

A close-up photograph of a very muscular man's torso. He is shirtless, showing his pectorals, abdominal muscles, and obliques. He is wearing camouflage-patterned shorts. The background is a workshop or garage, with a bicycle wheel visible on the right side. The lighting is bright, highlighting the man's physique.

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AMAZON BESTSELLING AUTHOR

STEPBROTHER'S OBSESSION

~ A Possessive Man #37 ~

STEPBROTHER'S OBSESSION

A POSSESSIVE MAN: BOOK 37

LENA LITTLE



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CONTENTS

[Free Books](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Extended Epilogue](#)

[Also by Lena Little](#)

PREVIEW

I'm more than ready for my much-needed break but relaxing takes a backseat when I find a stranger taking a shower in my childhood home.

My whole body reacts to her, something that has never happened before. It disorients, confuses, and unmoors me. Who is this woman? And why do I feel such a strong, instant magnetic draw to her?

Maybe I shouldn't have asked because the moment I find out she's my stepsister, I mentally punch myself. The almost animalistic need rising to the surface, the intense desire to have her—those are things I need to bury.

Except...when she looks at me and mirrors the *want* within me, my moral resolve crumbles to dust.

I need her like I need air to breathe, and I will have her no matter what.

Besides, she's worth going to hell for.

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I've been through countless hours of drills and extreme tests, meant to push all us Navy officers past our limits. I've slept on concrete crushed between snoring squadmates. Hell, I've broken my fingers so badly that my thumb still clicks loudly if I move it wrong, but somehow, sitting in the back of this taxi might be the worst thing I've endured.

One, because the interior of the car smells so strongly of aftershave that my eyes are watering. Two, because the driver has been playing the same idiotic song on repeat for the last hour. I know all the words to the damn song by now, entirely involuntarily.

From the flight, during which the two girls sitting next to me, who clearly had too much to drink, talked very loudly about all the ways their exes sucked in bed—information I'd have gladly lived the rest of my life never knowing—plus the loud chaos of airports and now this... Yeah, I'm really fucking ready for some peace and quiet.

Thirty days of it to be exact.

I love my job. I take pride in what I do, and I have no regrets about any of the time I've spent in the Navy. But ... I will admit that this break is wholly needed. All the knots in my muscles and the headache brimming behind my eyes insist that I need to remember how to relax, and I'm inclined to listen to the obvious signs my body is giving me. A month without

constant training drills and the stress of work—a month to myself—sounds like heaven.

It's been a while since I've come back to my childhood home, a whole year now that I think about it. Though I'll only get to see my dad for a few days at the end of my leave, it'll be nice to stay at the home I grew up in and explore the city again. Fun even.

Finally, the taxi driver turns onto the street I grew up on, and the second the car halts at the side of the road outside number nineteen, I throw the door open and leap out. Thankful I've already paid for the journey on the cab app so I don't have to spend another single second listening to that fucking music. I grab my bags from the back, close the trunk a little too hard, then turn around and stalk away from the car in pointed silence. Seconds later, tires squeal as the driver pulls away, and I'm fussing around with the plant pot by the side of the door where Dad always hides his spare key.

Cold, damp key in hand, I let myself in with a sigh. I pause long enough to kick off my boots and hang up my jacket, then cart my bags through the hallway, heading straight for the staircase. I need a shower to wash off the day before I do anything else, even if it's only 4 PM and the day's not over yet.

My feet automatically take me to my room upstairs, though I guess since I haven't lived at home since I was eighteen—seventeen years ago—I should be calling it the guest room now. My dad's house is a modest two-bed in the suburbs, but it was always more than enough space for us two.

Nothing has changed much since I was last here except ... Huh. That's odd. There's flowers on the little side table on the landing at the top of the stairs. And wait, is that runner covering the well-worn wood floors new? Has my dad been possessed with the spirit of some home decor-obsessed soul?

I snort at my own ridiculous thoughts, shaking my head as I drag a hand over my face. Christ, clearly I need a good night's sleep. At least the bed here is comfy as hell, and if my body will let me, I can lie in tomorrow. Then again, my body has

practically its own alarm system after years of waking up at 6 AM or earlier, so I'll be lucky to sleep five minutes past that no matter how tired I am.

The guest room door isn't closed all the way, so I push it open with my foot and saunter in. The carpet's new, fluffy under my feet. Damn, I can't remember the last time the original carpet was fluffy when I entered. Dad's stepped up his game.

I dump my bags at the bottom of the bed and turn to the door on the right wall that leads to the attached bathroom. Still running on autopilot, I push the door open.

A cloud of sweet-smelling steam engulfs me.

What. The. Fuck.

Every muscle in my body freezes, including my damn lungs. Hell, even my heart forgets what rhythm it's supposed to be beating. I feel like I've been punched in the chest, standing in the doorway with my jaw hanging open, eyes wide, and stuck on the blurry silhouette behind the fogged-up glass of the shower door.

There's someone in the shower. *My* shower. Why is there someone in the shower?

I choke on the humid air as the person turns, revealing the swell of breasts and lush curves of wide hips.

Not just a person. A woman. A very naked, very wet woman.

My dick twitches in my pants at the sight. She's ... gorgeous. Long, straight hair drips down her back, the strands ending just above the swell of her ass. She tips her head back to let the shower stream rinse her face, and the way she arches into the water makes my mouth go dry.

Fuck. Not just a girl, she's built like a goddess.

Without thinking, I take a step forward, feeling for all the world like there's some invisible force at my back shoving me towards her. It's impossible to stand still, to put more distance between us.

The goddess in the shower turns, revealing thick lashes clumped with water, green eyes hazy through the glass, and

flushed pink cheeks.

Those eyes widen the moment she sets them on me. Her plush lips part, and the color drains from her skin.

She shrieks, water splashing and flesh slapping off the tiles as she stumbles backward.

“Oh my God!” she screams, shutting the water off with a slap of her hand before she throws herself out of the shower stall, wide-eyed and clearly as shocked as I am about this turn of events.

Now that the glass isn't obscuring her, I'm struck still with the exquisite details of her body. She's soft and plush all over, and even though I blink, her stunning visage doesn't disappear. She's real, not a figment of my wildest dreams.

“If you're here to, like, rob me, you're gonna be real disappointed,” she stutters out through clacking teeth, shivering as she wraps her arms around herself. “You can have my laptop, I guess, but it's nearly a decade old and whirs more than a ceiling fan if you dare to have more than a single tab open...”

My trance breaks amidst her nervous rambling, and I jolt like I've been electrocuted. In a fumbling rush that lacks all the sure confidence of my usual movements, I stumble backward, reaching for the towel hanging on the rack that I've been blocking with my body. I practically throw the fluffy white towel at her, biting my tongue to stop a groan when she gasps and bends at the waist to grab it before it hits the floor.

Fuck, this girl is beautiful.

More than just her stunning body, the fact she's not still screaming and threatening to call the cops on me makes me need to know more about her. Because any normal person would be kicking and fighting and grabbing for the nearest available device capable of calling the emergency services.

Instead, this shower-damp goddess, hair dripping onto the bath mat and shivering, bundles herself up in the towel that's just long enough to cover the curve of her ass when she holds it

around her chest, covering herself even though the image of her will be seared into my brain for the rest of my life.

It would be impossible to ever forget her even if I try, which I already know I won't.

