her number again. Straight to voicemail. She's shut it off.

My father pulls his phone out, and after pressing a few buttons, he holds it up for me to see. It's a video of her walking into the game room. She comes to a quick stop when she sees my brother Vaughn and Mitch playing pool.

"Hey, babe." Mitch greets her.

She takes a step back, her eyes widening for a brief second.

Vaughn laughs. "It's okay, Pres. Mitch told me your little secret."

"What ...?" Her wide eyes go back and forth between them.

Mitch tosses his pool stick onto the felt and then walks over to her. He grabs her face and presses his lips to hers. The video ends.

"She wouldn't do this ..." I swallow. "We are ..." I stop myself. No one knows. We didn't wanna tell anyone. It's our little secret.

"The baby?" Lance asks.

My head snaps up, and I stare at him in disbelief. "What did you just say?"

"The baby. Avery, I ... She had me ..." He stumbles, looking for the right word.

My father steps forward. "She had it aborted, Avery."

No. "She would never—"

"I did it," Lance interrupts me.

"What?" I ask, trying to understand what they are saying.

"I performed the abortion yesterday afternoon."

My chest tightens at his words. "She wouldn't ..." But how would they know about it? It was our secret. But it has to be ... my legs threaten to buckle, and my father places his hand on my shoulder.

"She didn't belong here, Avery. She didn't want to be with a man who was like her father." His words stab me in the chest. 'Cause she had said those words before. Not that way, but how many times did she beg me to help these poor, innocent girls, and I never did a fucking thing but play my part.

She left me with absolutely nothing but a broken heart. Of all people to hurt me, I never thought it would be Bunny.

I pull away from my father and grip my cell in my hand. "It was bound to happen, son," he says, handing me a whip. I hold the black leather in my hand and feel the weight. For years, I've played a part in hurting women. Even if I didn't physically hurt them, I never tried to save them. But for once in my life, I want to hurt someone. The only woman I've ever loved. Who just

fucking ruined me. While holding the whip in one hand, I dial her number one last time. But this time when it goes to voicemail, I don't hang up. Instead, I leave her a message.

PRESLEIGH

I wake up on the couch. I slept down here all night. After I poured my heart out to Chloe, I couldn't move. The weight of myself too heavy to even crawl. Sometime during the night, I remember opening my eyes to see Tristan pick Chloe up off the floor. Then I went back to sleep.

I roll over to face away from the couch and see Avery sitting on the opposite one, staring at me.

I sit up and push the messy hair from my face. He still wears the same bloody clothes from last night, and his eyes are red. His hair standing up every which way as if he's been running his hands through it. He doesn't look like he slept at all. And the stubble along his jaw tells me he hasn't shaved in days.

"I don't apologize," he says roughly.

I nod and stand. "I never expected one from you, Avery," I say and turn to walk away from him. Not wanting to be around him.

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry for what happened to you. I'm sorry I wasn't there for you. I'm sorry I didn't track you down and demand an explanation." I turn back around to face him. "But I don't apologize for watching the tapes."

"Avery—"

"I hated you, Bunny," he interrupts me with a growl. "I hated you so fucking much it hurt. The thought of you with another man drove me off the deep end, and I buried myself in anything I could find."

I swallow, knowing he means women and alcohol. I hate how jealous that makes me feel. And how mad it makes me. While I was mourning the loss of our child, he was out fucking random women.

"The thought that you didn't want me or our baby ... I wanted to hurt you," he admits shamelessly. "I had thoughts of finding you and hurting you. I didn't want any other man to find you attractive or to see your smile. And the fact that you had just ... aborted our baby and erased any part of us ..."

He lets out a long breath. "And I never once hated myself for those evil thoughts. Until now. When I found out what my father did to you."

I know what he means even if he doesn't say the words. "You're not like him."

"I'm exactly like him," he shouts, that anger coming so easy. "I took you. I forced you to ..."

"No, you didn't. I wanted you," I admit with shame, hanging my head. "I wanted you to fuck me. Begged for it. Still want it—"

"Stop saying that," he interrupts me. He sighs heavily and lifts his drink to his lips but thinks twice when he sees it's water. His jaw tightens, and he lowers it. "Then when I saw the tapes. I tried, Bunny. I tried so fucking hard not to watch them, but I wasn't strong enough. I had to see what he did to you. I wanted to hate myself. Needed to hate myself." He lifts his hands out wide. "What I've done to you. The things I've said ..."

"They were all true." I know he's talking about the way he called me a whore. How I begged him and other men to fuck me. I craved sexual attention even if I never liked it. I needed to know that men found me attractive. I needed to know that I was still wanted after Victor told me I would never be.

I'll make sure no other man ever wants you again!

Victor took everything from me, but I was still alive. I wasn't gonna let him control me until I died.

"Don't." He growls. "Don't fucking let me off the hook! I was terrible to you. And now ..."

"And now you know."

He runs a hand through his hair. "If I could go back."

"You can't change the past, Avery," I say softly. "I tried for so long."

"You should have told me."

"He would have killed me," I argue.

"You're dead anyway," he snaps.

"What?" I whisper, a chill falling over me.

His dark blue eyes meet mine, and they hold so much anger that I take a step back. "You've been dead ever since he touched you. I just haven't noticed it until now. But I'm gonna save you, Bunny. I'm gonna bring you back because I need you."

My breath picks up at his confession.

He walks over to me, placing his hand on my face, and gently rubs my cheek with his thumb. "I'm gonna slaughter them, Bunny. For you. I'm gonna put you on a fucking throne and lay them at your feet for what they did

to you.”

“Promise?” I ask.

The look in his red eyes is answer enough, but he speaks anyway. “I promise.”

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

AVERY

I NEVER MAKE PROMISES. Not since I thought she left me.

They're too easily broken. And I've always prided myself on my word, but this is something I know I can keep. This woman has been through hell because of me, and I plan on returning the favor to any man who did or plans to do her wrong.

I haven't slept in two days. Last night, I sat in my bed flooded with memories of our past and thought of what our future could have been if not for what my father did to her.

I fucking hated myself. For what he did to her. For what I did to her. I don't deserve her, but that doesn't mean I don't want her. "I love you, Bunny," I say softly.

She places her hands on my chest and whispers, "I love you too, Avery."

I wrap my free arm around her back and pull her to me. Her breath hitches, and I know what she is thinking. She wants me. I want her too. I never not wanted her. Not even after what I saw. I wanna show this woman I can be what she needs. Deserves.

She looks up at me and licks her lips nervously while we stand in silence. I lean my head down and run the tip of my nose along her jawline. Her arms wrap around my back, sucking me into her.

I pause, my lips hovering over hers. I haven't allowed myself to kiss her on the lips, not even once, because I knew I'd be done for if I did. I was trying to treat her like a slave. *How fucking stupid of me.* She has always been more than that for me.

She's been my anger.

She's been my love.

She had been my happiness.

And now she is gonna be my damnation. Because I am going to burn this world down for her. She deserves that much. And more. This woman has been through hell, and she's gonna stand by my side as I bring hell to all of

them. The devil will bow at the way I make them pay.

“Avery.” She whispers my name, bringing me back to her.

“Yes, baby?” I ask, rubbing my nose against hers. Our lips so close ...

Her body trembles against mine. “I want you,” she admits, and I hate the way her soft voice makes me hard. I shouldn’t think about fucking her. But I do.

I still feel him on top of me. I still feel his breath on me.

I want to erase any memory of my father from her soul. I want her to know I still want her. That whatever he was trying to do didn’t work. She’s always been mine and still is. I own her!

“I want you too, Bunny,” I say and then press my lips to hers.

She moans, parting her soft lips for me, and just like that, I’m lost.

My hands slide into her hair, and I tilt her head back, deepening the kiss. Her tongue meets mine, and I growl deep within my chest.

I tilt her head to the side, and our kiss grows frantic. Her nails dig into my back, and my hands tighten in her hair. I need her. I want to feel her. I want to take her.

I release her hair and grip her ass. My hands slide into her underwear and lift her off her feet. She wraps her legs around my waist, and I walk us toward my study. I don’t want to take her on my couch in case someone walks into the living room, but I don’t have the patience to make it to my bedroom.

We crash into the room, and I shut the door with my foot. I lay her on the couch and pull my lips away from hers just long enough to yank my shirt over her head.

She’s undoing my pants and shoving them down my legs while I remove my shirt. “Lie down,” I order roughly, and she does as I say on the couch. I grab the black lace material and yank them down her legs. Then I’m on top of her. My lips back on hers desperately. Her hands in my hair and pulling. I moan into her mouth. She whimpers into mine.

I reach between our bodies and run a finger over her pussy. She’s soaked.

She pulls away and sucks in a ragged breath. “Please,” she begs.

“I wanna taste you,” I say, my mouth watering just thinking about my head between her legs.

She shakes her head. “Please. Just fuck me.”

I can’t deny this woman anything. And I know I have the rest of our lives to spend between her legs, so I take my hard cock in my hand and push into

her. She arches her back; her lips part, and she gasps as I stretch her.

She's so fucking tight. I drop my face to the crook of her neck, and she runs her fingers down my back. The feel of them burning my skin makes me shiver. Then she's digging them into my ass, her silent plea for me to move.

I pull my hips back and then thrust forward. "Avery," she pants.

I reach back and grab her hands and pin them down to the couch above her head. She whimpers. "Is this what you want, Bunny?" I ask, roughly pulling out and then shoving my hips forward.

"Yes," she cries out, arching her back. "God, yes."

I release her hands and grab her breasts. I lean down and suck her hard nipple into my mouth, and she tangles her hands into my hair while she bucks her hips, meeting mine with each thrust. I lightly nibble on it, and she shudders underneath me.

I pull away and trail kisses across her chest to the other one and give it the same attention. Her back arches, her mouth open as she gasps, and her pussy is soaking wet. "Fuck, I've missed you so much," I say, panting. A thin layer of sweat has formed on my head and chest.

She opens her heavy eyes and looks up at me. Her hands cup my face, and my hips slow at the look in her eyes. They're so soft. They make her look so young. It's as if we've gone back in time to eleven years ago.

"I've missed you, Avery," she whispers softly, and I see tears start to glisten in her eyes.

And I fucking hate myself all over again for what I put her through. If I had just called her ...

"Don't ever leave me," she says.

My chest tightens, but I force a smile. "Never, Bunny." Then I lean down and capture her lips with mine while my hips go back to moving.

We lie on the couch in my study. I'm on my side with my back pressed into the cushion and she's lying on her back in front of me. Our breathing finally evened out, and her body quit shaking from the two orgasms I gave her. Her hair is wet from sweat, and we're both still naked.

She sits up. "Where are you going?" I ask even though I love the view of her ass—it no longer has marks from when I whipped her. And that thought

makes me flinch. Just another thing I did to her that should have never happened.

She doesn't answer as she walks over to my minibar and grabs the bottle of scotch. I arch a brow. "Isn't it a little early to drink?"

"Since when does it have to be late for you to have some scotch?"

I laugh and sit up when she comes back over to me. She sits down beside me and hands me the bottle. "Trying to get me drunk?"

"Yes."

"Why is that?"

She looks down at her hands in her lap. "I need answers, Avery. And I know you don't want to give them." Her eyes meet mine. "But I need to know."

I understand her need to know. It was like when I told her that I needed to know what happened to her. I lean over, placing the scotch on the floor. "What do you want to know?"

The fact I'm willing to tell her anything doesn't seem to relax her. She seems tenser than before. "What did my brother do?"

"He killed a man." Her eyes widen. "The guy who is after you, Damon, he wants you for revenge."

She swallows nervously as her big eyes search mine. "Does he own slaves?"

I nod. "And it doesn't help that he and your father were enemies."

She looks at the floor. "Why?"

I shrug, not really knowing that history. "Who knows? It could have been over anything."

Her eyes meet mine again. "Why did you save me?" she asks, and I flinch at her choice of words. I didn't save her. I put her in harm's way. "Why not just let him take me? You didn't owe me anything. I saw the look in your eyes in the bathroom at the club. You hated me."

I run a hand through my hair. When I decided to get her, I never thought we'd be at this point where I had to confess why. "I never stopped thinking about you," I admit roughly. "And then when I got the phone call that you were in danger, it wasn't even a question of what I had to do. But don't think I did it with good intentions." My eyes meet hers. "'Cause I didn't."

She nods as if that's enough. "Why did you bring me back here? When I found you in the bathroom, you asked about Preston. If you planned on taking me, why didn't you do it then?"

“At first, I just wanted to see you. I followed you five days before I cornered you in the bathroom, and I was so mad at you. Damon had men on you who had been watching you for months. And that night, I watched him take a picture of you with his phone. Then you went into the bathroom, and I couldn’t help myself. I needed to see you. I needed to feel you. Smell you. And I stood there shaking, waiting for you to exit the stall and then there you were.” I cup her face. “I loved that look of fear in your eyes. I loved that I still had some effect on you. I thought when you left me, you never looked back. Then the other night, when I took that guy from your house? He was Damon’s guy. He was there to take you.” Her eyes widen. “I wasn’t gonna allow that to happen.”

“Why didn’t you just tell me?” she asks softly.

“Would you have come with me? Willingly?”

She shakes her head. “You know I wouldn’t have been able to do that. That’s why your dad took me in the first place. Because I’m here with you.”

I run a hand down my face. “You should have told me. I could have protected you.” She shakes her head. “You have that little faith in me?”

“What would it have changed?” she asks.

“Everything!”

She fists her hands, and her eyes narrow on mine. “Yes, it would have been so easy for me to just come out and tell you that your father raped me and killed our baby eleven years ago.” I open my mouth, but she continues. “You wouldn’t give me any information as to why I was here. Why would I have been forthcoming with something that happened to me?”

“Us.” I growl. “That was our child.” She looks away from me and picks up the bottle of scotch from the floor. I stand from the couch and grab her free hand. She looks up at me with a go to hell look. “You went through hell. But I lost someone too. Not only our child, but my best friend. The love of my life.”

“Yes, it must have been so hard for you.” She yanks her hand free of my hold. “Getting over me by fucking as many women as possible.”

“Bunny ...” I growl.

“After what your dad did, I woke up in the hospital, and Lance told me I had been in a car accident. He told me that I had been in a coma for two weeks. I was going to survive, but I lost my baby.”

The car wreck? That had been in the report Kayn gathered. They lied to cover up what my father did to her.