Which is why I need to get the fuck away from her. This response, this caveman-style possessive desire burning through me—this is absolutely not fucking normal. And for all her rambling and lack of running away, it's clear I've scared this girl by barging in on her.

It takes more force of will than I want to admit to turn on my heel and stomp out of the bathroom, the cloud of fruity shampoo-scented humidity following me out the door before I slam it behind me.

I shake my head, practically sprinting back down the stairs to the kitchen, putting as much distance between me and her as I can without leaving the house altogether. I nearly break my phone when I yank it out of my pocket. It takes me three times to find my father's contact and press call because I'm so fucking shaken by what just happened. I don't get shaken easily. Not through emergencies or threats or major injury. So how the hell has this girl managed to wreck me from just an accidental look at her?

And, probably more importantly, why the fuck is she here at all?

My dad picks up on the last ring, and I don't even let him get through the word *hello* before I'm growling down the phone.

"Did you know there's a woman in your house?" I snap, grip tightening on the phone. Not wanting to actually break the device, I set it down on the counter and put it on speaker.

"A woman...? Oh!" My dad pauses to laugh, and I hear a feminine voice in the background. "That's just Talia!"

As if that explains anything. "Dad, who the hell is Talia?" I try and fail to keep the exasperation I feel out of my voice.

"Oh, didn't I tell you?" Dad asks, and I grit my teeth because obviously not. "Well, since Lucille and I are away 'till the end of the month and Talia needed somewhere to stay, she's staying

there over the summer. Lucille, understandably, wanted her daughter to have somewhere to go on her college break, and we agreed before you told us you were coming for a visit too.”

My head spins. Is any of this supposed to make sense?

“Dad, you’ve missed like ten fucking steps of explanation,” I grunt, glaring at the phone as though he can see my frustration.

“Who is Lucille?”

“My wife!”

His ... *what?*

I must make some sort of noise because he continues, “We eloped a month ago, wanted to put the money towards the cruise rather than have a fancy wedding.”

Married. My dad is married. I blink a few times, unsure of how to feel. My mom died when I was little, so I always kind of knew Dad might find another partner at some point. But he’s gone and got married without even mentioning it to me, and I can’t help but feel a little bitter about that.

“And Talia?” I ask, needing all the facts. I’m starting to put the pieces together, though, and I come to the conclusion right before Dad helpfully puts it into words.

“Talia’s your new stepsister.”

I stare at the closed bathroom door with my mouth hanging open.

My fingers are clenched in the damp towel. I'm shivering from standing here soaking wet, but I can't remember how to move. I'm frozen, cold except for the spark of heat simmering low in my stomach, which gives me just as many questions as everything else that's just happened.

"What on earth..." I murmur to myself, trying to shake the shock off.

I think I probably should be scared shitless. Yeah, I'm shocked and confused, but the longer I think about the guy who barged in, the less terrified I feel. He was huge—tall and so fit I could see his muscles even through the steam and his clothes—but he hadn't made any move to grab me or use any of that strength against me. In fact, all he'd done was stare at me in as much shock as I'd been feeling.

Plus ... I'd have to be blind not to have noticed how freaking hot he was.

My curiosity vastly overwhelms any trepidation I feel, and before I really realize I'm doing it, I'm jogging out of the bathroom in my towel and down the stairs to where I can hear footsteps pacing back and forth in the kitchen.

I pause when I reach the kitchen doorway, bare feet half in the hall, half on the kitchen tile.

The guy is pacing around the kitchen island, a phone lying on the marble surface. His hair looks more tousled than it did before, a little messy like he's been running his hands through it, tugging at the ends. That spark of warmth low in my stomach coils tighter and I gasp.

The noise catches the dude's attention, and his eyes meet mine. Swallowing thickly, I pad into the room, pausing at the island—him on one side, me on the other.

“Trey? You still there?”

I jump a little as the voice calls through the phone, a little staticky in the way that indicates the connection isn't great. But even with the small measure of distortion warping it, I still recognize that voice.

“David?” I ask, the confusion I feel lining my voice.

Why is my stepdad on the phone? Better yet, why does this random guy—Trey—have his number? And why does that name sound so familiar to me? I don't think I've met anyone named Trey, but there's a niggling feeling in the back of my head that insists I'm missing something obvious here.

“Oh, Talia! How are you, sweetheart?” David asks, apparently oblivious to the twin looks of confusion on my and Trey's faces.

I lean over the counter to get closer to the phone, and Trey reaches out to nudge the device towards me, allowing me to look down at the screen. My jaw drops open, and my eyes go wide as I set eyes on the contact photo of my stepdad at least ten years younger than I've seen him. It's not the photo that stuns me speechless, though, but the name his contact is saved under: **Dad.**

Oh. My. God.

“David is your father?!” I gasp, eyes flicking wildly between the phone and the man across the counter. Trey looks at me with assessing eyes, arms crossed over his chest in a stance that makes his muscles bulge. I look away hurriedly before I let myself study him the way I want to.

Because, yes, Trey is the hottest man I've literally ever seen. Older than me by what must be ten years, but he wears his age well. Like fine wine, not that I'm fancy enough to have experience with fine wine. God, I don't have experience at all, but from the way I'm reacting to his presence from the very fiber of my being, my body and soul are suddenly convinced that this man is the one to start experiencing things with.

There's one giant fuck off problem with that.

Trey is my stepbrother.

That's why I recognized his name. And now that the realization is hitting me, I can see the ways he resembles his dad. His hair is the same color—dark brown with a couple strands of silver at the hairline that only add to his appeal—and he has the same strong nose his dad does, though Trey's has a more defined bump in the bridge that looks like it's maybe from being broken.

But where my stepdad's eyes are a deep brown, Trey's are a cool blue-gray that reminds me of stormy seas. I wrack my brain to remember all the times David's talked about his son, but he and my mom have only been married a month and their relationship was a whirlwind.

Hell, they were only dating for three months before they eloped, but I guess when you know, you know. And they are really in love. Like, disgustingly in love. I've never seen my mom so happy, so I can't bring myself to see their constant cuddling and pet names as anything but cute.

Cute is not how I'd ever define Trey or my reaction to him. No, I want to climb him like a tree and test out just what all those muscles can do.

Oh my God, what the hell am I thinking about?

With a shake of my head, I realize I'm standing there gaping at him, and David's saying my name down the phone, clearly waiting for an answer.

"It seems in all the excitement, your mom and I forgot to explain to either of you that the other would be home over the summer," David says, a hint of apology in his voice.

“Um...yeah, you definitely didn’t mention this,” I say back with a small laugh. “He nearly scared the life out of me—”

“Is that Talia? Put her on speaker!” I hear my mother call out. Seconds later, her voice comes through more clearly. “Talia, darling, how are you? I’m so sorry we forgot to tell either of you. The diaries got crossed and I’ve been so caught up with the wedding and then leaving for the honeymoon, it slipped my mind entirely.”

I sigh, smiling at the phone even though she can’t see me. My mom has always been a little scatterbrained, but she always means well. She’s the best person I know, and I can’t be mad at her for this. No harm is done after all.

“It’s okay, Mom,” I assure her. “Just got a fright when some random, giant dude walked into the house.”

Mom laughs with me before David says, “Don’t worry, Talia. My Trey would never do anything to hurt anyone. Well, unless they were trying to hurt someone. Oh, and there was that fight he got in high school but—”

“That’s quite enough, Dad,” Trey calls out, stopping David. He turns his eyes to me, and I shiver under his attention. “I apologize for scaring you. I didn’t know you were here, obviously, or I would never have...” He trails off, and we both glance down at the phone before back at each other, neither of us willing to say out loud that he walked in on me showering.