“Your father was there. The moment I saw him, it all came crashing back to me, and he told me to never contact you again or he would kill me. His men took me to a hotel and dropped me off. It was under a fake name, and they had identification for me. They made sure I was in my room and left. I picked up my phone to call you, but I listened to my voicemail first.” She shakes her head. “I was going to call you and tell you what happened, but after the voicemail, I knew it would be pointless. But I tried anyway.” She jabs her finger into my chest. “I at least tried. All you did was change your number.” I wouldn’t have answered my old one. That’s the pathetic part. I was that fucked up over her leaving me. “I knew it was over, and I had to move on.”

She spins around, and I grab her arm, yanking her back to face me. Lifting my hand, I cup her face. “I never moved on.”

She lets out a long breath. “I never did either. When I saw you in that bathroom, everything came back, and then when you came to my house. And we ...” She swallows. “Even when you brought me here, I wanted to run. I tried.” She chuckles at her failed attempts. “But like I told you, you made me feel alive. Even though I knew my time was limited.”

I cup her face with both of my hands. “Bunny, no one is gonna touch you. Do you understand?”

“You can’t stop him ...”

“I can.”

She shakes her head softly. “He let me go, Avery.” I frown, not knowing what she means. “He told me that he knew you were coming for me with guns raised and an army.” She looks down to the bandage around her upper thigh. “I was a message.”

My body tenses at those words. “That’s what he said?” I clarify.

She nods. “A message that you can fuck me all you want, but you’ll never own me.”

I begin to pace my study.

“I can’t live my life in fear, Avery,” she says, sitting back down on the couch.

I stop and crouch in front of her. “You’re not going to,” I assure her.

“Let me help you catch him.” I tilt my head to the side. “Set him up. Let him take me again.” Fuck, she sounds like Tristan when he wanted to use her as bait to catch Damon.

“Absolutely not!” I snap, jumping to my feet. She just keeps coming up

with crazy ideas.

“I’m not afraid of him, Avery,” she says, standing and squaring her shoulders. “He can’t do to anything to me that he hasn’t already.”

“Don’t say that,” I growl. I know the man. There are plenty of other things he could do to her. All involve screaming and blood.

“I don’t want to be afraid. I don’t want to always be looking over my shoulder waiting for him to show up.”

“You’re safe here.”

“You may no longer see me as your slave, but I’m still a prisoner here.” She raises her hands out to her side.

“No, you’re not.”

She crosses them over her bare chest. “Can I go home this weekend? To New York?”

“Absolutely not!”

“See.” She sighs. “You say I’m not a prisoner, but I can’t leave the house. How fair is that?”

“Bunny—”

“Avery,” she growls, interrupting me.

We stand, staring at one another. Neither one of us backing down. Her eyes dare me to argue, and her body tells me to deny her. My eyes trail down her perfect round tits, and my cock starts to harden as I imagine fucking them. My eyes lower to her smooth pussy, and her inner thighs are still wet with our cum from earlier. Then I see the bandage around her thigh, and it reminds me of just how strong she is.

She steps to me, dropping her hands to her side. “How long will you keep me locked up here?” she asks softly.

I reach up and run my hand through her brown hair. “Forever, if I need to.”

She sighs heavily. “That is no way to live.”

“At least you would be alive.” I’d die if anything happened to her. I would take my own gun and end my life if I lost her again.

She pulls away from me, and my hands drop to my side. “I need more.” She fists her hands.

“I can give you anything you want.”

Her eyes narrow on me. “I want to leave.”

“Anything but that,” I say, shaking my head.

“I want to show him that I’m not afraid. I want to show him that no matter what he did to me, you still want me.”

“He knows that nothing he could do would keep me away from you.”

“Really? Because he told you I had an abortion and left with another man, and you believed him,” she snaps, getting angry. “And that lasted eleven years.”

“Stop.” I growl. “Things have changed.”

PRESLEIGH

He doesn't get it!

He doesn't understand what I want. All these years, I've been helpless, and now I know I need to stand up for myself.

I reach down and grab his shirt that I was wearing and put it on over my head.

“What are you doing?” he asks with a sigh.

I'm not sure if it's lack of patience or annoyance. And I don't care either way. Ignoring him, I grab my underwear and pull them up my legs. Then I make my way to the door. As I pull it open, his hand slaps it, slamming it shut, and he pins me against it.

“I asked you a question,” he growls, looking down at me with narrowed eyes.

“I'm leaving,” I snap. He starts shaking his head, and I arch a brow. “What are you gonna do? Tie me to my bed?” I ask, shoving my hand into his hard, bare chest. He doesn't budge. “Whip me?”

“Bunny,” he growls. “Don't fucking test me!”

“Maybe you're testing me,” I counter.

He leans into me, pressing my back into the door. I hitch in a breath when I feel his now hard cock against my lower belly.

He lowers his face down to mine, his nose tracing my jaw before dipping into the crook of my neck. His hands still flat against the door above me, caging me in.

I reach out and wrap my hand around the base of his dick. He jumps but doesn't pull away from me.

He lets out a moan as if he's pained. Then he speaks roughly into my ear. “I can't get the image of you tied to my bed out of my mind now.”

Wetness pools between my legs as my breathing picks up. “Avery,” I pant and begin to stroke his hardness. He just fucked me, and already I need more.

I've always been so dependent on this man. I'm not sure how I survived eleven years without him.

He removes his right hand from the door, and it slides down my ribs to my hip. His fingers are gentle but setting me on fire at the same time. He gives my hip a little squeeze before he reaches between my legs.

My head falls back to the door, and I pant when he slides a finger into me. "I think you have that image in your head as well," he says, and I can feel the smirk against my neck.

"I do," I admit shamelessly.

"And?" He slides another finger into me, his knees spread mine wide.

"And ..."

A knock on the other side of the door makes me jump, but Avery stays put, pinning me against it. "What?" he snaps.

"I need to talk to you." Tristan announces.

"Can't it wait?" he demands.

"No." There's a long pause. "It's about Vaughn."

Avery pulls away from me and slides on his pants. "Put that blanket around you." He gestures to the one over by the fireplace. I sit down on the couch and drape it over my legs since I'm not wearing any pants but have his shirt on.

Once Avery has his pants buttoned, he looks at me to make sure I'm presentable and then opens the door, sans shirt. "What is it?"

Tristan comes walking in, and I bite my lower lip nervously. It smells like sex in here. Not like he didn't already know what we were doing, but still. "We found him."

"Where?" Avery demands.

Tristan looks over at me and then back at Avery. "Manhattan."

Avery runs a hand through his hair, letting out a long breath. His shoulders are now tense. The gorgeous features on his face hardening. He turns to face me, and I push myself back into the couch at the look in his eyes. "Well, Bunny, looks like you get your wish after all."

"What wish?" Tristan asks, and I frown.

Yeah, what wish?

"We're going to New York."

"What?" I ask, sitting up straighter. "All of us?"

"Yes," Avery answers.

"No." Tristan shakes his head. "She can stay here with Chloe."

“No. She won’t,” Avery snaps.

“Yes,” he argues. “I will leave some men here—”

“Absolutely not!” Avery interrupts him. “I’m not letting her out of my sight again. Bring the men with us. We’ll need them.” Then he looks at me. “Go upstairs and pack a bag.”

Less than an hour later, we are in an Escalade SUV on the way to the airport. I bounce my right knee and bite my bottom lip nervously. I keep waiting for Avery to pull out the syringe to drug me. I can’t get on his plane without it.

I’ll freak.

The car comes to a stop, and he opens the door. “Wait,” I say in a high-pitch tone. Four sets of eyes turn to face me. Avery, Tristan, Kayn, and Chloe. I lock on Avery’s. “Aren’t you going to drug me first?”

He opens his mouth, but Chloe beats him to it. “Drug you?” she snaps and looks at him. “You drug her?”

Avery ignores her. “Not this time, Bunny.”

“But ...”

“Come on.” He reaches out and takes my hand, pulling me out of the SUV. And then we are walking toward his private jet.

“He fucking drugs her?” I hear Chloe shout from behind us while she talks to Tristan, but I tune them out.

I’m shaking. My legs feel heavy, and my throat tightens.

Avery slows his steps and presses his hand on my back, pushing me forward up the stairs to board the plane. With each step, I feel my heart pound harder. My breath comes quicker. I try to slow my steps, but his hand on my back pushes me as he forces me up the stairs.

I step into the plane and spin around to run off but slam right into him. He stands before me, blocking the only exit. “Avery ... please.” I squeeze my eyes shut.

“Look at me,” he orders, placing his hands on both sides of my face.

I slowly do and silently beg him to do it. He knows I hate to fly. “Are you punishing me?” I whisper and feel my eyes start to sting. For standing up to him in his office.

He frowns. “No.”

“Then why won’t you just give me ...?”

“No.” He growls the word this time, interrupting me.

“Avery ...” His lips crash to mine, silencing me. His hands leave my face, both sliding into my hair. They tighten, and goose bumps spread across my skin, causing me to gasp into his mouth. He tilts my head to the side and deepens the kiss. His tongue meeting mine with passion. My pussy tightens, and I moan as he pushes his hips into mine. He’s hard.

He pulls away, and I gasp for a breath. Placing his forehead on mine, he takes a deep breath. “Fuck, Bunny. I could kiss you for hours.”

“Don’t stop.” I rasp.

“Sir?”

He pulls away to turn around. Kayn had walked halfway up the stairs and is holding a black backpack. “The bag you requested.”

“Thank you,” he says and then turns back to face me. “Let’s go, Bunny.”

I choose a seat, and Avery promises to get me a drink. Maybe he’ll put something in it if I’m lucky. Chloe sits down across from me and looks around before leaning forward and whispering. “You *want* him to drug you?”

“I’m afraid of flying,” I admit.

She frowns. “It’s the safest way to travel.”

“Tell that to my parents.” She tilts her head to the side in confusion. “They died in a plane crash.”

Her green eyes soften with sadness. “I’m sorry for your loss.”

I look away from her ’cause I never gave my father’s death a second thought. The world got rid of an ugly man. He had once sold his soul to the devil, and he came for payment. My mother, however, did I miss her? Yes. But I think she too had done some unforgivable things. Avery used to tell me he was playing his part. I’m not sure if that’s what my mother was doing or not.

“Here.” She reaches out and grabs my hands as the engines roar to life.

I close my eyes and start to count to ten. When I get to five, I feel a hand on my shoulder, and I jump, my eyes springing open. I look up to see Avery standing next to me with a glass in his hand containing dark liquid. I take it and throw it back all at once. It makes me cough, but I hand it to him and order, “Another one.”

I don’t miss the fuck you look that Chloe gives him when he turns and walks away. “Are you excited to be going home?” she asks.

I look down at my hands knotted in my lap, my knees bouncing. “Yes. I

haven't spoken to my best friend in over three weeks."

"Why not?"

"I'm not allowed to use the phone," I tell her.

She exhales, showing her annoyance, and then pulls her cell out of her purse and hands it to me. I just stare down at it. "Go ahead. Call your friend."

I dial her number, and it rings once, then twice. I have no clue what time it is here, so I can't even decipher what time it is in New York. She answers on the fourth ring. "Hello?" she answers sleepily. I woke her up. Not surprised. She's like a freaking vampire. Sleeps all day, runs all night.

"Alex."

"Who is this?" She yawns.

"It's me. Presl—"

"Presleigh!" she interrupts me. "What the fuck, bitch? Where the hell have you been? I've been looking for you."

"I'm in Vancouver." I finally found this out last night when I spoke to Chloe. She seems to be the only person willing to tell me anything.

"What? No way." She pauses. "You don't even have a passport."

If only that is all it would have taken to keep me out of Canada. "Long story."

"When are you coming home?" she asks, and I feel my chest tighten. *Home?* I'm not sure I can consider that place I hid a home anymore.

"We're about to takeoff."

"Takeoff?" she asks confused. "As in take off in a plane?"

"Yeah." I begin to chew on the end of my nails.

"Presleigh, are you high?"

"No."

"Did you smoke some PCP again?" she asks concerned. "You know that shit is bad for you."

"I'm sober." Then I think of the drink Avery just gave me and the next three I'm about to have. "For now, anyway."

She sighs heavily. "Where are you flying into? I'll meet you there."

I look around the spacious and expensive air craft. "I'm not sure. I'm on a private jet ... I don't think it's going to land at JFK ..."

"Frankford," Chloe says.

"What?" I ask, looking at her.

"I overheard Tristan telling one of his men we are flying into Frankford. It's a private airfield."

I nod and mouth a thank you. “Frankford.”

“Where the hell is that?” Alex asks.

“I don’t know. You’ll have to Google it.” I smile even though I feel the plane start to taxi, and my heart race. “Don’t tell anyone I’m in town. Okay?”

“Presleigh. Everyone has been worried sick about you.”

“Please, Alex?” I beg. “Just keep it a secret. I’ll ...” I take a deep breath when the plane picks up speed. “I’ll explain everything when I get there. Just come alone and don’t tell anyone.”

She sighs but finally agrees. “Fine.”

I smile. “I’ll see you soon ...”

The phone is ripped out of my hand, and my head snaps up to see Avery standing beside us. Chloe’s phone is now in his hand, and he terminates my call. “Hey!”

“Who the hell were you speaking to?” he demands.

“Alex ...”

“Where the hell did you get this?” He holds up the phone gripped in his hand.

“It’s mine,” Chloe answers, snapping at him.

Tristan plops down beside her. “Why the hell would you give her a phone? She’s not allowed to talk to anyone.”

Before she can answer him, Avery yanks me up by my arm and shoves me down the small aisle, and then we’re entering another room. It’s the same tiny bedroom Darrell shoved me into when he drugged me. He spins me around, and his eyes glare down at me like he wants to murder me. “You should have never called him.”

“Is that what this is? You’re jealous?” His jaw sharpens. “For your information, he is a she. And *she* is my best friend.”

“I don’t want anyone knowing you’re back in New York.”

“Then you should leave me in Vancouver,” I snap.

He steps into me. “Are you gonna make this difficult, Bunny?”

“Goddamn right, I am,” I growl back.

He glares down at me, and I can feel my feet vibrate from the plane’s engines. I want to reach out and grab him for stability but refrain. I refuse to show weakness anymore.

The corner of his lips lifts, and a cruel smile spreads across his face. It makes my stomach do flips. Or that could be the fact I’m on a plane about to take off.

“Okay, then. If that’s what you want, then that’s what we’ll do.”

His hands grip my hips, and he pulls me to him. He’s still hard. I bite my bottom lip to keep from whimpering out loud.

“Are you gonna throw me on this bed and handcuff me to it?” My mind is going through every scenario where he keeps me in one place. Where no one can get to me and I can’t get away.

He lowers his head and runs his lips along my jaw. And I break out in goose bumps. “Is that what you want?” His voice has dropped to a rough growl, and my legs tighten.

“No.” My voice is barely a whisper.

“Liar.” His hand comes up and grips a handful of my hair and yanks my head back. I moan.

I feel my body sway, and then I’m falling backward. My lips part, and I let out a squeal in surprise. He grabs me and spins us around, slamming my back into the wall. His body presses into mine. “Oh, God.” I gasp.

“You’re okay,” he assures, pinning me to the wall.

I close my eyes when I feel the plane leave the ground, climbing high into the sky. “I need a drink.” My voice shakes with nervousness.

“As soon as we level out, I’ll get you one.”

I nod quickly, and my hands fist his button-down.

“Bunny, I ...” he pauses.

“What?” I ask, looking up at him, trying to ignore my racing heart.

“Nothing.”

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

AVERY

I ALMOST SAID YOU'RE OKAY. That I would never put you in a situation that could possibly harm you. But she would only see it as a lie although it would be the truth. Now. Things are different between us. I just hope she can see that.

The plane starts to shake a little, and her blue eyes widen in fear. I grab the back of her neck and kiss her just as I did earlier. I press my lips to her and force her to open for me. Her body is stiff, her kiss weak. I take her hands and place her arms around my neck, and then I grip her right thigh and lift it to wrap around my hip. And I deepen the kiss, pushing her head back, my tongue crashing with hers. She releases a small moan into my mouth, but it's not enough. My free hand reaches between her legs and slides into her black yoga pants. Pushing her thong to the side, I run my finger over her pussy. Teasing.

She rips her lips from mine and pants. "Avery ..."

"What, Bunny?"

Her eyes are tightly closed, and her fingers grip my hair. She's afraid still, but she's trying not to show it. "Please ..."

I rip her from the wall and toss her onto the bed, and she yelps in surprise at the sudden movement. Before she can say another word, I have her yoga pants yanked down her hips, and my slacks unzipped.

I sit with my brother and Kayn at the front of my jet. I have clear line of sight of Bunny sitting in the back by the minibar with Chloe. She's made her three drinks since we came out of the bedroom.

"He was staying at a hotel in Manhattan but was spotted at a night club over in Queens," my brother informs us.

I look away from Bunny to him. “When?”

“Last night. He closed it down and then stumbled out of the club with a woman.”

“Do we know where they went?”

He shakes his head. “No. But I guess this is his new favorite hangout.”

I rub my chin. “It’s gotta be a ploy.”

“How do you figure?” Kayn asks.

“He takes Bunny, then when we find her, he takes off to New York?” I shake my head. “He hates that city. He’s setting us up for something.”

“How do we find that out?”

My eyes go back to hers when I hear her laugh. She has her head thrown back, and she looks ... happy. For the first time in the three weeks she has been with me, she actually looks like her old self. I know it’s help from the alcohol, but I find myself drawn to the way she looks now. She reminds me of that girl I fell in love with all those years ago. And I smile, looking back at the men. “We let him think he’s got us.”

“Like you did when you allowed Preston to take you?”

“Something like that?” I mumble.

“What the hell happened to him anyway?” Kayn asks. “You gave him a month. Have you heard anything from him?”

“Nope. Not one word.”

My brother sighs. “Maybe he’s on the run.”

“Possibly.” I take a sip of my drink. “Or maybe he bled out and died.”

Tristan grunts. “We wouldn’t get that lucky.”

By the time we land in New York, Bunny is hammered. Just like all those nights I followed her from club to club before I took her. I know this because she didn’t even flinch when the plane touched down on the ground. And she won’t stop laughing. I don’t know what she and Chloe have been talking about, but it’s worked. I must admit I’m not fond of Chloe, but she seems to have become a friend of hers. And she could use a few of those.

“Here,” I say, grabbing Bunny’s hand and helping her down the stairs to exit my aircraft.

She grips it tightly and looks over at me. “Where ... are we going ...?” She

hiccup.

“Well—”

“Pres?” A woman’s shriek interrupts what I was about to say.

Bunny removes her hand from mine and stumbles down the steps before running onto the tarmac. “Alex!” she shouts.

A blonde dashes toward her in a short red skirt and a white shirt that looks like it’s about to fall off her shoulders. Once they reach one another, they hug, and the Alex chick picks Bunny off her feet and spins her around. “Fuck, I’ve missed you,” the blonde tells her.

For a moment, I feel guilty for taking her from her friends. But honestly, she didn’t seem to have any when I followed her around during my short stay in New York. Or maybe my rage for her back then blinded me from everything but her.

“Me too,” she slurs.

“Are you drunk?” she asks, pulling away. Then her smile falls. “What the hell happened to you?” she demands, placing her hands on Bunny’s shoulders.

“Long story.”

“Well, good thing we have plenty of time for you to fill me in.” She reaches up and runs the pads of her fingers over Bunny’s neck. It’s healing, but the wounds are still visible.

“Actually, we don’t,” I inform this woman.

Her blue eyes narrow on mine. “Who the hell is this?” she demands.

Bunny places her arm over her shoulders and spins her around so both of their backs face me. “Avery—”

“*The* fucking Avery?” she interrupts her. “The fucking Avery we hate?”

I fist my hands, and I hear Chloe laugh from beside me. I already know she hates me. Now she has a new member to add to her club.

PRESLEIGH

My lips are numb, and my limbs heavy, but I feel pretty damn good inside. And proud of myself. It took quite a bit of alcohol, but I managed to fly without needing to be put under or having a meltdown. Considering how much I’ve been losing when up against Avery these past few weeks, I’ll take that small win.

I climb into the back of a limo that awaits us, and I drag Alex in with me.

“Don’t you have a ride to catch?” Avery asks her when she follows.

“Took an Uber to get here.” Her answer is clipped, and I giggle. “I’m not leaving my girl.”

God, I’ve missed her so much. She’s the only real friend I’ve ever had. I met her at a bar a couple of years after I lost Avery. After I lost everything. She’s the only person I’ve ever opened up to. It took three bottles of wine and a truth or dare game for us to reveal our deepest, darkest secrets. Hers are just as black as mine, but in a different way.

She made me feel like I wasn’t alone in this world. And we’ve been inseparable ever since.

“I’m so glad you’re back,” she exclaims, holding my hand out from beside me.

“She’s not back.” Avery growls.

Tristan and Chloe fall into the back with us, and I hear the front door open and close as Kayn climbs in.

“What do you mean you’re not back?” she demands, looking at me.

I have no fucking clue what’s going on, to be honest. Avery has proven time and time again that I’m just along for the ride.

“If you’re not here to stay, then why come home at all?”

“I have business to attend to,” he replies flatly even though she wasn’t talking to him.

“You mean you have someone to kill,” Chloe snaps.

“What the hell?” Alex demands. “What the hell have you gotten yourself into, Pres?” She grips my wrists tightly in her hand, and through the fog of alcohol, the pain makes me hiss in a breath. They’re still tender from the cuffs I wore for two days straight. Her eyes fall to look and then she lets go of me. “What the fuck ...?” Midsentence, she stops and lunges across the limo for Avery. But she’s not fast enough because Tristan reaches out and grabs her by the hair, yanking her back. She cries out, and Chloe begins to hit Tristan on the back. Avery doesn’t even move.

“Enough!” Avery barks out.

Everyone seems to freeze where they are, and I arch a brow at him as if to ask what he’s gonna do. Hurt her? Kill her?

He seems to understand my stare and runs a hand through his hair. “Let her go, Tristan.”

Alex shoves him off her, finding her place back beside me. “Who the hell

are you people?” she shouts.

“Alex ...”

“No, Pres!” she screams, interrupting me. “You just disappear out of nowhere for three weeks, and you return with your high school sweetheart who ruined you.” She looks at him with disgust. He sits there, his hands in his lap unaffected. “And you’ve obviously been abused.” Her eyes are back on mine. “Do you have Stockholm syndrome?”

He actually laughs at that.

“You *have* kept her against her will,” Chloe chimes in.

“Chloe!” Tristan snaps.

Alex gasps at her words. They all begin to argue. Alex is screaming, and Chloe is arguing with Tristan. I hang my head and rub my temples. Closing my eyes, I try to take a deep breath. I had too much to drink. Maybe two too many. “Just stop,” I tell them. But it’s not loud enough. Their shouts mix with my ringing ears. My teeth clench and my body leans to the left as the limo takes a sharp turn. “Just stop.”

“No,” I hear Alex snap. “I’m not letting you do this to yourself ...”

“Shut up!” I shout, lifting my head. The limo falls silent. Taking in one deep breath after another, I open my eyes. “Just. Shut. Up,” I growl. “I just want to go one day without arguing. Without having to fight with myself or anyone else.”

Everyone just stares at me. I focus on Avery sitting across from me. His right ankle on his left knee and arms crossed over his chest. “Do you have a plan?” He nods once. “Does it involve me in anyway?”

He shakes his head and finally speaks. “Tristan, Kayn, and I will handle it.”

“What about me ...?”

“Tristan’s men will be with you and Chloe.” He ignores the fact that Alex is with us. But for all I know, they could not be planning on going after Vaughn until days from now.

“Where?” Chloe asks.

“A safe place,” he answers simply, not removing his blue eyes from mine.

“What if I tell you I wanna help?” I argue. “Vaughn ...”

“I’ll tell you absolutely not.” His reply is instant.

I huff. “I could be useful.”

“You’d only be a hinder,” he counters. “Vaughn wouldn’t think twice. And I refuse to have a repeat of what happened. I want you protected at all times

and out of his sight.”

“Who the hell is Vaughn?” Alex asks, her voice softer than before.

When telling her my past, I never mentioned Vaughn because I never knew he was behind the scenes. I mean, I knew he was bad news, but I never thought he would go as far as to record what their father did to me. And then how he treated me when they kidnapped me.

“Our older brother,” Tristan answers.

She frowns. “Why are you all looking for him?”

Avery’s eyes finally meet hers, and he matches her look of disgust. “Because he is the one who hurt Bunny.”

We come to a stop and get out one by one. I’m the last one to exit. I step onto the rock driveway and look up at the ... what I can only think of is a hotel. Most of the front is made of big windows. But they’re tinted, making them look black in the night. The building is a dark red brick and looks to be five stories. Not sure, my count is a little off since my sight is a little blurry. “What is this place?” I ask.

“Mine,” Tristan answers.

“Is it a hotel?”

“No.”

I stumble on the driveway, and Avery grabs my hand, pulling me forward up the white rock stairs. They’re uneven, and even in my Chucks, I manage to stumble a little. The alcohol still lingers more than I would like. Now that the flight is over, I want my drunkenness to clear as well.

The large glass door swings open, and a man stands before us in a black and white tuxedo. He bows to Tristan. “Master.”

I snort, and the sound bounces off the tan walls and shiny black floors. Everyone ignores me.

“Are all the rooms set up?” Tristan asks the poor man.

“Yes, Master,” he assures him.

Tristan nods. “Thank you, Ralph.”

I tug on Avery’s button-down. “Why can’t we stay at my house?”

“It’s not safe,” he replies.

“I don’t think she’s safe anywhere around you.” Alex gives him another

jab, but like the man he is, he ignores her well.

Tristan looks at her but speaks to Ralph. "Show Alex to her room."

Her brows rise. "My room?"

"Unless you plan on going?"

She looks at me. Her eyes run over my faded bruises and then back at Tristan. "I'll stay." She says it like I'm in danger here. When, in fact, this is the safest place for me to be at the moment.

I close my eyes and place my hand over my mouth to cover a yawn. The day is catching up with me.

"Come on, Bunny." Avery pulls me forward, and my shoes slap on the floor. Too heavy to pick up and my eyes too tired to stay open.

He takes me down a hallway and then pushes open a door. I step inside the bedroom and look around when he switches the light on. It's big and extravagant. But that's what I expect when it comes to Tristan. He and Avery were always alike.

I fall onto the king-size bed. The fluffy dark brown comforter swallows me up. The bed dips, and I open my heavy eyes to see Avery now sitting beside me. His hand caresses my cheek. "How do you feel?"

"Good." I give him a drunken smile and close my eyes again.

Then I feel his lips on my forehead. "Get some rest."

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

AVERY

I SHUT OFF THE LIGHT AND close the door, allowing her some sleep.

“Can I get you anything Mr. Decker?” Ralph, my brother’s butler, asks me.

“No, thank you.”

He turns to walk away but stops and faces me. “Your brother wants to speak to you. He is in his study.” Then he disappears.

I remove my suit jacket and walk up the stairs to his second floor. I don’t know why he wanted his office up here. I tried to tell him it would be better on the first, but he never listens to anything I say.

Coming up to the landing, I take a right and enter the second door on the left. He sits behind his desk. “You wanted to see me.”

“Yes, I ...”

“You’ve been ignoring my calls, Avery.” A voice announces from the speakerphone on his desk.

My eyes narrow on my brother’s. He tricked me. “I’ve been busy.”

“With Presleigh?”

I say nothing.

Tristan leans forward, placing his elbows on his desk. “Sir, we just arrived in New York.”

“To get Preston?” our boss asks.

“Other business,” I answer, sitting down across from his desk.

He sighs heavily. “Avery, I don’t know what you’re doing, but it’s not your fucking job.”

I stand from my seat and walk over to the desk and place my fisted knuckles on the cool surface. “What I’m doing does not concern you.”

“That’s the problem!” he snaps. “Tristan, is Presleigh fogging his mind? You had a chance at Damon, and you passed on it. Does she need ...?”

“Don’t fucking say it!” I roar, interrupting him. “I’ll do whatever needs to be fucking done when I’m ready to do it.” I pick up the phone and slam it down, terminating the conversation. Then I begin to pace the room.

Tristan's chair squeaks when he leans back in it. "He has a point. We've gotten off target."

"We're just fine."

"Just as you gave Preston a deadline, we've been on one too. And we're months over it."

"I'm aware ..."

"It's not about the money. But you know it needs to be done."

"I know!"