Trey shakes his head. “My dad’s right. I would never hurt you. Protect you, yes. But never hurt you or scare you again.”

I have absolutely no reason to trust him, but ... I do. I truly believe he means it when he says he’ll only ever protect me. It sends a rush of fluttering butterflies through my stomach, and I grip the towel around me tighter like it can shield me from my reactions to him.

“We’ll be back on the 28th,” Mom reminds me through the phone. “Think of this as a good opportunity for you guys to get to know each other now that we’re family and all.”

Family. Yeah, right. There is nothing about the way I look at Trey that’s at all familial. I can feel my face burning as I

cringe at myself. *He's your step-brother!* I chastise myself, but the knowledge does nothing but make me burn hotter. God, I'm sure I'm bright red right now. I duck my head to try to hide it, but I swear I can feel Trey's gaze on me like a brand.

No! Don't think about him marking you.

What the hell has gotten into me? I've never reacted to someone like this before. Never even been interested enough in anyone to have sex with them, and all of a sudden I feel like I'm on fire because of my literal stepbrother. Great. Perfect. Totally ideal.

This is a shitshow.

Trey begins speaking, and I realize I've ignored my mom, too lost in my own spiraling thoughts.

"Talk to you soon!" Mom and David call before the phone beeps, signaling they've hung up.

Silence falls between Trey and me, making the air feel thick. I'm struggling to remember how people breathe normally. A mess. I'm a mess. And I hate silence.

"So...guess we're spending the month together," I say, clearing my throat and hoping my cheeks aren't as pink as they feel when I raise my head again.

The fact of the matter is that Trey and I are going to be alone here for a month, and I think a month of silence and awkwardness might actually kill me. It'd be much better to make an effort to be friendly and hope he can't sense the way I react to him. Maybe that'll stop, too? Like exposure therapy. Not likely.

I walk around the counter, smiling, and reach out my hand in his direction. "I didn't get a chance to introduce myself," I say, "I'm Talia, Lucille's daughter."

I realize too late that I'm still only wearing a towel, and with one of my arms extended, the fabric starts to slip. Panicked, I drop my hand and grab the towel before it unravels completely, stumbling backward. There's no way I can start my goal of friendliness while I'm practically naked in front of

him for the second time since we met not even twenty minutes ago.

With Trey still silent, I turn and rush out of the room to put on some actual clothes and get a grip on myself.

I return twenty minutes later, with my hair still damp but in twin braids so it doesn't drip anywhere, wearing comfy pajamas and fuzzy slippers. I feel a little more centered now that I've had a chance to breathe and cover myself up.

Trey's standing right where I left him, leaning against the kitchen counter like a statue. Hell, it wouldn't surprise me if those muscles of his were actually carved from stone. I swear I can see his abs through his shirt.

You're ogling him again! I blink and raise my eyes to his face, smiling. Friendly. I can do friendly.

It's nearly seven in the evening now, and I know for a fact there's nothing much in the cupboards because I was supposed to grocery shop today. We both need to eat something.

"You grew up here, right?" I pull over a stool and sit down on the island.

Trey raises a brow and nods with a grunt of affirmation. Not a talker, I see.

"Then you know the area better than I do," I push on, filling the silence with my rambling. "I've only been here for a few days. What's the best take-out spot?"

Trey considers my question for a minute, those stormy eyes of his holding me hostage as he keeps his gaze trained on me. After a minute, he reels off the name of a Chinese food place, and I immediately pull up my delivery app.

My stomach grumbles eagerly while I scroll through the menu, adding a whole bunch of food to my cart. Trey doesn't give me any input into what his favorite dishes are, so I choose for him, ordering us a feast. When I'm done, I set my phone down and pin him with a look.

"Look, we may as well get to know each other, considering our parents clearly aren't going to do the introductions for us,"

I say with a smile and a shrug.

Trey inclines his head slightly. "I'm Trey," he states simply. I wait for him to expand on that, but he doesn't.

I laugh a little, shaking my head. "Just Trey?"

"What more is there to know?" he asks in that dark voice that makes goosebumps break out on my skin.

"I have an idea," I announce, hopping off my stool. "You know the best way to get to know someone, to know what they're really like?"

Trey frowns at my question. "What?"

"Board games," I finish with a grin. "You never really know what someone's truly like until you've gone head to head over a game of Monopoly. Once, Mom and I had a month-long game because neither of us was willing to admit defeat."

"A board game?" Trey repeats slowly, sounding unconvinced but not objecting. I take that as a win and hurry over to the cabinet beneath the TV where I know Mom's stored her board games.

I grab Monopoly and spin back, shaking the box at him. "I won in the end," I add with a teasing smile when Trey still looks unconvinced. "What? Are you worried I'll wipe the floor with you?"

He scoffs, eyes brightening as he takes my bait, making me grin. "Of course not."

I shrug, raising a brow at him. "You should be."

My teasing works because he pushes off the counter and comes to join me on the sofas as I set out the board on the coffee table.

I select my piece and he picks one at random and then shuffles the cards. Once the game is ready, I look up to find Trey staring at me with such intensity that I'm caught off guard.

Does he have to be so damn handsome?

If he thinks his good looks are gonna convince me to take it easy on him, he's sorely mistaken. I meet his eyes and set my

piece down on the start square.

“I’m going to grow a goddamn empire,” I announce and roll the dice. Neither of us stops looking at the other to check the numbers, though. I smirk at him, my voice coming out huskier than I intended it to when I challenge, “Accept defeat now, Trey Taggart. You don’t stand a chance against me.”

Talia grins and holds out her hand for my stack of cash, flexing her fingers and curling her palm in a *give-me* gesture.

And fuck if I won't give her anything she asks for if she keeps smiling and teasing me like this. I'd buy her half the properties on this stupid board game for real if she'll keep saying my name in that sweet, sparkly voice of hers.

I'm pretty sure I'm halfway to bankruptcy because I haven't paid a single lick of attention to the game or my strategy. Somehow, Talia's already got two hotels built, and I don't even have a full set of colors yet. I don't even care. Normally, I'm competitive. I've won our squad's card game night every time for the past year for fuck's sake, and I never make a bet I can't win.

But Talia ... God, how could I possibly pay attention to anything else when she's in the room?

"Ah, shit." She tucks her cash away and looks at her dice roll that will put her directly on one of the only decent properties I've got. "How much do I owe you?"

As much as you can take, I think before shutting that thought down. The idea of seeing how much I could give her, how much she could take of me, is a rabbit hole I can't afford to go down.

Stepsister. This is my damn stepsister.

But...

Well, I don't care about that either. Shit, the second I set eyes on her in that shower, she claimed my fucking soul. I don't understand it. I've never felt anything like this ... this draw to her. Because she's stunning, obviously, and I want her in every conceivable way possible. But also because, despite the fact that I've known her for barely an evening, I've never met someone who shines so brightly. The sun has nothing on Talia.

I can't remember the last time I played an actual board game. I must've been a kid. There's hardly enough time in my life now to make frivolous activities like this a priority, but Talia could ask me to sit on this sofa playing this game every day for the rest of my life and I'd probably say yes.

I can't even imagine ever saying no to her.