"Then what do you propose we do?"

I come to a stop and stare at my younger brother. He sits in his seat, his arms crossed over his chest. He has a black button-down on with black slacks. His dark hair is slicked back, and his blue eyes on mine. He's nothing like me. He hides his emotions well. Growing up, Victor always knew I was angry and resented him. Even though Tristan felt the same way, he never showed it. He always did his own thing, and it drove Victor mad. He hated that he couldn't control him. He didn't have anything to hold over his head because Tristan just didn't give a fuck. Victor tried to break him so many times—he has the physical scars to prove it—but he never did. I looked up to my younger brother. Where I tried to play my part before it came time to leave, my brother would spit in our father's face while he whipped him.

"Avery?" he snaps.

I blink. "What?"

He frowns up at me. "Go get some sleep. We can discuss it tomorrow."

"No. I'm fine." I shake my head and sit back down. "What were we talking about?"

"A plan? You were about to tell me what we are gonna do?"

I sigh and undo the top two buttons of my shirt. "I'm not sure."

"Look ..." He pauses, and I know I'm not gonna like what he is about to say. "Maybe he was right. If you need to step back ..."

"I'm fine."

"Avery, I understand you are worried about Presleigh. Hell, I'm worried about Chloe, and she isn't even involved. But I can handle this if you need to take time off ..."

"Absolutely not!"

He sets his mouth in a hard line. A knock comes on the door, and he calls out, "Come in."

Kayn enters, shutting the door behind him. He just stands there. "What do

you need?” I growl.

“I called him in here,” Tristan announces.

“Why?” I ask.

“Because you need ...”

“If you tell me I need to step back, I will knock your fucking head off,” I warn.

He throws his hands up. “I don’t know what to fucking do,” my brother snaps. “I’m trying to fucking help you.”

“I don’t want ...”

“My help.” He finishes my sentence. “I get you don’t want my help, but that doesn’t mean you don’t need it. Fuck, Avery.” He jumps to his feet. “You’re pushing Presleigh to seek help, but what about you?” I snort at his question. “You find out the love of your life was raped by our father. And that he fucking killed your child. And I don’t care what you say; I know that has to affect you.”

“Of course, it has,” I snap. “But that doesn’t mean I’m gonna walk away.” I stand and point a finger at him. “You told me in my office that you would stand by me.”

“That’s what I’m doing.” He hangs his head, and the room falls silent. When his eyes meet mine, I feel a pain in my chest at the way he looks at me. I know what he is about to say, but I pray he doesn’t. “You were there for me when no one else was, Avery. You saved me from the man who was supposed to protect us. I finally have the chance to help you, but you won’t let me.”

“It’s too dangerous for you. There is a reason we keep you behind the scenes.”

“But that’s not where I belong,” he argues. “Not anymore.” Shaking his head, he squares his shoulders. “It’s time we let them know they fucked with the wrong people.”

Even though I’ve never come out and said it, I’m proud of my little brother. In a world full of evil, he managed to be one of the good guys. A man who wants to rescue the helpless no matter the consequences. I nod. “What do you want to do?”

He gives me a smile. “I wanna make a call.”

I sit behind my brother's desk, my hands folded in a prayer position on the wood. My brother stands at the front of the room, hidden underneath the TV that hangs above him. Kayn sits to the right of me on a couch. The TV before me comes on, and I sit back in my seat when the man comes into view.

"Hello, Avery," Damon greets me. "I heard you got your toy back." My teeth grind. "Hate to say, but I'm a little jealous."

"You told me to call you." Even though he text me that a while ago. "What about?" I ask him.

"You know what I want. Your slave."

I say nothing.

He smiles at my silence. "I've decided to offer you ..."

"She's not for sale."

"You keep saying that. But I have a surprise that may change your mind."

He stands in a room with black padded walls. Chains of various lengths hang on the wall behind him. And a spanking bench is to his right. A man comes to stand beside him, and my entire body stiffens at the sight of him. I haven't seen him in almost eleven years. Just the thought of him makes my heart race. Now the sight of him makes my skin crawl.

"Son. It's been a long time."

"Don't call me that." My voice doesn't waver like I expected it too.

Victor chuckles. *What the fuck is he doing with Damon?* Did he know that we would call? This was Tristan's idea. He wanted me to find out what it was that Damon wanted. I already knew before I made the call.

Damon slaps Victor on the back. "You know, Avery, your father showed me the tape of what he did to your little *Bunny*. I must say, that is why I'm offering you the extra for her."

My hands fists, my nails digging into my palms. *How many people have seen that tape of Victor raping her?*

"And I must say the fact that you and your brother Tristan set her up at the party was genius. I almost believed that you wanted to treat her like a slave."

My eyes go to Tristan, and his are full of rage. When did he find out that we were brothers? Did my father tell him? Bunny said that Victor told her we set her up. Had Damon known all along?

"And I appreciate you calling your dogs off while I was at your house. I went there intending to give you a reason not to kill me. Looks like her mom was enough."

I slowly stand from the desk. "How did you ...?"

“Did you really think I’m that stupid?” He shakes his head. “I’m not like that little bitch Preston who allows men to play him.” He tilts his head to the side. “Speaking of him, do you know where he is? I still owe that fucker revenge for the death of my brother.”

My lips pull back in a smirk. “Right? He killed him, didn’t he? Guess he was smarter than your bother. Since he was able to take him out.”

His face tightens, but Victor laughs at my statement as though I was being funny.

“Bring her,” Damon calls out.

Tristan comes out from underneath the TV and turns to watch it. Kayn stands from his seat and we all stare as a man shoves a woman into view. Victor grabs her hair and shoves her down to her knees. She looks up at the camera, and my stomach drops when I see it’s Bunny’s mother. There are no tears in her eyes. Just madness. I’m surprised she hasn’t given in. Twelve years is a long time to endure torture. I saw girls turn to nothing within days, even hours under my father’s ruthless soul. She’s strong. Just like my Bunny.

Damon walks out of sight for a second only to return with a knife. The same kind that I removed Bunny’s brand with. He lifts it and spins it around. “Final chance, Avery. Give me Presleigh or watch her mother die.”

My eyes go to the woman, and I watch her fight her restraints. I can’t see her hands, so they must be tied behind her back. She’s naked. Her body covered in fresh bruises and what seem to be old scars from the many beatings she has taken over the years. Her bones protrude due to starvation, and her skin is pale. In a way, I feel I may be doing her a favor. Because her torture is about to end. She stops fighting for a brief second and gives her head the slightest shake. She doesn’t want me to trade her daughter’s life for hers. She’s ready to face her fate. Hell, she’s probably wished for it for years now.

My eyes meet Damon’s. “Do it.”

He glares at me and bares his teeth. My father yanks her head back, and Damon slices the knife against her neck, one end to the other, cutting her open like a fish. Her body jerks, and she makes a gurgling sound before the blood starts to run and cover the front of her. Victor shoves her forward, and her lifeless body hits the floor with a thud.

I watch Damon clean the blade off on his dark gray slacks. My father looks at me. “You know, Avery, we could be great friends. There is so much I know that you don’t.” Victor laughs at his words. “Have you ever stopped to

think about how you got in this situation to begin with?”

I don't respond. Still too numb. I killed her mother. I did it to save her, but that doesn't make me feel any better.

“You blamed Darrell for what happened to Presleigh, but you never stopped to ask how he got involved.” My father reaches over taking the knife from Damon and holds it up. He looks over it as if it has some secret message scribbled on it. “You're smarter than this, Avery.” His eyes meet mine again. “I raised you better than this.” Then the screen goes black.

Silence fills my brother's study. My heart pounds, and my breathing is erratic. He's fucking with me. He has to be. He doesn't know as much as he thinks he does. If so, then that means I have another rat. But who could it be? Should I just kill them all?

“Son of a fucking bitch!” Tristan yells, interrupting the deafening silence. He then picks up a glass jar that sits on a shelf and chunks it at the TV, shattering it into millions of pieces. “Fuck!” he roars and spins around. “What the fuck was that?” he asks me as if I know. “He killed her ...”

“She's been dead for a long time,” Kayn says roughly.

“You didn't do anything.” He glares at me.

I open my mouth, but nothing comes out.

“You just stood there!”

With my mouth still open, I have nothing to say to that. I can't argue the fact that her mother's death is on my hands.

“What did you want him to do?” Kayn asks Tristan.

“Fucking something,” he snaps. “Offer money ...”

“He wouldn't have taken it.” I'm finally able to whisper.

“You don't know that!” he screams.

“I know that he wanted Bunny!” I find my voice. “And I'm not going to give her up for anything. It was your fucking idea to call him!” I add.

“For you to make a deal. We have a job to get done.”

“There was no deal to be made!”

He rushes over to me and bumps his chest into mine. “Don't, Tristan. You won't win this fight,” I warn. I could kill a million men right now.

“Guys!” Kayn steps between us and shoves us apart. The back of my legs hits the desk. Tristan falls into a chair and bows his head, running his hand through his hair in frustration. “You're looking at this wrong. There is someone out there we need to take care of.”

“Damon,” my brother snaps.

Kayn ignores him and looks at me. “Who knew that you had Presleigh?”

“My men and Tristan.” I point at him. “Maybe you’re the one who is fucking me over. You wanted me to kill her, after all.”

He jumps up and storms over to me like he’s gonna hit me but Kayn grabs him and shoves him back again. “Fuck you, Avery!”

“Someone else had to have known,” Kayn insists.

I shake my head. “No. I had you and the guys pick her up ...” My words trail off.

“What?” Kayn demands.

I stare at the floor, remembering that night that I had him take her and bring her to Vancouver. It hits me like a fucking fist to the face. I never gave it a second thought until now. Now I’m able to understand my mistake.

“What is it?” Tristan demands.

I look at him, and he’s breathing heavy. His eyes narrowed, hands fisted down by his sides. And I understand his anger. Once again, I’m at fault. Everything that has led up to this point is on my shoulders, and I hate to have to admit that. “I know who got Darrell to turn on me.”

PRESLEIGH

I open my heavy eyes and roll over in the darkness. I reach out my hand, finding I’m alone in bed. I sit up and rub my sleepy eyes. I’m not as drunk as I was when I passed out, but I’m definitely not sober just yet.

Getting out of the bed, I use the restroom and then head out of the bedroom in search of Avery. How long have I been out? And why hasn’t he come to bed yet? He has to be tired. I don’t think the guy ever sleeps.

I don’t know where I’m going or where anything is in this unfamiliar place, so I walk around aimlessly, turning on lights here and there but only finding more empty rooms. So much wasted space. Making my way up the stairs, I hear voices coming from behind a closed door. I walk over to it and knock twice. The voices come to a stop, but I don’t dare open it. Instead, I wait for someone to say come in. But no one does. After a few long seconds, the door opens, and I come face to face with a pissed-off Tristan. Without saying a word, he exits the room and storms past me.

I step in to find Kayn leaning up against a wall and Avery leaning against a desk. I clear my throat when they just stand there staring at me. Both have

that look of hatred in their eyes. I swallow nervously.

“Give us a minute.” Avery finally speaks to Kayn but doesn’t take his eyes from me.

He too exits without a word. Kayn closes the door and then silence again. I cross my arms over my chest. I’m still dressed in the clothes I put on back in Vancouver, but all of a sudden, I feel like I’m naked. Exposed. Avery has a way of making me feel that way.

“Will you come to bed?” I ask softly.

“Not tired,” he replies flatly.

“Avery, I ...”

“Go to bed, Bunny,” he orders, pushing off the desk and walking behind it to sit down.

Instead of getting mad at his bossiness, I walk around the desk and come to a stop between it and him. I jump up to sit on it and reach out to touch his cheek. He pushes it off.

“Not in the mood.”

I don’t give up. “You make it all stop.”

He looks up at me, his blue eyes clouded and brows pulled together.

“The memories, the nightmares. When I’m with you, you make it all fade to black. Sometimes it feels like it never happened. Like we were never apart,” I say honestly.

“It did happen. And we were.”

I sigh at his words. “I don’t know what’s wrong, but I can fix it.” Leaning forward, I start to unbutton his shirt.

He grips my wrists, and I hiss in a breath just like I did in the limo when Alex did earlier. “I’m not in the fucking mood, Presleigh!” he snaps.

“Avery, I ...”

He grabs my arm and yanks me off the desk and drags me over to the door. Opening it up, he yanks me down the stairs, and I have flashbacks of when he did the very same thing and took me to his dungeon at his home in Vancouver.

“Kayn?” he barks out once we hit the first floor.

He appears from down the hall with Tristan right beside him. “Sir?” he asks coming up to us.

He shoves me forward into Kayn. “Change of plans. Take her back to Vancouver!”

“What?” I gasp, turning around to face him. “No ...”

“Bringing you here was a mistake,” he says, looking down at me with disgust.

“What?” My heart begins to race. What the hell happened while I was taking a nap?

“What is going on out here?” I hear Alex ask from behind us.

I ignore her. “Avery, please ...”

“Take her back! Now!” he yells at Kayn.

I catch Tristan crossing his arms over his chest. He glares at me satisfied with Avery’s decision. What the hell? “I’m not going anywhere,” I argue.

“You’ll go wherever I send you!” he shouts.

I reach up and slap him across the face. And just like before, he slaps me back. Hard. It knocks me off my feet and onto my ass.

“Presleigh!” Alex shrieks and falls to her knees beside me. “Jesus. Are you okay?” she asks in a rush, cupping my cheek.

But I ignore her and the stinging of my face. Instead, I stare up at the man who has put me through hell and also saved me from it. I’m confused and heartbroken. “What did I do?” My voice breaks at the question because I’m not sure I want the answer.

Instead of answering, he does something worse. He turns his back on me and walks away. I jump to my feet. “What did I do?” I shout this time. He doesn’t stop leaving the room. I go to run after him, but Alex grabs my arm, yanking me to a stop. “Remember what happened last time you sent me away?” My body shakes at my words. The memory of waking up cold and alone thinking he was punishing me. Only to find out it was my biggest fear come to life. All because of him.

He comes to a stop and spins around to face me.

“You owe me an explanation,” I shout, yanking my arm free from Alex. “You owe me everything!” My voice bounces off the walls with anger. Betrayal. At this point, I can’t tell the difference between them anymore.

He places his hands behind his back and squares his shoulders. “I owe you nothing, Presleigh.” My stomach drops at the use of my name and flatness of his voice. Then he looks at Kayn. “Take her back.” He turns once again, and this time, he doesn’t stop or yell. He just walks away as if I never meant a fucking thing to him.

This time, I willingly fall to the floor, my knees unable to hold me up any longer.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

AVERY

I LOOK DOWN AT MY phone when it vibrates.

Kayn: *Same.*

He's responding to the message I sent him earlier asking how Bunny is doing. I don't respond. No need to. She's not eating. Not talking to anyone. She's also not sleeping much. At least Alex is with her. When Kayn told me that she wanted to follow, I didn't deny her.

The truth is, I didn't want her to go, but I had no choice. I knew who the culprit was, and I knew what I needed to do. She needed to be as far away from me as possible because I'm willing to die to make sure she is safe. There's always the chance I'll die, and Kayn promised he'd protect her with his life if that is the case.

Tristan and our boss were right. She was clouding my head. My judgment. I needed her gone. But the roles have reversed. She was no longer my slave, I had to get back to that. Make her leave. I had to make her think she was nothing. And I fucking hated the look in her eyes when she realized that.

"Ready?" Tristan asks, sitting beside me in the car.

"As ready as I'll ever be." Chloe answers him from the back seat.

My eyes meet hers in the rearview mirror. "You know you don't have to do this."

Instead of giving me some bullshit line, she places the magazine in her gun and tucks it into the back of her pants. Then she gets out of the car without a word.

My brother and I sit quietly, watching her cross the street, her black blazer covering up the bulge from her gun. When she disappears into the club, he turns to look at me. "This better work."

"It was your idea."

He gets out and slams the door shut. We haven't spoken much in the last

week since the shit went down in his study and I sent Bunny away. I'm not sure things will ever be the same again. And I've had plenty of alone time with a bottle to come to terms with that.

Fuck the money. Fuck my job and fuck my life. I will take out one more person if it kills me. And tonight might just be that night.

I grab my gun out of the glovebox and check the magazine as well before placing it in the pocket of my suit jacket and then getting out of the driver seat. When I enter the club, I head straight to the bar with my head down, avoiding eye contact with anyone.

Once I leave, I was never here.

"Scotch," I call out to the bartender over the blaring of the music. Fuck, I hate these places. Seven Deadly Sins has made a name for itself—not a good one, but one nonetheless.

He nods his head and turns his back to me. I take the chance to look into the mirrored wall in front of me and scan the club. It's one a.m., and the club is packed. I see the guy who I know as the owner, Jet, looking down at his phone while he stands on the stairs. When he puts it away, I move my eyes to the dance floor. I spot Chloe immediately. She has her hands in her hair and her eyes closed. She reminds me of the night I watched Bunny here from my booth back in the corner. Fuck, that feels like years ago.

A man approaches Chloe, and she pushes him away. He's not the one we're looking for.

The bartender places my drink in front of me, and I lay a hundred down. "Keep them coming." I toss it back, before pushing the now empty glass to him. He nods in understanding.

My eyes go back to the mirror, and I see my brother standing over by the stairs. He has his head down talking to a girl. Probably some bitch thinking she can take him home tonight to play with her. He'll be playing all right, but it won't be with her.

I throw back another shot and then look at Chloe. She's gone. I spin around to face the dance floor and jump off the stool. Where did she go? My eyes scan the club. The lights flash, and there's a fog machine that chooses this time to release its contents.

Where the fuck did she go?

The partiers start to shout, and a crowd gathers around the smoke. I make my way over to Tristan, shoving the drunks out of my way. He looks up and his eyes meet mine when I reach him. "She's gone."

He immediately starts to look around. I do too. Seconds later, he slaps my chest and nods his head over to the bar I just came from. I spot her bleach blond hair at the end. She is turned toward a man who we both know so well. I smile. And Tristan calls out. "Showtime."

An hour later and a countless number of drinks, we watch Chloe stumble out of the club with the man on her shoulder. And I have to admit I'm a little worried.

"I think he drugged her." Tristan announces what I'm thinking.

I don't respond. Instead, I get into the driver seat of my car, and Tristan falls into the passenger seat. His phone dings, and he pulls it out.

"I've got an idea. Just follow it." He reads the message off his phone and then drops it in his lap. "Fuck!" He hisses. "Why is she not sticking to the plan?" His fist hits the dash as I start the car.

"Trust her," I tell him.

"Easy for you to say. You shipped Presleigh away so she'll be out of harm's way. Chloe jumped right in the middle of it."

I don't argue that he allowed her to do it. When he came up with this plan, he had suggested he pay a hooker off the streets to do it, but she wasn't having it. I sat back and watched them argue back and forth for an hour. To my surprise, he folded.

She gets into the passenger seat of a two-door black Maserati. And then it takes off. I pull out of my spot and follow behind at a good distance. Instead of getting on the highway to head toward town, it goes in the opposite direction.

"Where is he going? Where is she taking him? There's nothing out this way."

I continue to follow, the city lights getting smaller and smaller in my rearview mirror, and I begin to wonder what her plan is. Or if she is even still awake. She could have passed out by now if he had drugged her.

Tristan's knees bounce, and he keeps looking down at his phone as though he's waiting on her to call or text him.

Just when I think she's in danger, the brake lights come on for a brief second, then the car swerves to the right a little. "What the ...?" Tristan

starts, but his words are cut off when the car veers completely off the road. The back tires kick up dust when it hits the gravel before it loses traction and spins around and hits the ditch, flipping before coming to a stop right side up in the ditch.

I slam on the brakes, and Tristan is jumping out before I can even get my seat belt off.

I get out and run over to the car as Tristan is pulling Chloe out of the passenger side door. “Fuck, babe. Are you okay?”

“I’m ... fine ...” She coughs.

He bends down, picking her up, and carries her back to my car when I come up to the driver side of the wrecked Maserati. I yank open the smashed door and look down at the man who is about to hate life. “Hello, Preston.” His dark eyes meet mine and widen.

“Avery ...”

“You never called me.” Then I punch him in the face, knocking his ass out.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

AVERY

I STAND IN THE WAREHOUSE in New York City with Preston sitting in a chair in front of me. But this time, my brother stands to the right of me.

I take the knife and spin it around in my hand. “I will admit, I underestimated you.”

He yanks on the rope that ties his wrists to the wooden chair. “What the fuck, Avery?” he snaps.

“Never thought you had it in you.”

He throws his head back and screams. “FUCK!”

“Yes, you are,” Tristan informs him.

“Okay, okay ...” The panic is starting to set in. “I made a mistake.”

I set the knife down on the table, giving him a second of relief. That maybe I won’t kill him. I won’t. Not here. Not right now anyway. “I never wondered who contacted Darrell. Until Victor brought it to my attention.”

“It was your dad’s idea!” he shouts. “He wanted her! She was always his!”

I nod. “So he says.”

“She is!” he spits out. “My father sold her to him during a poker game when she was younger—”

“The how and why doesn’t matter at this point,” I interrupt him.

“I called him when I found out that you were looking for me.” He swallows. “I killed Damon’s brother for him. I owed him money that I couldn’t pay back, and he told me if I killed you and brought him Presleigh, then my debt would be repaid. After you shot me, I informed him that you took her.” Preston bows his head. “But that’s wasn’t enough,” he grinds out. “The sorry, greedy bastard wanted more. When he found out that you had her, he gave me two options. Get her or he was going to kill me!” His voice rises. “So I called up Darrell and offered him a deal he couldn’t refuse.”

I take a step toward him. “Were you in my house?” He doesn’t answer, just glares up at me. “Did you help take her?” I shout.

“Yes,” he answers without any remorse. “She was fucking easy ...”

I slap him across the face, like the bitch he is, making his head snap to the side. Then I grab his chin and force him to look up at me. “You’ll pay for taking something that didn’t belong to you. But first, I want to know where Vaughn is.”

He yanks his chin out of my hold. “You’ll never find him.”

Tristan chuckles behind me. “Oh, I’m positive we will.” I turn around to watch him pull a cell out of his pocket. He waves it in the air before pressing some keys to open the screen.

“You son of a bitch!” Preston yells.

“See, Preston,” Tristan begins, “I’ve been talking to him for over an hour pretending to be you.” He smiles. “And he is already on his way to us.”

I turn back to face him and remove the syringe out of my pocket. Preston’s eyes widen, and he starts shaking his head quickly. “No ...”

“Yes. We’re gonna take a little trip.” Then I stick him in the neck with the needle. His eyes close instantly, and his head slumps forward. I turn and face my brother. “Make the call. I want wheels up in an hour.”

I’m ready to go home.

PRESLEIGH

A week I have been in this hellhole. Back in prison, but this time, I don’t get any conjugal visits. At least, Alex is here with me. All she does is try to get me to discuss what all happened last time I was here, but I ignore her. Though she is taking her life sentence much better than I did at first. She hasn’t even tried to escape once. Before we left New York, Kayn went to take her phone, and she threw it at him. Satisfied when it hit him in the head before he could react and catch it. She gave up her freedom so easily. I think back and wonder how my body wouldn’t have been beaten if I had done the same.

I lie in Avery’s bed just staring up at the darkness. No clue what time it is and don’t care. I leave the curtains drawn. The sunlight hurts my eyes.

The door opens, and I close my eyes with a sigh. “I’m not in the mood, Alex. Please just leave me alone for one night.” I don’t even know why she came. I love her to death, but she doesn’t belong here. She doesn’t deserve this life.

The light turns on, and I let out a growl of frustration at her persistence to

make me get out of bed and walk around this damn mansion like it isn't a prison. My eyes spring open, and I shove off the covers and sit up. My heart stops when I look into a set of blue eyes that don't belong to her.

Avery stands in his doorway. His arms crossed over his chest, and his hip resting against the doorframe. He doesn't show any sign that he's happy to see me. Or that he's sorry.

I look away from him as the shame washes over me like it has every other damn time he makes me feel something. "Go away."

He pushes off the wall and starts for the bed. I jump out of it and run into his closet.

"Bunny ..." he calls out from the outside. Then he pounds on it when he finds it won't open. I've had a week in this house without him constantly watching my every move, and I've had an exit strategy this entire time. I just haven't had the guts to do it until now.

I drop to my knees and open his safe. It's amazing what you learn when you have hours and hours of uninterrupted time. After trying a thousand different dates, I finally found the one that worked. It was the due date of our child. A part of me understood how sick he is to make it that combination. Another part of me dropped to my ass and rocked in the closet while bawling. Understanding he never forgot our child who never got a chance to know how loved he or she was.

But that's what Avery makes me do—lose my fucking mind.

I yank the gun out, then turn to face the shut door and remove the piece of wood that I have shoved against it to keep it closed.

He storms in but comes to a stop when he sees the gun I have raised at his chest. Avery throws his hands up in surrender, and my body stiffens. I don't trust him. Not anymore.

"Bunny ..."

"Don't fucking call me that!"

"Let me explain."

"No." I can't allow him to talk. "You don't deserve that."

He lowers his hands to his side, and I feel him about to pounce. I take a small step back. "I don't. But please let me."

"I said no—"

"I did what I had to," he interrupts me. "To save you."

"You lied to me." I swallow the knot that forms in my throat. "You promised me." His flinches at my choice of words. "You fed me full of

bullshit! For what?" He doesn't answer. "For what?" I shout, and my hands start to shake.

"Just ... lower the gun and we can talk."

"No, Avery." I shake my head. "I've had enough."

"It's over."

"I don't believe you."

"I promise you, Bun ..."

"Your promises don't mean shit!" I scream. Tears start to sting my eyes. "I believed you." I lick my lips nervously. "But never again, Avery."

He takes a step back from me and stands outside the closet. "What do you want?"

"To go home." My voice cracks because it's a lie. I wanted him. I thought we were finally gonna be the old us again. "I want my life back."

His jaw tightens. "The one where you spread your legs for any guy who looked your way?"

"They never lied to me!"

His eyes narrow on mine. "No. They just used you."

"So did you."

"What the hell is going on?" Alex comes into view, and she gasps when she sees I'm holding a gun. "Pres. What are you ...?"

I don't take my stinging eyes off Avery. "I'm so tired," I admit. I haven't slept in I don't know how long. My mind is playing tricks on me. My memories haunting me. The first tear slides down my face, and his eyes soften while they follow it. When his eyes meet mine again, he stares at me with pity. As though I've lost my mind. And I have. The gun shakes in my hands. My arms already tired from holding it up at him. My body is that weak. I've been starving myself. And for what? All because he threw me away like trash? He's not the first guy to do it, and I'm sure he won't be the last.

"I know, Bunny."

"I need to go home." Another tear falls.

"You can. As soon as you get some rest," he assures me.

"Lies." My voice cracks again on the single word.

He reaches into this pocket slowly and pulls out a cell phone. It's mine. He holds it out to me, and I just stare at it. "Take it."

I look back at him and shake my head once. It's a trap.

"You can have it back, Bunny. It's yours. You can call anyone you want to

come get you.”

I release the gun with my left hand and snatch it. I press the unlock key and see that it's fully charged. I go to my call log and hover over the last call I had made for them to come and save me. I pause over it when I see it's Alex. It won't do me any good. She's already here.

I look up at them. Tristan stands next to Alex now, watching me intently. No doubt about to jump me so I don't shoot his brother. Avery holds out his right hand. “Give me the gun, Bunny. Come on, baby.”

A sob bubbles up in my throat, knowing I can't fucking do it. Even when I have the chance to stop the madness, I'm too weak to go through with it. I never wanted to kill Avery. I'm not like them. I don't need to destroy or make things bleed. I just want us to be like it used to be. If I had got a hold of a gun sooner, I would have used it to escape. But I never got that chance. I was too busy allowing them to hurt me for the cost of freedom. But I don't want to leave. Not now. Not like this. I told him that he couldn't change the past so I don't know why I'm trying so hard to do it now. My eyes blink away the stinging tears and my shaking hand grows tired of holding the weight of the gun.

He wins. He always has. Always will. My mother once told me that a woman must learn her place. Each one plays a different role. And I guess without knowing it, I've come to terms with mine.

I place the gun in his hand and then drop my face into my shaking hands. I hear some commotion, then I feel hands on me. I jump from the contact and try to pull away, but instead, I'm swept off my feet into a strong set of arms. Then we're lying down. I turn in the arms and bury my face into a chest and inhale, smelling Avery. My hands grip his shirt, and he rubs my back.