The bell rings before I can figure out how much fake money Talia owes me for the fake rent, and I stride over to grab our food from the delivery guy. I've only just placed the bags down on the kitchen counter when the doorbell rings again. I frown. Maybe the delivery guy forgot something?

Instead of the delivery man, I open the door to a face that I swear looks familiar to me.

"Hey, is—oh, shit. Trey? Is that you?" the dude asks, dark eyes going wide, a smile breaking out on his face.

"Wait. Daniel, right?" I reply, suddenly remembering why I know him. We went to high school together. He was on the football team and in my math class. His hair is shorter now, and there are laugh lines on his face, but he clearly still works out. His shoulders are nearly as wide as mine, and he really hasn't changed all that much since the last time I saw him at graduation.

"The one and only." He laughs, reaching out with his free hand to shake mine in an overly enthusiastic greeting. He's holding some sort of Tupperware container in his other hand, one that's empty as far as I can tell. "How have you been, Trey? Did you go into the military like you said you were going to?"

I nod, leaning against the doorway. "Navy," I answer. Then, because it would definitely be seen as rude if I don't at least

pretend to care about this conversation even when every cell in my body is demanding I shut the door in this guy's face and get back to focusing on my step-sister, I ask, "Still playing football?"

Daniel grins. "I played in college, but now I'm a personal trainer down at the gym. Means I get to stay fit without nearly as many injuries as I got playing." He laughs again.

"What's taking so long? Stalling's not going to save you from bankruptcy—" Talia calls out, her voice cutting off as she pads over and peers around my shoulder to see for herself what the hold up is. "Oh! Daniel, hey!"

Every muscle in my body tenses at the friendly, familiar way she says his name. I grit my teeth so hard I'm half surprised that I don't crack a molar. My head snaps in Talia's direction, dismissing Daniel entirely.

"How do you know him?" I ask, watching her eyes widen a little at the darkness in my voice.

Shit, what if they're close? What if she likes him? The idea of her with another man makes me want to strangle him. My fists clench at my sides as the possessiveness overwhelms me. Talia isn't even really mine. For fuck's sake, we only just met and our goddamn parents are married and yet ... I know down to the marrow of my bones that, despite it all, she is and will be mine.

So fuck Daniel and fuck any other man who ever even looks her way. They don't deserve to bask in her sunny glow. Hell, I don't either, but I'll do whatever it takes to be worthy of her.

Talia ignores my admittedly rude question, shoving past me to accept the empty Tupperware Daniel's holding out to her. The position puts her tucked under my arm, and the contact calms the raging urge to slam the door in Daniel's face. She's close, and I want to keep her there. Closer too. As close as we can get.

Fuck, those pajama shorts she's wearing shouldn't be legal.

"Hey, Talia," Daniel greets with a grin that I want to smack off his face. "Thank you again for the cake. It was delicious, and

Lucy loved it. She's already told me it's my brotherly duty to get her one every year for her birthday from now on."

Talia giggles. My cock roars to attention, and my heartbeat picks up at the sound. "I'm glad she enjoyed it," she says, blushing a little at the compliment. "It was fun to bake."

"Everyone loved it," Daniel insists. "I've never had chocolate cake that good before."

"The trick is to add some coffee to bring out the cocoa flavor," Talia explains, smiling brightly, eyes sparkling.

It's obvious she's genuinely excited about cakes and baking, and I make a mental note to ask her more about it later. I need to know everything about her, need to know her better than Daniel does. Fucking Daniel.

Daniel's eyes flick to mine. He must see the dark thoughts written on my face because his smile falters a little and he turns back to Talia. "I should get going, leave you guys to it."

"Will I see you tomorrow?" Talia chirps, sweeter than any cake, and taps her nails against the tupperware she's holding.

"Of course, you will," Daniel says before he gives us a wave and turns to head back home.

The second he turns around, I slam the door shut, locking the rest of the world out. I stomp over to where I left the take-out containers on the kitchen counter, Talia following closely behind. She sets the Tupperware down and pulls out two plates, helping me to unpack the many containers of food we've ordered.

"Why does Daniel think he'll see you tomorrow?" I ask through clenched teeth, opening a container so aggressively that it rips and rice falls out onto the counter.

Surprise crosses Talia's features, but she quickly smoothes her expression out, spooning noodles onto her plate. "Because he will see me tomorrow. We volunteer at the city's soup kitchen, and we're both on the Monday morning prep shift."

I grunt in response, trying not to let all of my feelings show on my face. There's no fucking way I want her alone with Daniel

tomorrow, not when I saw how he looked at her. Talia is all sunshine and sweetness, and Daniel, or any of the other guys she volunteers with, could take advantage of that. No, there's no way she's going alone, not without someone to protect her.

"Sweet and sour?" Talia asks, pulling me from my thoughts.

I accept the container of sauce she's offering, and we finish filling our plates before returning to the sofas and the game she's destroying me at.

I don't even try to win. There's far more satisfaction in watching Talia cheer and tease and light up every time she makes grabby hands for more of my dwindling stack of fake cash, building a new hotel, and gloating about her property empire expanding.

I never thought I'd be happy about going broke, but as Talia leans across the coffee table to take the last of my money, I'm grinning deliriously. My chest aches with laughter, and I don't remember the last time I had this much fun.

Talia's cheeks are pink with humor as she looks up at me through her lashes, waving the fake bills like they're a fan in front of her face. She's still leaning over the table and the neckline of her cotton pajama top dips with the angle, revealing the swell of her breasts just before she sits back up to count her cash.

"Told you I'd wipe the floor with you," Talia declares.

The game finally ends with me penniless and grinning so hard it's painful.

"Only 'cause I let you, cupcake," I tease right back, surprised at my own words. My voice is laced with the possessive darkness I've felt all night, and Talia's breath visibly hitches in response. The air between us changes, charged suddenly. It lasts only a second, though, before Talia stands up and starts packing the game away.

I grab our plates, taking them to the kitchen to wash and tidy up the leftovers. When I'm done, I find Talia hovering by the sofas with a frown on her face.

"What's wrong?"

“I just...um...there’s only one spare bed here, and I don’t want to kick you out of it,” she explains. “It was your room first after all.”

I have an easy solution to her concern. Like hell am I kicking Talia out of the bed. It’s hers now. “I’ll be just fine on the sofa, cupcake,” I reassure her, that stupid nickname slipping out again. It’s teasing, but considering her sweetness and apparent talent for baking, oddly fitting too. And she hasn’t told me to knock it off yet. In fact, she just smiles at me. Then her smile fades into a yawn, and I realize how late it is.

I make quick work of grabbing my bags out of her room and snagging some blankets from the laundry cupboard to make the sofa my new bed. I gather the plush cushion from the smaller sofa Talia sat on during our game to use as a pillow.

“Goodnight, Trey,” Talia calls out from the doorway, slipping out and heading up to her room.

“Goodnight.” I unashamedly watch her legs and ass in those torturous pajama shorts as she walks away.

The exhaustion I felt earlier after all the traveling hits me like a truck, and I fall asleep in minutes, surrounded by the scent of Talia’s cherry shampoo covering the pillow I’m lying on.

I wake up before my alarm, which is a rare occurrence for me. Still, I decide to make the most of the extra time my body clock has allowed me today, and actually make what I want for breakfast rather than just shoveling a bowl of cereal into my face before I rush out the door for my volunteer shift like usual.