I begin to sob, not knowing what the hell is wrong with me. But I need to let it out. Need to cleanse my soul and heart. Because I have no idea what tomorrow will bring. Will he lock me up in the cellar for punishment? Or will he send me back home to live a pointless life until I die? At this point, I'm not sure which one I want more.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

AVERY

I LEAVE MY BEDROOM ONCE she falls asleep and walk down the hall. I come to a stop when I see Tristan and Alex arguing outside of my study. Kayn stands beside them with his arms crossed over his chest. Chloe leans against the wall with her head in her hands. She still feels like shit from the car wreck. She tried to stay back in New York, but Tristan wouldn't allow it.

"He has fucked with her mind too much," Alex growls, pointing a finger in my direction. "She's lost it."

"I think we can agree she's been this way for a while," he argues.

"I've known her for years. You've known her for a month," she snaps.

"I knew her long before you did."

"You know what I mean," Alex shouts. "A sane woman wouldn't have pulled a gun out on a man she loves unless she felt she had no way out."

"She did this to herself," Tristan states.

Alex gasps at his words and takes a step into him. "She has fallen into depression, you dumbass, and it wasn't brought on by *herself*." She finally turns to face me. "You did this to her. She fucking broke down and just quit everything the moment you turned your back on her in New York. She ..."

"Enough!" I interrupt her, and she shuts her mouth. She's not telling me anything I didn't just witness.

"Thank you," Chloe mumbles, her head still in her hands. She drops them to her side and lifts her head. "She needs some sleep."

"That isn't just going to cure her." Alex sighs.

"Why haven't you drugged her?" Tristan asks Kayn.

He shakes his head as Chloe punches Tristan in the arm for even suggesting such a thing. "You're right, Alex. Sleep isn't going to magically cure her, but it's a start." Chloe pushes off the wall. "Sleep deprivation can have some severe side effects. Depression, irritability, and increased anxiety. She could even hallucinate." She looks at me. "But you can help her fix it, Avery."

I nod my head. “I’m going to.” She had finally reached her breaking point. Honestly, I’m impressed she lasted this long. All her life she’s been lied to. Back then I was the only thing that was constant and true. Until I wasn’t. But I can make it right. I can save her. I have to. If not, I’ll go crazy with her.

PRESLEIGH

I open my eyes to a brightly lit room. It’s Avery’s. Looking around, I don’t notice anything different. I yawn and stretch my sore muscles.

Did I dream it? Or did I really go insane? If so, why am I alone? I sit up, and my eyes fall to the nightstand. My phone sits on it. Reaching over, I snatch it up as if someone is going to take it from me at any second. I have some missed phone calls and texts, but I don’t open them. Instead, I grip it in my hand and get out of the bed. My legs feel a little heavy, and my head is groggy but not too bad. I make sure to use the restroom first, then step out of his bedroom. Looking around, I hear voices coming from down the hall. Slowly, I make my way down it and come to a stop in the formal dining room. Five heads all turn to face me, and silence falls over the room.

Avery stands from his place at the head of the table but doesn’t speak.

Alex is the second one to stand. She reaches over to the empty seat and picks up a plate. “Here, Pres. You need to eat.” She begins to fill the plate with bacon, scrambled eggs, and sausage. And last, three pancakes. She places in front of the empty seat to the left of Avery, across from her.

“How long have I been asleep?” I ask roughly.

“Almost twenty hours,” she answers.

Shit! No wonder I feel rested. “Why are you here?” I ask Avery but keep my eyes downward not wanting to look at him.

“We can leave.” Chloe is the one who speaks to me when he doesn’t answer. “Alex and I are ready when you are. The jet is ready and waiting for us.” I look at her, and she gives me a soft smile. “I just want you to eat a little something first.”

I nod and make my way over to the seat and sit down. I feel like a robot on autopilot. I’m starving, but I can’t make myself grab the fork and eat. Not when I know five sets of eyes are on me. I take in a long breath and finally lift my eyes to meet Avery’s. “I can really go?”

He sits back in his chair and nods once. “I have something I want to show

you first, but yes, afterward, you may go.”

I don't know why, but the fact that he wants me to stay a little longer has my stomach doing flips. The good kind.

“Okay.” He picks up his fork to start eating. “Show me now.”

“You need food ...”

“Now Avery.” I'm testing the waters. Will he boss me around? Order me to eat or there will be consequences? Just how much have things changed in the last week that we've been apart?

Surprising me, he pushes his chair back and stands. “Excuse us,” he says and then reaches out his right hand for me to take. I wait for Alex to object or Chloe to call him a son of a bitch, but when it doesn't come, I place my hand in his and allow him to lead me away from them.

My heart starts to pound when we near the dungeon. He's gonna punish me. And I hate that I'm looking forward to it. To feeling something again.

He opens the door, and I close my eyes as we enter. I feel his hand leave mine, then they're on my face. My eyes spring open, and I look up at him, my breathing erratic, not knowing what he is about to do to me. “I promised you something.” His blue eyes search mine. “I did what I did because I didn't have any other choice, Bunny. You deserved more. You deserved to get your revenge just as much as all those other girls who were used. The ones I couldn't save.” He sighs. “I couldn't save you eleven years ago, but I kept my promise.” He lets go of me and flips the lights on.

My breath gets stuck in my throat when I see my brother chained to the far wall. A black mask covers his eyes. His arms are up above his head secured with black straps. His legs spread eagle also secured by the black straps. And next to him in the very same position is Vaughn. They both wear nothing but their boxers. “What ...?”

“Presleigh?” my brother asks, shaking his head around, trying to see under the mask. “Presleigh, is that you?” He yanks on his restraints.

I turn to face Avery. He stands by the wall, his arms over his chest, and his eyes on mine. I stare at him for an explanation, and he doesn't make me wait. “Your brother was the one who sold you out to Victor. I had him tied to a chair in a warehouse in New York when I had you taken from your house. He was the only one who knew you were with me.” He sighs heavily as if disappointed in himself. “He and Vaughn broke into my home and took you from me. He was the one who removed your tracker. He was there in the house they kept you at with Vaughn, Victor, and Lance.”

I look back over at him. “There was a voice ... I recognized it while there. But couldn’t place it.”

“Presleigh!” my brother snaps.

“Why?” I ask, and my voice shakes. “How could you ...?”

He doesn’t answer.

Instead, Avery speaks. “But he had planned to take you before then. He had already sold you to Victor.” My eyes widen, and he continues. “They’ve had a lot to say since I brought them down in here. Vaughn informed me that Preston is the one who told Victor we were expecting a baby.”

“What? How ...?”

“He found your pregnancy test in your bathroom trash. And it was his idea to get me out of town that week in order for Victor to ... do what he did.”

Tears sting my eyes. Looking at my brother, I don’t feel an ounce of remorse for what Avery is doing to him right now. Does that make me a bad person? Maybe. Do I care? Not one bit. He stole everything from me. He took something that can’t be replaced.

I feel hands on my shoulders, and I jump. Avery leans down and whispers in my ear. “I told you that you can leave. But you can also stay as long as you want. To make them pay as long as you want.”

I spin around in his arms and look up at him. “Is that the only way I can stay?”

He pushes the hair from my face, tucking it behind my ears. “I never want to be without you again.”

I smile up at him, and I know he can see it in my eyes because he gives me a soft smile in return. I’m not going anywhere. I might not have come here willingly, but I’m the one choosing to stay. “What did you have planned?” I ask, and he takes the pad of his thumb and erases the last tear I’m gonna cry over my past. I’m going to get my revenge, and I’m going to move on with my life. With my Avery. Just as I always wanted.

He steps away from me and goes over to the table. “Funny you ask that.” He picks up a long metal-like poker. And then picks up a blowtorch. My eyes widen when I realize what it is. My brother begins to thrash in his restraints. Vaughn doesn’t make a noise or move. I’m not sure he is even conscious. “I made this for you,” Avery says, handing it to me.

I look at the end of it, and *bunny* is written out in small letters. “And when you decide you’re done with that, I figured we’d take this ...” He holds up a knife with a long blade. The same one he used to remove my brand that

Victor gave me. “So he can know what it feels like to have it removed.”

I smile up at him. This love story is ugly. But it’s ours. And I wish I could change how we got to this exact moment, but I can’t. All I can do is look forward to our future and move on. Because I’ve been stuck in the past for the past eleven years, and it was hell.

But this? Now I get my revenge that I’ve dreamed of for years. All because a man with a sick mind loves me. If I had to choose, I’d choose madness over boring any day.

CHAPTER FORTY

AVERY

I WALK OVER AND SIT DOWN on the chair nailed to the floor and watch her with fascination. I wanted her to eat. I wanted her to have a couple of days before I showed her what I had to offer, afraid it may take days before she is back to herself. But she's stronger than I give her credit for.

She walks over and stands before Vaughn. Reaching up, she yanks the black blindfold down his face to where it hangs around his neck. His eyes are narrowed on her and his nostrils flare. He hasn't said much since we ambushed him at the warehouse in New York. Unlike Preston, can't get that idiot to shut the fuck up. He always did talk too much.

"Since you like to watch so much," Bunny says to Vaughn, "you can watch me torture my brother. See what you have to look forward to."

"Presleigh!" Preston barks, still yanking on his restraints. "You can't fucking do this."

She walks over to him, lifts the blowtorch, and turns it on. He begins to cuss, spitting in the process. Instead of arguing with him, she takes the now hot iron rod and pushes it into his thigh. The same exact place hers was and holds it there while he screams out. When she pulls it away, he hisses in a deep breath, banging his head back into the wall.

"Fuck you!" he shouts. "Fuck you, Pres. You always were a fucking bitch who deserved what you got ..."

She silences him pressing it against his stomach this time. When she pulls that one away, his body is pulled tight and veins bulge from his forehead and neck, but he doesn't speak to her.

Turning on the blowtorch again, she makes her way back over to Vaughn. My brother glares down at her. She shuts it off and just stares at him for a few long seconds, and I wonder what she's thinking. Is it anger? Does she finally feel at peace? Our father was the one who raped her, but Vaughn played a big part in it.

I get my answer when she finally speaks.

“Now you’re my bitch.” Then she presses the iron rod into the middle of his bare chest.

PRESLEIGH

I always steered clear of Vaughn growing up. He gave me the creeps and made the hairs on the back of my neck stand up just entering a room. I hated when Avery left me. I begged him to stay. I remember it like it was yesterday.

I sit on the edge of his bed as he digs around for clothes in his closet.

“Please don’t go,” I beg for the hundredth time today.

“I have to.”

“No, you don’t. You’ve already taken a year off of school. What’s one more?” He’s supposed to wait for me. I’m still in my senior year.

He throws a pair of jeans in his bag along with a pair of Vans. Then he’s walking out of his closet and over to me. He kneels down to my level, cupping my face. “I’m doing this for us.” I open my mouth, but he continues. “I know you want out of this place.” His hand drops, and he places it on my stomach. “I want you both out of this place.”

I hang my head and sigh. “We are fine, babe. We need you here.”

He reaches up and runs his hand through my hair. “How have you been feeling today?” I hate when he answers my question with one of his own.

I’ve been exhausted and sick in the mornings. We had our first appointment yesterday, and we managed to go without getting caught. We have an estimated due date, and there’s no way I won’t be showing by the time I graduate. We’re gonna have to leave before then. “Let’s just run,” I offer. “I can go with you. We can leave now.” I push off his bed and stand, needing the movement.

He grabs my hand and pulls me to a stop. “I know you’re scared, but it’s gonna be okay.”

I just have this feeling. There’s a thought in the back of my head that we’re gonna get caught. I can only hide it for so long. We need to get the hell out of here. “The baby ...”

“Our baby is fine,” he assures me, pulling my hips into his. “I just need you to trust me. I’m gonna take care of you. Both of you.”

My phone rings, and I pull it out of my back pocket. I look at it to see Mitch written across the front. I press ignore.

“What does he want?” Avery demands.

I roll my eyes. “Who knows?”

“Why is he even calling you?”

“The other night when you were down in the cellar with your dad, he came over. I walked into the game room to find him and Vaughn talking about you and my brother going on your trip.”

“What about it?” he snaps.

“I don’t know. They stopped the moment I entered. Mitch just winked at me and said he would see me soon,” I lie. If he knew Mitch kissed me, he’d flip. And I don’t want that kind of trouble for him.

“I want you to stay the hell away from him, Bunny.”

“I do.” I pull away from Avery. “But I can’t stay away when he comes over.”

My phone rings again, and I don’t even bother to look at it. “Who is it?” he demands.

“I don’t know ...”

He yanks it from my hand and answers. “Why the fuck are you calling her?” Avery growls in answer. He pulls the phone away from his ear and tosses it onto the bed.

I blink and look up at Vaughn. His arms are stretched out before him, and his legs are just as wide. “You set me up.” I say in disbelief.

He doesn’t respond. His chest rises and falls quickly, and his eyes glare down into mine.

“You had Mitch call me, thinking that it would be more believable when your dad told Avery that I left with him.” I shake my head. “You set me up. You fucking bastard ...”

He actually chuckles. “You set yourself up, Presleigh.”

I press the end of the rod to his stomach, and he bows his back, hands fisted. I hold it there as long as my arms can hold it up. When I pull it away, he sucks in a breath through his teeth.

“Presleigh.” My brother growls my name. “You don’t have to do this.” I turn to look at him. “You’re not like him.”

I tilt my head to the side. “Like who?”

“Avery ...”

I laugh. "He saved me."

He shakes his head quickly and pulls on his restraints. "He put you there. If you had just stayed away." He swallows. "If you had just listened to me ..."

"You were supposed to look after me!" I scream. "After Mom and Dad died, you were supposed to take care of me. But all you cared about was yourself. You knew what I went through. Fucking helped set it up and never once asked me if I was okay." My heart pounds in my chest with anger.

I remember things he had said to me before Avery took me. Like when I laid on the bathroom floor drunk.

"Get your ass off this phone and on the jet. Now, Presleigh. If you don't, he will make a move." He growls. *"And it'll be too late."*

I look up at him. "This whole time, I thought you were talking about Avery."

And the other time when he dragged me out of Seven Deadly Sins.

"Because you're business, Pres."

I shake my head. "It was always Victor. You were going to fucking hand me over to him! For money!"

"Presleigh, I'm sorry."

He sounds sincere, but he always was a good liar. He got that from our father. "I believe you." I walk back over to the table and grab the blowtorch. Turning it on, I hold it up to the iron.

He tenses when he hears it. "Presleigh ..."

"But it's not enough." Then I shove it into his skin, enjoying the sound that it makes on contact.

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

AVERY

FOR THREE HOURS, I SIT in that chair and watch her make these men pay for what they did to her. And not once did she ask me for help. Or permission. She branded them over and over, and then when she was finally done, she just stared down at the blowtorch before placing it on the table. Then she went for the knife, and she began to cut. At one point, she cried, but I'm not sure if it was from happiness or anger. I just let her do her thing.

She drops the knife to the floor, and I sit up straighter when she turns to face me. Her blue eyes heavy when they meet mine. I open my mouth to speak, but the door opens. We both look over to see Tristan walk in. He comes to a stop when he sees the guys hanging in their restraints, bleeding to death. Patches of skin cover the floor by their feet along with blood and sweat. The smell of burned flesh fills the room, and the moment it hits him, he takes a step back, placing a hand to his mouth.

Bunny walks out with her head held high and shoulders back, not saying a word.

Tristan closes the door once she leaves and places his hands in his pockets. "Damn." He looks over the guys. "Remind me to never piss her off." He actually smiles.

"You ... are a ... disgrace ..." Vaughn manages to get out between breaths. "You ... both ... deserve death."

I stand from the chair. "You and Preston will be the only two dying tonight." And with that, I exit the cellar. I make my way into the formal dining room and don't see Bunny anywhere. So I head to my bedroom. It's empty, but I hear the shower come on in my adjoining bathroom. I enter to find her removing her bloody clothes and then stepping into the shower.

I quickly undress and join her. She faces the showerhead, her forehead resting on the tile along with her hands. Her lips are parted, and I can see her ribs through her skin expand as she breathes heavily. Blood runs down her frail body and pools at her feet before disappearing into the drain.

Walking up behind her, I softly touch her back, and she jumps, spinning around and looks up at me. I push the wet hair behind her ears, and she licks her lips. “I’m sorry—”

“Don’t ever apologize, Bunny,” I interrupt her. “You owe nothing to no one.”

Her shaking hands come up and rest on my chest. Her eyes search mine, and I press my body into hers. She rises on her tiptoes, lifting her lips to mine but not close enough to touch. She’s feeling me out. Trying to see where I stand after what she just did to her brother and mine. She should know that no matter what this woman does, I stand with her. By her side.

My hands slide into her soaked hair, and I grip it tightly, pulling her head back, and she sucks in a long breath. My cock instantly hardening at the sound. Then I lower my face to kiss her neck. Opening my mouth, I bite into her soft flesh before sucking her skin between my lips. She shudders and lets out a moan. “Avery ...”

I cut her off, spinning us around and slamming her back into the wall. She cries out from the force, and I grip her left thigh and wrap it around my hip. Then my hand goes between our bodies and finds her wet cunt. “Fuck, I’ve missed you.” My voice mirrors my actions—rough and needy.

“I’ve missed you too,” she breathes, rocking her hips into mine. “Please fuck me.”

“What have I told you about begging?” I ask.

“I need you to use me.” She urges. “It’s been too long.”

I chuckle even though I smile down at her. I’m gonna have her coming so hard she’s gonna need another nap afterwards.

PRESLEIGH

The rest of the day went by like a dream. For the first time in eleven years, I was at peace with myself. With life. We all sat around Avery’s formal dining room table laughing and telling every funny story we could think of about ourselves. It wasn’t like we were trying to compensate for what everyone knew I had done. It was real. The laughs. The jokes.

It was ... natural. For once, I felt normal. Avery made himself and Tristan a glass of scotch, and I told him no thanks when he offered me one. He gave me this smile that made my heart beat faster. Like he was proud of me. I

hadn't felt that in so long that it made my chest hurt. Alex ended up snatching it out of his hands and everyone laughed. I sat back and watched them all with fresh eyes. As if I had been blind for years. Burying yourself knee deep in drugs, alcohol, and men will do that to you.

I noticed the way that Tristan couldn't keep his eyes and hands off Chloe, and how she would lean into him and get that dazed look in her eyes when he spoke to her. I saw the way Alex stared into her glass of scotch as though it held answers to questions she didn't even know she needed to ask. I hate it for her. The unknown. The path that she ended up taking because she had no other choice. It had to have been for a reason. Maybe I'm it. I'm supposed to help her find her way back to who she was before. I'm far from being fixed, but I'm on the right road. I watched Kayn, but the man is a mystery. A dark hole closed off to the world. And then I glanced at Avery. He was already staring at me over the rim of his glass tumbler. His blue eyes watching me intently. They looked like storm clouds ready to release their madness over a city. And I smiled at him, knowing that I would take on that storm any day.

It's funny that a month ago he had me bent over this very table. We were both full of hatred that was fueled by anger. Now we're just two people who love one another in a way that most will never understand. It's messy. But the most beautiful things are never just handed over to you wrapped up in a bow. It takes tears and sweat to get what you want. Even blood. And I'd bleed for this man. All he'd have to do is ask. 'Cause I know without a shadow of doubt that he would do the same for me.

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

AVERY

I ENTER MY STUDY AND SIT behind my desk. Everyone sat around the table for hours talking until the late night. Tristan finally carried off a sleeping Chloe to a room after I told him to stay over. Bunny helped a drunk Alex crawl to hers before she headed off to mine, telling me to wake her up when I come to bed.

My computer comes on just as my door opens. Marvin enters. The man is like me—never sleeps. “Sir, you had a package arrive while you were in New York.”

Without looking up, I reach out my left hand, and he places a small padded envelope in it. “Thank you.”

Then I hear the door close as he exits. I type away on my computer for a few minutes. Once I’m done sending the email, I pick up my cell and make the call.

“This better be good,” my boss growls.

“Preston is taken care of.” Might as well get to the point.

“Good.” His voice changes to appreciative. “And Damon?”

“Still working on it.”

“Well, I believe you will get it done.” Click, he hangs up. We never do small talk. Always business.

I turn to the envelope on my desk and open it up. A USB drive falls out of it. I stare at it for a few long seconds before I slowly put it into my computer. I stand from my desk, go over to the door, and lock it, not wanting any uninvited guests.

Leaning up against my desk, I lift the remote and press play and watch a familiar dark room come on my TV. The same room I found Bunny in after she was taken from me.

And her brother stands in the middle of it. He smiles up at the camera. “Hello, Avery. I’m making you this video because I know you would want to see what she really thinks of you.” He runs his fingers over his chin. “I hid

out back while you and your men just whisked her away like you saved her. But we both know that's not the case." He chuckles. "You may think you won. But you haven't. Not even close. She'll always be a broken little bitch! Just like all the others. Let me prove it to you."

The screen goes black for a moment, and then it shows the camera focused on a concrete wall. There's a chain bolted to the wall and a steel collar lies open on the dirty floor.

The back of a man comes into view, and he's carrying an unconscious Bunny. He lays her on the floor and removes her shirt; it was the only thing she had on. Then he picks up the steel collar and secures it around her neck, locking it in place in the back.

"I'll be back when this has worn off," he tells her as if she can hear him. Then he turns around and looks up at the camera. It's Preston.

The door shuts, and the camera changes to night vision. I watch her pull herself into the fetal position and begin to shake.

The bastard recorded the entire fucking thing! What Damon said to me when I spoke to him last makes sense now.

"You know, Avery, your father showed me the tape of what he did to your little Bunny. I must say, that is why I'm offering you the extra for her."

I thought he meant the tape of when he raped her. But this is what he was talking about.

I fast forward until I see movement. She laid there for four hours. Shaking, she was so cold.

I press play once I see her open her eyes. She sits up and notices she's naked.

"Avery?" She calls out my name, and my throat tightens.

She looks to her left, and her breathing picks up. Then to her right. You can see the fear creeping into her eyes when she realizes she's in a concrete box.

"Avery?" she shouts, standing, and begins walking over to the door but is yanked back by her collar.

Her hands go to it, and when she feels the lock, she spins around to see the chain connecting her to the wall.

"AVERY!" She shouts my name frantically, and my chest tightens to the point it's painful. That she could think I would do this to her. But why not? Isn't this what I threatened her with when I dragged her down to my cellar? And then again after Conway's party?

Wrapping her hands around the chain, she begins to yank on it

She starts shouting my name. Then the tears start to fall. “Avery, this isn’t funny,” she screams. “Let me go!”

I sit in my office for hours watching all the footage. Fast-forwarding through the part where they left her alone and unconscious. Seeing everything Victor and Vaughn did to her. Even the brand. I shouldn’t have watched it, but I did. It was like the last video. I couldn’t look away. It physically pained me, but I deserve that. I should feel her pain. I watched up until the point I came running into the room with Tristan and cut her loose. Then after we walked out with her, Preston came back on screen.

“See, Avery?” He gives me that fucking smirk again. “She will always see you as one of us. And nothing you can do will change that.”

I shut off the video and place the remote on the desk, then walk out of my study, heading down to my cellar. I haven’t been back down there since I watched Bunny torture them earlier today. Yanking open the door, I go storming into it to find Preston still in his restraints. My brother is gone. That means he’s already dead. Kayn must have removed him before he went to bed and got rid of the body. But he left Preston because he is still breathing. He knew I’d want him down here until the bastard is stone-cold dead.

“Preston, I got your tape,” I inform him, walking over to the black safe that stands over six feet tall and four feet wide. It holds all my torturing devices.

He whimpers. There’s not much more he can do than that. Bunny had him screaming for hours. He lost his voice long ago.

I open it, grabbing the red and yellow can. I remove the straw and shake it up before screwing the straw to the top, securing it. Then go to stand in front of him. He lifts his heavy head to look me in the eyes. He smells of death, so he’s not far from it. Blood runs from the skin Bunny removed after branding him. She did a hack job, that’s for sure. Some places on his forearms are down to the bone. He probably doesn’t even feel them anymore due to her severing nerves. “You’re about to die.” I sigh. “Maybe ten minutes at the most.”

He drops his head unable to hold it up any longer. “I wish I could have drawn it out longer. But this was Bunny’s show.” I would have done things differently, but it wasn’t my decision. Not my revenge to take.

“But ...” I take a step closer to him and grip his chin, pushing his head up. “I have a gorgeous woman in my bed waiting on me, and I don’t want to wait another minute for your pathetic ass to die.” I growl. “I wanna watch you

take your last fucking breath, Preston. So, open up.” I begin to pry his mouth open with my hand, and he tries to pull away, but he’s too weak. I dig my fingers into his cheeks and push his head into the concrete wall to help keep him in place. Then I shake the can in my right hand before lifting it to his lips. I place the long straw to the back of his throat, and he starts to gag. I push the button. Foam begins to fill his mouth and throat. His head tries to fight me, and he pulls on his restraints to no avail. I fill his mouth completely. Then I shove the straw into his nose and fill his nostrils.

I take a step back. He thrashes, and his eyes widen as the foam starts to expand, cutting off his air. And I watch the life drain out of him like the piece of shit he is. I tap the side of his face a couple of times, and say, “Go to hell, Preston. And tell your father I said hello.”

I smile satisfied and go back over to the safe. I place the foam sealant that is supposed to fix cracked ceilings and walls away and then walk over to the door. I turn off the light and shut the door. As I walk to my room, I pass Kayn.

“I’ll take care of him, sir,” he says, knowing where I just came from.

“It can wait until later,” I tell him and enter my room. I undress, then crawl into bed next to Bunny. My hand immediately goes underneath the covers, and I find her naked. She begins to stir when I slide my hand between her thighs to cup her pussy. “I need you,” I tell her.

She gives me a soft smile, eyes still closed, and says, “I’ve been waiting.”

EPILOGUE

AVERY

“TAKE THE NEXT RIGHT,” MY brother informs me as I drive down the New York highway. Bunny and I have been visiting him for the last two weeks. She spends all of her time with Chloe and Alex, and none of them argue with me when I make Kayn escort them.

“She’s calling you again.” He holds up my phone in his hand, and I glance over at it to see *Bunny* light up my screen. I hit answer. “Hey, Bunny,” I call out into my speakers as the Bluetooth picks it up.

“Where are you?” she asks in her sweet voice.

I dodge her question. “Are you back at Tristan’s?”

“No.” She sighs. “We are at some Halloween store looking for costumes.” She gets quiet for a second. “Can we come back for Halloween? Chloe and Alex have made plans to go out. And I really wanna go.”

“Of course,” I answer although I hate New York.

“Thanks, babe.” Her voice has changed to excitement. “I’ll see you back at Tristan’s. Love you.”

Click.

She hangs up before I can even respond.

My brother begins to laugh. “Shut up,” I order before he has the chance to say anything. He knows that I would do anything that woman wants. Thankfully, he keeps his mouth shut.

I see my exit coming up and jump off the highway. Going ten over the speed limit, I take the curves faster than I should.

“It’s up ahead.”

It comes into view, and I slow down. The house sits on ten acres back off the road. I see a black Corvette parked in the driveway, and I smile. *The bastard is here.*

I pull into the driveway like I’m expected and get out, my gun tucked in the back of my slacks. Tristan and I make our way around to the back of the house and use the key that Kayn gave me. That guy can get anything

anywhere. I unlock the door and step in. There's soft piano music playing, and I smile because that could be an advantage.

My brother falls behind me, allowing me to take the lead, knowing I can handle it. He just came along because he didn't wanna go shopping with the girls.

A voice comes from down the hall, and I follow it. Pulling my gun out of my pocket, I also grab the silencer out of the other and screw it on. My brother pulls his out to be ready just in case. Cocking mine slowly, I raise it. As I step into a kitchen, the man comes into view. He stands in front of the burner, his back facing me, flipping pancakes. He picks them up with the spatula and plops them down on a plate. He turns around but gasps when he finds me and my brother standing in front of him. "Who the hell are you?" he demands.

I place the gun under his chin and speak. "The real question is, what did you do to deserve this?" Then I pull the trigger. He drops the plate, and it shatters before he falls to his knees, then face down.

I kneel, place the gun in his hand, and then we turn around and leave, not even bothering to turn off the stove. If the house catches on fire, then it was meant to be. I remove my gloves, and we walk outside and jump in my car. There will be signs that it wasn't a suicide. Like the fact he dropped a plate of pancakes and no suicide letter to explain his decision. Or someone might have seen my car. But the police will never place me here because I have no connection to the man. And the gun is untraceable. I can make that possible in my line of work.