I'm craving waffles, and the second I'm dressed in comfy leggings and a pale pink t-shirt and have wrangled my hair into a ponytail, I bounce down the stairs to make them. Even though I still need to go grocery shopping, I always make sure my kitchen is stocked with baking supplies. Sure, this isn't my kitchen, it's my Mom's, but since I'm staying here over the summer, I've claimed it as mine anyway.

I stop short at the door to the lounge and kitchen. I thought Trey would be up before me, but nope. He's sound asleep on the sofa, tucked up because he's too tall to stretch out completely. I fight the urge to stand and watch him sleep like some sort of creep. Instead, I rush past him to the kitchen, trying to keep my footsteps as light as possible so I don't disturb him.

I get to work, gathering everything I need to make breakfast, figuring it'll be a nice gesture for him to wake up to a homemade meal. Besides, I always make too much batter for just me anyway and end up having way more waffles than one person could possibly eat by themselves.

Before I start mixing ingredients, I need coffee.

With my cup in hand, taking tiny sips so I don't burn my tongue, I'm about to start whisking everything together. But a sleepy, husky voice stops me short.

"Talía."

Coffee sloshes over the edge of my mug, and I set it down in a rush, grabbing a paper towel to wipe up the mess. I turn around hurriedly, hoping Trey hasn't just watched me make a complete fool of myself.

Except, when I try to greet him, he's not there. I'm sure I heard him say my name. Confused, my brows furrow and I take a step forward, pushing up on my tiptoes so I can peer over the back of the sofa he's asleep on.

Sure enough, he's still there, tangled in a blanket with his eyes closed.

"Talía," he groans, and I bite my lip to hide my gasp as he says my name again. This time, it comes out rougher, darker, needier.

Oh. Dear. God.

Heat rushes through me like I've been set on fire, all thoughts of waffles crushed as all of my focus hones in on Trey. There's still space between us. I haven't left the kitchen, but somehow the room feels much smaller than it did before.

Surely, he can't be dreaming of me, right? But he did say my name. Twice. And the way he said it, like he was groaning it in my ear from above, like it was a plea and a praise all at once.

It's the single hottest thing I've ever experienced.

Trey, of course, immediately proves me wrong by making it even fucking hotter.

I'm leaning forward to watch him, ears straining in case he says anything else. He shifts in his sleep and the blanket drops to the floor, giving me an insane view of abs and abs and—oh, did I mention—abs. I might be drooling, but I don't know because I can't think or focus on anything else except him.

Then his hand moves.

I think I might faint.

While he is shirtless, he's not entirely naked, which is a saving grace because that might kill me. Still, the black cotton pajama shorts aren't much better because they do nothing to hide the huge, hard outline of him beneath the waistband. Holy. Shit. He's...aroused.

Not just that, he's so aroused that, even in sleep, his palm finds his cock over the fabric, rubbing and stroking himself.

“God. Talia.”

I grip the edge of the counter, my knees going weak, my body threatening to collapse, wetness flooding my core. I squeeze my thighs together, not used to feeling like this over anyone. I've never been so turned on in my life.

Trey—hot as fuck, grumpy but kind, literally my stepbrother Trey—is touching himself to thoughts of me.

I'm halfway to melting into a puddle on the kitchen floor, but somehow my body manages to follow the instinctual demand to get closer to him.

Problem is, my legs are still weak, and I'm leaning on the counter for support. When I take a step, my hands move along the counter's edge, and my arm hits the side of my coffee mug, sending it crashing over the side and onto the floor.

Trey jolts awake in an instant, leaping to his feet with his eyes wide and fists balled, going from deep sleep to ready to fight in the split second it takes my brain to register what's happening. My heartbeat soars as my gaze flicks between the shattered, wet mess on the floor and ... oh, holy mother of God.

My eyes snare on Trey, body on display fully now as he stands by the sofa, no longer obscured by bad angles and sleep, in all his shirtless glory. Abs, pecs, biceps, even his damn forearms. Every inch of him is carved from stone, including the rock-hard length tenting his pajama pants. Low-slung pajama pants that draw my attention to the V of muscles at his hips that I suddenly have the burning desire to trace with my tongue.

Screw waffles, I want him for breakfast. I swear my mouth's actually watering.

Plus, besides the obvious hotness, Trey looks ready to fight. To defend. His stormy eyes assess every inch of the room, body language displaying just how ready he is to leap into a fight. I can't help but wonder what it would look like, to see him grapple with someone in my defense.

It takes a few seconds for Trey to register that there is, in fact, no threat except my own clumsiness, his eyes finding the broken cup on the floor at my feet. Then his gaze flicks to mine as his shoulders drop in relief, his fists uncurling, fingers flexing and making the veins in his forearms stand out.

"Are you okay?" he asks, his voice gruff and thick from sleep, sending shivers through me.

I do my best to hide my reaction, already knowing I'm bright red with embarrassment about the coffee and my obvious ogling. I nod, tongue producing a bunch of incoherent noises that barely string together into a sentence. "S-sorry, I was just, um, I didn't mean to wake you. I mean, I thought we could eat breakfast ... Waffles! I was making waffles!"

Trey's eyebrows draw together as he surveys me. "You look flushed, like you've been for a run. Making waffles can't be that strenuous?"

At that, my flush gets about ten times worse. How am I supposed to answer that? Oh, no, my flush is actually from imagining my stepbrother bending me over this counter and showing me what sex could be like.

Yeah, no. I don't realize my gaze has dropped until his follows, and we're both staring at the way his cock strains in his pants, a damp patch darkening the fabric. Images of him stroking himself while saying my name replay in my head, and I can feel my own panties get damp. I squeeze my thighs together, mind scrambled.

Before I can attempt an explanation, Trey turns on his heel and walks out of the room. A minute later, the sound of the shower turning on reaches my ears. My breath comes a little easier

even though my brain very helpfully offers up suggestions of what he looks like up there, naked and wet under the spray.

I shake my head, trying to clear the thoughts, and turn my focus to cleaning up my mess and restarting the waffles. By the time Trey returns, fully clothed thankfully, I've made a whole array of toppings—chopped fruit, honey, caramelized apples—and set out the full spread of waffles and coffee on the kitchen island.

I shove a plate towards him, gesturing for him to pile it up with whatever he wants. His eyes appraise the spread, then me, and he nods once in silent thanks. I'm grateful he doesn't speak because I'm not sure I can answer.

The air in here feels charged with unresolved tension, and the place between my legs is still aching with unmet need. Need I've never experienced so viscerally before. I doubt my own clumsy touch will fix it. No, my body craves him no matter how wrong it might be.

I shove my food down, barely tasting the waffles, my mind churning. There's ten minutes till I have to leave for my volunteer shift, and I take my last bite before wrapping up what little leftovers there are. Trey ate three times as much as I did, which made sense given how giant he is.

I grab the cupcakes I made yesterday from the fridge, but before I even realize what's happening, Trey plucks the container from my hand.

“What are you doing?” I ask, frowning.

“I'll carry them for you,” he says simply, which does absolutely nothing to lessen my confusion.

“I ... uh ... I'm going to the soup kitchen,” I remind him, tilting my head back to find him nodding like he knows that already, which he does. I told him yesterday after all. Still doesn't explain why he won't let me take the cupcakes. “I need to take them with me. They're a treat to put in the meal packages.”

Trey nods again. “Yes.”

Seriously, dude? Throw me a bone here. I inhale slowly, trying to ignore how badly I want him in order to communicate clearly. “So, why are you carrying them?”

Trey raises a brow, and a hint of a smirk makes his lips tilt at the sides. There’s something like playfulness in his blue-gray gaze, the same expression I caught hints of during our Monopoly session yesterday, so unlike his usual stoic, stony expression. I want to see more of that, more of the teasing, fun, soft side of him that I doubt he shows much. I want to be the one who gets that from him, the caring, kind, playful Trey as well as the protective, badass, muscle-man Trey.

I want all of him. Whatever he has to give, I want to take. I realize I want to give him all of me too. I want to give him things I’ve never given anybody else before in my life.

“I’m coming with you,” he says softly, his tone something between a whisper and a rumble, dark but soft at the same time. Sparks shoot down my skin as though he’s whispering in my ear, but all he’s doing is standing in front of me holding some cupcakes like a damn gentleman.

“Oh,” I say like an idiot. “You want to come volunteering with me?”

I nearly faint when he answers with no hesitation. “I want to be wherever you are, cupcake.”

Talia greets everyone busying about the cramped community kitchen by name.

I lose track after the third, not particularly caring if the short redhead Talia's chatting with is called Jen or Jasmine. The only name that matters, the only damn person that matters, is Talia. I'm a silent shadow as she leads me through the main kitchen space, all shiny silver surfaces and the smell of cheap floor cleaner filling the air. We drop our jackets off in a store cupboard, and Talia quickly points out the small, dark corridor that leads to the bathrooms and extra supply cupboard before shoving an apron at me with a grin.

I balance the cupcake container in one hand, grabbing the apron with the other so it doesn't fall to the floor.

"I don't need this," I tell her calmly as we enter the kitchen again. The smell of cooking onions is beginning to drown out the chemical lemon scent of the cleaner.

Talia's smile is nothing short of mischievous. I can't help but love the way her eyes sparkle with it. "If you're going to insist on being here, you can make yourself useful and help me wash the dishes."

She ties her own apron around her waist before snatching the cupcakes from me and flouncing off to store them in one of the giant fridges.

I stare after her for a minute, stunned by just how much personality is stored in her short frame. She's mesmerizing, and before I make the conscious decision to do it, I'm

following her orders and tying the stupid apron around my waist.

Talia quickly shows me where everything is and barely muffles her laugh when I reluctantly tug on a pair of yellow gloves. She looks ridiculously cute in the apron and glove combo, while I've never felt more ridiculous. Still, I keep my complaints to myself and commit to washing dishes by her side, splitting my focus between the sponges and soapy water and watching Talia out of the corner of my eye.

All around us, other volunteers clean, cook, and plan logistical things that sound almost as detailed as my Navy missions, with the addresses, menu plans, and timings to coordinate amongst every volunteer and family in need on this side of the city. More than once, someone asks Talia for her advice or checks that she's still happy to add her bakes to the meal boxes because they've had more requests for her chocolate cherry cakes or raspberry flapjacks. Talia's smile never falters, and she agrees to everything readily, seeming genuinely happy even scrubbing something burnt off the bottom of a pan.

Once the first pile of dishes is done and on the rack to drip dry, Talia peels off her gloves and excuses herself to the bathroom. I watch her until she's out of sight, fighting the urge to follow after her because I don't want to freak her out. *That would be too far*, I tell myself and grab a towel to dry off the cutlery.

But five minutes pass, then seven, and she still hasn't returned.

Where the hell is she? She should have been back by now. My ability to give a shit about what anyone thinks about me following her goes out the window. I abandon my damp apron and gloves and stride out of the kitchen to the dimly lit hall beyond.

The door to the kitchen closes behind me, muffling the noises of cooking and planning. I focus on my new surroundings, taking everything in as fast as I can, my entire body on alert the way I've trained for half my life.

"...new Italian place on third?"

I go still as the voice reaches my ears, the hairs on the back of my neck standing on end. I know that fucking voice.

Daniel.

Three long strides take me around the corner, where my eyes immediately lock on Daniel and Talia. She's cornered, her back against the stone wall outside the bathrooms, Daniel's hand braced beside her shoulder in a false show of casual confidence, blocking her exit.

"I'm just really busy with baking and volunteering, and you know I go back to school at the end of summer. I don't think it's a good idea to go on a date right now," Talia answers with utter kindness, being so much more sweet to him than he deserves.

He doesn't even deserve to breathe the same damn air as her. For all her attempts at niceness, I can see the way discomfort is making her muscles tense, her shoulders bunched up and her eyes keep flicking between Daniel and the arm that's essentially trapping her in place.

"You can find time for one date," Daniel argues, his tone calm but condescending. "How about Thursday?"

My teeth clench so hard my jaw pops. I want to rip his fucking tongue out. It's clear he's not taking no for an answer, and fuck knows how long Talia's been trying to get him to back the fuck off.

I'm already moving before Daniel makes his next mistake. The fucker leans forward, closing the distance between them. Talia scrambles backward, but she's already flat against the wall and there's nowhere left for her to go. She turns her head to the side, trying to avoid Daniel's mouth as he zeroes in on her, going in for a kiss that is entirely unwanted.

Yeah, ripping his tongue out sounds fucking great right now.

My hand fists in the collar of Daniel's shirt, and I yank him backward, away from Talia. I shove, forcing him to lose his balance and crash to the cold ground on his ass. He's a big guy, not far off my own build, but that just means he falls even harder.

“Dude, what the hell?” Daniel groans from the floor at our feet, shock and anger written all over his face.

I scoff, sneering down at him. “Stay the fuck away from her.”

“What the fuck? I was just being nice!” Daniel snaps back at me, pushing up on his hands, angry eyes flicking between me and Talia.

Talia looks shell-shocked, her lips parted and her eyes wide. But she doesn't speak up in Daniel's defense, and her silence tells me everything I need to know.

I step towards him, barely able to resist the urge to crush his fingers under my boots. “If you ever make her uncomfortable again, I'll knock your fucking teeth out,” I spit at him, meaning every single word.

To Daniel's credit, he only pales a little, then his features quickly rearrange themselves into a threat.

“You wouldn't dare,” he tells me with entirely misplaced confidence. There's very little I wouldn't do for Talia even if she doesn't realize it yet. “I'm a personal trainer, man. I work out for a living. You think I'm easy to take out? Fuck. If you want a fight, I'll give you a fight. Show you what real strength looks like—”

I level him with a bored stare as he embarrasses himself with his bragging. He finally pushes to his feet, going toe to toe with me. He's an inch shorter than me, and I can tell how much that pisses him off.

Sure, he's muscular, but I doubt this guy's ever fought a real fight in his life. Training in a secure gym setting is nothing like facing real threats, and there's not a single fucking cell in my body that's scared of him.

I cut off his bragging, speaking in a low tone that does nothing to hide the darkness in my words. “I haven't spent twenty years in the military without knowing how to take down threats,” I tell him, holding his stare, my lips curving up in a smirk that's far from friendly. “Though, I can't even call you a real threat at all, Daniel. You're no better than a fucking rat, a pest that's made the mistake of bothering what's mine. So

scurry off to whatever dark fucking hole you crawled out of and know that if there's ever a next time, you won't be able to walk anywhere after I'm through with you."

I really want to make good on my promises to break his teeth and cut his tongue off, but I don't want to scare Talia. She's been through enough today already. Plus, we're in a fucking soup kitchen. This isn't the place for blood and gore, no matter how much imagining it makes me smile.