The love of my life was once a patient of his. She went to him for help, and all he did was make her feel like it was all her fault. After doing some research on the man, I found he had assault charges while in college. He had money to have it hidden well but not good enough. The man preyed on women who were already victims—too afraid they had no voice—so I did society a favor. If he had taken care of Bunny, I would have spared his life, but no one seemed to have done that. That's why I got a list, and I'm going name by name until they are all dead.

"I can't believe you're gonna become a boring husband." My brother finally breaks the silence. "Who am I gonna kill people with now?"

"I'm not quitting. I'm just taking a vacation to spend alone time with my wife." A vacation that is long overdue.

"Have you told her yet ...?" His voice trails off.

I shift gears. “The other night.”

“And how did she take it?” he questions.

I take in a deep sigh. “As good as I figured she would.”

He grunts, knowing it didn’t go all that well. I’ve tried to avoid telling her what I do for a living. When I first took her and she asked, I’d just completely ignore her. Or tell her it’s none of her business. But things have changed. Now we’re trying to make up for the eleven years that we lost. The other night while eating dinner, she wanted to know how worried she should be every time I left the house. And I couldn’t hide it from her anymore. Didn’t want to. So, I told her, and it was worse than what she had suspected.

I’m a man who kills for a living. It doesn’t matter how I do it, as long as the job gets done. I take out men who use women and little boys and girls. I always thought she hated the part of me that wouldn’t stand up for the women who had no hope, so after I thought she left me, I buried myself in that world but in a different way. My brother and I wanted to make a difference, and to my surprise, the government paid us millions to end worthless lives like Vaughn’s and Victor’s. Our father and Damon are still out there, but I have no doubt that Tristan and I will find them once I return from my honeymoon. The only difference is that I will be coming home to a wife. Who I will treat like the queen she is.

“Are you nervous about tomorrow?” he asks, handing my phone over. I put it in the cup holder.

“No.” I’ve waited all my life to marry Bunny, so I couldn’t be more ready.

He turns and looks out the window, changing the subject. “Do you think he’ll stay away?”

I know he’s asking about our dad. “He won’t for long.” He’s not the kind of guy who sits on his hands. He’ll come for us. He’ll forget about Bunny. She’s no longer important to him. I know how he works. According to him, Tristan and I killed the one thing he couldn’t live without—Vaughn. His protégé. He would never believe that Bunny did it, and I’d like to keep it that way. The less he knows about her, the better.

“It sure would be easier than us trying to find him,” he states, and I’d have to agree.

Thirty minutes later, we pull into Tristan’s driveway, and I see my Escalade SUV with bulletproof glass already here.

We walk inside, and I go straight to our room that we are staying in. But I find it empty. “Bunny?” I call out.

“One second,” she answers from the other side of the closet door.

I begin to undo the buttons on my shirt and sit on the end of the bed. A moment later, I hear the closet door open. Looking up, my breath gets caught in my throat when I see her exit.

She comes to a stop in front of me, holds out her arms and spins around. When she comes to a stop, they fall to her sides. “Do you not like it?”

I stand and push her dark hair back from her shoulders. “I love it.” My eyes sweep over the deep purple satin dress that clings to her from her chest down to the floor. It has a black sash high on her waist and ties in a big bow in the back that falls down the length of her dress and to the end of the small train. “I’m not supposed to see your dress.”

Back when we were kids, I used to imagine the day I would see her in a white wedding dress while I stood at the altar. But that’s not who either one of us is anymore. Tomorrow, she will become my wife and me her husband. It’s not going to happen at a church in front of God. Instead, my brother is going to marry us in front of a few of our friends. And that is better than any fantasy I’ve ever had because this is real life. Finally, after all these years, she’s gonna be mine in every way.

She wraps her arms around my neck and smiles up at me. “I’m not superstitious, Avery. Don’t tell me you are.”

I open my mouth to tell her no when my eyes catch sight of the black lace collar around her neck. The same one I gave her the night for Conway’s party. I reach up and run my fingers over it, looping one through the hook. Gently, I bring her toward me by it. And I arch a brow in question.

“I can be your bride and your dirty little whore,” she whispers, running her tongue along her nude painted lips.

My cock hardens behind my zipper at her words. “Yes you can, Bunny.” We laugh and smile with one another all the time, but one thing hasn’t changed. She still likes to be my slave in the bedroom. She still begs me to let her come, and there’s times I still refuse her. She likes the way I take charge of her and use her however I want. And I love that about her.

“Turn around,” I order, and she does without thought.

My hands go to the sash, and I untie it before unzipping the dress. I pull it down her body, and she steps out of it. I grab the dress and walk it into the closet. Hanging it up, I open up one of my bags that I brought and pull out what I want. Then walk back into the bedroom.

She stands in front of the king-size bed looking like a dream that I never

thought would come true. Her long dark hair is over one shoulder, breathing ragged and nipples hard. I bet she's wet. She always is for me. All she wears is her collar and black ten-carat princess cut engagement ring. She doesn't wear flashy things. She never did. But I wanted something that men could see from a mile away. Bunny would have been happy with just a band, but I wanted to make a fucking statement. She's mine! And I chose black because I wanted it to be dark—like our love. Our story may have once been hearts and flowers, but now it's storm clouds and hurricanes. And I'm okay with that.

Her round tits are asking to be kissed. Her shaved pussy begging to be fucked.

Her eyes drop to my hands, and her teeth sink into her bottom lip when she sees the black leather straps that hang from them. "Lie on the bed, Bunny. Face down."

She tries to hide her smile but fails. She crawls onto the middle of the large bed, and being the good girl she is, she places her hands behind her back for me. I take the thick straps and wrap them around her small wrists, making sure they're nice and tight. Once I'm satisfied with that, I slap her ass. "Up on your knees."

She moans into the duvet and wiggles her ass up into the air. I sit between her legs and use my knees to shove them farther apart. She begins to pant. I run my hand over her pussy, and she pulls on her restraints. "You're not going anywhere," I say with a smile. "You're mine." I slap her ass again, and she hisses in a breath.

"Please ..."

I grab her hair and yank her head back, cutting off her words. I lower my face down to hers, whispering in her ear, "You can fucking beg me all you want, Bunny, but it won't get you off any sooner." Then I let go of her head, and it falls to the bed.

Tomorrow night I will marry this woman, and when we get to our hotel, I will pick her up and carry her through the door and then make love to her until she passes out in my arms.

But tonight ... I'm gonna use her. Just like we both crave.

EPILOGUE TWO

AVERY

I STAND IN MY CELLAR, MY sleeves rolled up to my elbows. My first two buttons undone and my hands fisted.

“It’s not what you think,” the man cries from the chair before me. As usual, I’ve nailed his hands to it.

“Then explain it to me,” I counter. The guy has nothing, and we both know it. He’ll be dead within the hour. And Kayn will bury him with the rest of the sorry bastards I take out.

Just then, the door opens, and I spin around to see Marvin standing there with his arms behind his back. “Sir, Mrs. Decker is looking for you.”

“It can wait,” I snap, pissed that he interrupted me. He knows better ...

“She’s in your study.” He goes on. “And she is upset.”

I look at Kayn as he stands off to the side, and he nods his head once, letting me know he’ll keep an eye on him. I grab a towel off the table and try to wipe off some of the blood. My knuckles are cracked and muscles tight. I need answers about Victor and Damon, and no one seems to want to give them up.

Storming into my office, I find Bunny sitting on my couch. Her head in her hands. “What?” I snap. “I’m in the middle of something.”

She looks up at me, and tears run down her gorgeous face. Her eyes are red, and she’s practically gasping for air. My anger fades instantly. “What’s wrong, Bunny?” I ask, coming to kneel in front of her.

Her eyes scan the blood that lingers on my clothes and skin, but she doesn’t question it. She prefers to stay in the dark when it comes to my job.

Her lips begin to tremble. “Bunny, talk to me. What happened?”

She buries her face in her hands and sobs while mumbling something I can’t understand,

“What?”

“I’m pregnant,” she cries out.

I pull her hands from her face and hold them in mine. My eyes roam hers

as I try to make out what she is telling me. “What ... that can’t be ...”

She pushes me away and starts to dig in her purse that sits beside her. She pulls out four pregnancy tests and tosses them onto the floor.

I bend down to pick them up.

“I bought them earlier today when Kayn took me shopping.”

I hold them all up and shake my head. “No. This can’t be.”

“I’m sorry.” She begins to sob again.

“You had a hysterectomy.” I state the obvious.

Her head snaps up to look at me when I stand to my full height. “What did you say?”

“You had a hysterectomy.” I repeat.

She just stares up at me blankly, tears still falling down her cheeks. Seconds tick by that turn into minutes. And I begin to think that I’m missing something.

Finally, I break the silence. “I had Kayn do a medical report on you.” I know she remembers me showing it to her. “It states that you had a hysterectomy.”

She takes in a deep breath. “When I woke up from my coma, Lance told me that I had lost the baby and had to perform an emergency hysterectomy. But months later, I found out he had just said that to scare me.” Her eyes drop to the floor. “When I found out it was a lie, I got an IUD. I’ve had one ever since.” She sniffs.

“Wait a minute.” I drop the pregnancy tests. “How is that possible? How was your information not updated by other doctors?”

She shrugs. “How do they twist shit? Money.”

I run a hand through my hair trying to wrap my head around all of this. “So, we’re having a baby?”

Her eyes instantly tear up again, and she shakes her head. “It’s ... it can’t be ...” She begins to sob so hard she can’t talk. “I think ...”

I lean back down and cup her face. “What? You can tell me.”

She swallows. “I haven’t had it removed.” I frown at her words. “I remember Lance checking me before I passed out ...” Her voice trails off, and I begin to understand why she is so hysterical. “He must have taken it out. And your father ...” Her voice trails off and I stand up. “I didn’t think he had raped me.” She hiccups. “But I was in and out of it a lot. Maybe I just don’t remember.”

“No,” I say.

“What if it’s ...?”

“He didn’t rape you that time,” I say and my jaw tightens.

“But what if ...?”

“He didn’t rape you!” I shout.

Silence fills the room, and she stares up at me. “How do you know? You weren’t there.” Her voice rises with anger.

I take in a deep breath and say. “Because your brother sent me a tape. He recorded everything that they did to you for those forty-eight hours.”

She slowly stands, a look of disbelief on her face. “You watched another tape of me?” I stay silent because I already told her that. “You didn’t tell me.”

“Bunny ...”

“What the hell Avery?” She yells my name.

“I didn’t think you needed to know.” It’s that simple. Contrary to what she thinks, I don’t like hurting her.

“I’ve been sitting in our room for the last three hours trying to decide how to tell you that I could be pregnant with your father’s baby to find out that it wasn’t even a possibility,” she screams.

I reach out for her, but she pushes me away. “Don’t touch me!” She shoves me out of the way and stomps toward the door.

“Where are you going?” I ask.

“To bed. And don’t bother coming after you’re done torturing some sorry bastard,” she snaps. “You can sleep in your dungeon!” She opens the door and then slams it shut.

I spin around and slam my hands down on my desk, making everything rattle.

We’re fucking pregnant. I didn’t even know it was possible. We never spoke about it, and now we’ve got a baby on the way. It’s the best fucking news I’ve had in a long time. I don’t care if she’s mad at me for keeping the video from her. I care that my father, once again, managed to fuck with her. For three hours, she thought he had raped her again and knocked her up. That’s why he wanted Lance there. He had checked her and removed it. He said he was supposed to keep her alive. Was Victor planning on knocking her up, but he just didn’t get the chance? I don’t put anything past that sick bastard.

That sorry piece of shit will pay with his life. And that can’t come soon enough. Especially since Bunny is pregnant. I can’t let him find out.

I storm out of my study and make my way back down to the cellar. Walking in, I remove my shirt and toss it to the floor. “Now. Let’s try this again. Where is Damon and Victor?”

“I don’t ...”

I punch him in the face, and his head snaps back. “I can do this all night.” I laugh. Because my wife has probably locked me out of our bedroom. I’ve never slept on the couch before, and I’m not about to start now.

THE END

Thank you for taking the time to read Slaughter. Avery & Presleigh’s story has come to an end. But you can see more of them in Tristan & Chloe’s book, coming 2019. Add it to your TBR list now <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/42348643-tristan-chloe-s-book>

Continue on to read the prologue of my novel I Dare You. It’s a young adult romance with very mature content. Readers are calling it deliciously dark. It is FREE in KU.

I DARE YOU

PROLOGUE

COLE

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN TO a funeral where the preacher stands before the friends and loved ones of the deceased and talks about how shitty the person was? How he fucked around on his wife? Or spent his family's life savings to feed his gambling addiction? How about during his bachelor party when he snorted coke off a hooker's ass?

Me neither.

Why is it that we're fucking saints the moment we die?

You hear the preacher say things like, "*Oh, John Smith was a lovely man who loved his wife and kids,*" when he should really be saying, "*John Smith was a worthless piece of shit who fucked the underage babysitter every chance he fucking got while his wife was busy working two jobs and raising his ungrateful children.*"

And let's not forget that the deceased in that casket before you never even went to church. Let alone knew the preacher who speaks so highly of him. All he knows are the stories the blinded loved ones wrote down on a little card for him to share.

He's a fucking puppet.

I haven't read the Bible word for word, but I know the Lord says if we confess our sins and ask for forgiveness, he will cleanse our souls, and we will be forgiven.

Poof. It's like magic.

Now that begs the question—what if you're not sorry? What if you don't care to be forgiven?

No amount of holy water could cleanse my soul, and I'm okay with that because when I sinned, I understood that I would one day have to pay. We're all going to die eventually. You can be one of those people who bury your head in the sand to avoid talking about it all you want, but it's life!

Live or die.

Heaven or hell.

Angel or devil.

It's black and white. There are no gray areas.

So tell me ... when you're lying in that casket in front of your friends and family, what are they going to think of you? Are they gonna believe that preacher who talks bullshit, or are they gonna know you didn't care if you were going to burn for eternity?

I'm not a religious person. Obviously. But I do know this. When I am damned to hell, it'll be because I fucking earned it.

To read more, check out [I Dare You](#) on Amazon. Available FREE in KU!

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And last but not least, my readers. Thank you for taking a chance and wanting to read my books. I hope that you all love them as much as I do.