Daniel's gaze flicks past me to Talia, pupils widening slightly. "Talia, come on. Tell him to back off," he pleads with her, voice sharp now.

"You don't talk to her," I growl, getting closer to him to block his view. "You don't even fucking look at her."

I'm standing between them, blocking him from getting near her again. When he tries to take a step forward, I plant a hand on his chest and hold him still, not moving an inch when he tries to shove me away. He might be strong, but brawn isn't enough without the brains and training to back it up. My feet are planted on the floor, my balance secure, and I'm hardly straining to keep him in place.

"Fuck this," Daniel mutters, shaking his head at me. "You're a fucking psycho."

I push him away, watching him shoot another glare my way before turning around and storming off. I wait until he's gone straight out the front door and it's slammed behind him before I turn to face Talia again.

She hasn't moved an inch, still leaning against the wall, her forest green eyes wide and locked on me. A shaky breath leaves her lips, and I take a cautious step towards her, not wanting to scare her even more.

I wish I had come to check on her sooner, and I vow to never make that mistake again. Talia is as sweet as the cakes she makes, and that sweetness deserves to be protected at all costs. I'll be her damn guard dog all she needs, fighting off assholes so she doesn't have to.

“You...um...” she tries to say, swallowing thickly. Her tongue darts out to wet her lips and I track the movement, blood heating. “Thank you.”

“You don’t have to thank me,” I tell her honestly. “I’m sorry I didn’t come to check on you sooner. He never should’ve gotten that close to you. Did he hurt you, cupcake?”

There’s that nickname again. I don’t give people nicknames, especially not cute ones like that. But fuck, everything’s different with her. And it makes her smile, light returning to her eyes, so I’ll call her every cutesy name under the sun if she wants me to.

“No,” she says, and I breathe a sigh of relief. “He just wouldn’t listen to me. I thought ... I thought he was my friend, but I guess not.” Her shoulders drop a little, and the sadness that pulls on her pretty face makes my heart sink.

I pull her closer to me, wrapping my arm around her shoulders. She sinks into my touch, and it feels so right, holding her, comforting her like this.

“Did you mean it?” she asks softly.

For a second, I think I misheard her.

“Mean what?” I ask, not wanting to misinterpret this. This moment feels vital, something unspoken hanging in the air around us.

“When you said ... when you told him ... I’m yours,” she whispers.

I don’t hesitate. “Yes. I meant every word.”

She doesn’t answer, but I swear she shivers a little in my hold. I want to keep talking, to finish the conversation, but I need to get her somewhere she feels safe first. I keep her close and take a step, ensuring she comes with me.

“Come on, cupcake. I’m taking you home.”

Trey doesn't put even an inch of distance between us as we walk home, his arm a steady, warm constant around my shoulders. It's as if he's unwilling to let me go even for a second.

And after what just happened with Daniel, I'm grateful for the calming touch. The memory of what went down back in the kitchen makes a fresh spike of fear-tinged anger tear through me. I can't believe Daniel did that. Sure, he's flirted with me before, but I've turned him down each time. I thought the message was abundantly clear—I'm not interested in him.

I never expected him to get so pushy.

And the way Trey had thrown him off me, the things he threatened to do to protect me? I shiver despite the heat collecting low in my stomach. That, combined with the gentle, caring side of him he's showing as he holds the front door open for me and ushers me into safety ... Yeah, my stepbrother is better than any man I've ever met, any man I could ever have dreamed of.

I'm yanked out of my thoughts as my feet leave the ground. Trey lifts me like I weigh nothing more than a feather, and sits me on the edge of the kitchen counter.

"What—" I try to ask, but he interrupts me.

"Sit there and let me take care of you," he tells me in a tone that brooks no argument.

I shut up instantly, somehow instinctively wanting to obey him, to please him. God, my reactions are all over the place today. Still, I can't deny the way some of the tension leaves my body as I sit there where he put me, waiting like he asked, and watch him grab milk out of the fridge and chocolate powder out of the cupboard.

By the time he hands me a warm mug, my mouth is watering—not because of the hot cocoa, but because of him. Okay, and maybe the hot cocoa too. He's topped it with cream and marshmallows and the rich, chocolatey taste of the drink makes me moan in pleasure. How did he know this was what I wanted? Has he really figured me out so fast, right down to the fact that my sweet tooth is absolutely the way to my heart?

Oh, Trey was trouble. And I never wanted to be in trouble more.

He comes to stand between my parted knees, watching me lick the cream from my lips.

“What do you need, cupcake?” he asks, trapping me in his stormy gaze.

My mind empties of every thought but him. Trey. He's what I want, he's what's making me feel better, he's who protected me and looked after me. What do I need? There's only one answer to that.

“You,” I blurt out.

Trey's gray eyes darken like storm clouds rolling over an ocean. Butterflies erupt in my stomach, and I set my drink down.

His voice is all growly and rough when he asks, “Are you sure? Because seeing that asshole touch what's mine makes me want to claim you so thoroughly you'll forget anyone else's hands but mine. Be very sure this is what you want, Talia, because I will devour you.”

Yes. Yes, yes, yes, I want that. I want everything he'll give me. I'm so damn tired of not doing what I want. Hell, I've done three years of a degree I have no passion for. Studying marketing is a chore, not something I actually want out of life.

I want to bake. I want to make people happy with my cakes and cookies and treats. And I want to be happy too.

I don't care that Trey's my stepbrother. I don't care that this is insane. I don't care that I've never done this before because I've never been so sure of anything.

"I'm sure, Trey."

The second the words leave my mouth, Trey grabs me and, in a few quick strides, takes us to the lounge. I'm dropped on the sofa with a squeal that instantly gets muffled the moment Trey's mouth crashes against mine.

The entire world melts away as Trey's kiss consumes me. My arms wrap around his neck, tugging him closer, my entire body lighting up. His tongue sweeps across my lips, and I part them for him.

"Fuck, Talia," Trey groans against me. "God, you're so fucking sweet. Need to see if you taste this good everywhere."

I gasp, arching up against him, too mindless with need to answer with words. I'm nodding before I really even know what exactly he means, more than willing to let him do whatever he wants to me. If his kisses feel that good, I need to know how he could possibly make me feel better than this.

"You're mine," Trey murmurs, his kisses dropping to my neck, making me moan. "Mine to kiss and taste and touch, isn't that right?"

"Yes. Yes," I manage to answer with another moan.

"Are you wet for me, sweet girl?" His tone is dark and full of need. Pleasure ripples through me just from his dirty words against my skin. His hand skims down my body, cupping me over my leggings. I'm sure the fabric is damp with evidence of how much I want him. He hums with approval as he feels it. "Does it ache? Do you want me to make it better?"

"P-please," I say, mindless as he rubs the heel of his hand over me, making another rush of wetness ruin my panties. Even through the layers of clothes, his touch feels so good.

“I need you to lie here like a good girl and let me make you feel good. Can you do that for me?”

Oh God. Is this real? I think I might have died and gone to some sort of sexy heaven.

I whimper out something that sounds vaguely like a *yes*, and Trey’s eyes sparkle as he grins at me. My face flames when he hooks his hand in the waistband of my pants and yanks them down, leaving me bare. Nobody’s ever seen me like this before, and I can’t help the self-consciousness I feel. I’m so wet for him. I can feel the evidence on my thighs as the cool air hits me, and I squeeze my eyes shut in embarrassment.

Trey’s hand cups my face, and my eyes snap open to find his eyes narrowed on me. “Don’t hide from me, Talia,” he growls. “You are fucking gorgeous. Do you hear me, sweet girl? So damn pretty, all wet and needy for me. You will not be ashamed of this, do you understand me?”

There’s so much heat in his gaze that I can’t help but nod. I feel safe as his words wash over me like there really is no reason to be embarrassed after all. I’m his, like he said, and all I have to do is let him look after me. I can do that. I want that.

I let my body relax back onto the sofa and love the way approval lights up Trey’s face.

“So good for me,” Trey murmurs. He shifts down the sofa, warm hands cupping my thighs and parting them so he can kneel between them. “Do you like your stepbrother telling you what to do, Talia?”

That really shouldn’t be so hot, should it? But ... dammit, it is.

“Yes,” I admit, swallowing thickly. I’ve never been this turned on in my life.

Trey groans, and when I glance down, I can see the evidence of how hot he’s finding this too, pressing against his jeans. Long and thick. Will he show me how to make him feel good too?

Before I can work up the courage to ask him that, though, my breath is stolen from my lungs by Trey’s touch. My back arches off the cushions. Trey’s fingers slip through my center,

sensitive skin parting under his touch, need pulsing through me. He dips one finger into me, my body so ready for him that he meets no resistance despite my inexperience with this.

“Jesus, you’re perfect,” Trey mutters, more to himself than me. I squirm as his touch moves and acute pleasure shoots through me. “Ah-ah, sweet girl. Hold still for me.”

“C-can’t,” I rasp when the pad of his finger circles that spot again.

“Yes, you can. Try for me, sweet girl. That’s it.”

My mind is deliciously fuzzy, and all I can focus on is Trey’s voice and his touch. I want to obey him, to do as he says, to make him proud of me. I bite my lip as I try to hold still, and he rewards me immediately by increasing his speed, making fireworks burst inside me.

Then his touch is gone, hand slipping down to press two fingers inside me again. I make a strangled noise, trying desperately to stop my hips from bucking like they want to.

Trey clicks his tongue off his teeth. “Do you need more, sweet girl?”

“Yes,” I answer immediately. There’s a hot, tight coil of pleasure low in my stomach, an insistent need for more that I’m helpless but to try to fill. I feel like I’m on the precipice of something, and damn if I don’t want to let him push me right off the edge.

“Ask nicely, Talia,” Trey insists, voice all growly and demanding. “Where are your manners?”

My face heats again, but his admonishment only makes my blood run hotter. “Please,” I ask. “Please give me more.”

“Since you asked so nicely...” Trey ducks down, his breath hitting my wetness, and his mouth hovers over where his fingers are still pressed inside me.

His tongue swipes across me, flicking up to that sensitive bundle of nerves he teased with his fingers earlier, and I cry out. That tight coil of need burns hotter, and I forget how to breathe.

“Ssh, sweet girl,” Trey murmurs from between my legs. I’m whining like a needy creature, unable to think enough to form real words. “So needy. Let me kiss it better.”

His tongue strokes and circles and flicks, his fingers curling and pressing inside me, and I’m overcome with desperate desire. I need...something. I feel close.

“Trey, I-I’m gonna...”

“Don’t fight it, baby,” he whispers. “Give me your pleasure.”

The second his mouth is back on me, I free-fall over the cliff. Bright stars dance in my vision, utter bliss coursing through me. I think I scream his name, but my ears are buzzing as my body gives him exactly what he wants.

When I come back down to earth, I’m panting and limp. I stare down at where Trey is kneeling between my legs to find him raising his fingers to his mouth. He holds my eyes and licks my wetness from them, smirking like he’s just won some sort of prize.

“Such a perfect girl.”

He gathers me up in his arms, and I sigh happily as he tucks me against him, his arms around my waist and my head resting on his chest. He murmurs sweet compliments to me, my breathing returning to normal, and I’m able to move my limbs again.

“How do you feel?” he asks softly when I tip my head back to steal a kiss.

“Good,” I answer honestly. “I...um...I feel really good.”

Trey smiles, kissing my forehead. “Good, because now that I’ve had a taste of you? I’m going to be addicted.”

I like the sound of that more than I want to admit. Because ... well ... I think I’m becoming addicted to him too.

The more time I spend with Talia, the less time I think I'll ever be able to spend without her.

Every night, we eat dinner together, and she's taught me the rules to at least three more board games—all of which she's beaten me at. Then again, I haven't been trying very hard to win. Seeing her smile and cheer at her victory is the real win anyway.

I can't seem to think of a single thing except her. I crave her in every way possible. Since she let me touch her days ago, we haven't done anymore but kiss. Even though I want her so much it's killing me, I refuse to push her into something she's not ready for.

But as I watch her dance around the kitchen to some upbeat rom-com movie soundtrack, powdered sugar making the very air around her as sweet as she is, it's taking all of my self-control to hold myself back. Talia is mine, and every part of me wants to claim her fully and completely.

She's baking, yet again, this time a birthday cake for the neighbor's little boy. The only thing stopping me from sneaking a bite of the delicious-looking chocolate cake is knowing it's for a five-year-old's party, and I'm not that mean. Plus, it would upset Talia, and that is unacceptable.

She starts to sculpt a red race car out of fondant, her small hands making quick work of rolling and shaping colored icing, and I sidle closer to her.

“No wonder this is your job, cupcake,” I say, making her startle a little as my voice breaks her concentration. “You’re amazing.”

Talia’s cheeks go pink, and she glances up at me. “Oh, no. This isn’t like a job,” she stutters out, shrugging. “It’s just a hobby. That’s all.”

“A hobby?” I scoff, shaking my head at her. “Talia, most people aren’t even this talented at their actual job, never mind a hobby.”

Talia’s cheeks are nearly as red as the fondant in her hands now, and fuck if that isn’t the cutest thing I’ve ever seen. Jesus, this girl is like my kryptonite. Everything about her affects me.

Talia sighs, using the back of her hand to push her hair out of her face. I help her out so she doesn’t get icing in her hair, tucking the strands behind her ear, my fingers caressing her skin as I do. She shivers a little at the touch, trying and failing to hide it. My dick is already half-hard just from being around her.

“I’d love to do this full-time,” Talia admits quietly. “It’s fun, and I like making people happy. But...I’m in college, and it’s too risky to take the leap to baking and decorating like this.”

“You’re studying?” I ask, frowning. She hasn’t mentioned college once.

Talia pulls a face. “Yeah, marketing,” she says with a soft laugh. “It’s not exactly a passion, but it’s a steady option, you know?”

“Why don’t you drop out if you don’t even want to go into that field?”

Talia grabs a modeling tool and starts adding details to the body of the race car. “My mom and Dav—well, your dad—” she corrects, blushing at the reminder that we’re stepsiblings. I grin, stepping closer, and crowding her space a little more. “Um, well. They helped me out a lot with tuition. I started later than my high school friends since it took me so long to figure out what I wanted to do. I’m twenty-five, and I’ve still

got a year to go before I graduate, and I ... I don't want to keep wasting time or disappoint my mom after everything she's done to help me out."

I cup her cheek, needing to touch her. She drops the cake tool, leaning into my touch a little. She's so caring, so generous, so kind, and while I love that about her, she deserves to be kind and caring to herself too.

"Your happiness is worth more than anything," I tell her gently, stroking my thumb along her jaw. I feel her pulse jump, and her lips part in surprise at my words. "You can put yourself first, Talia. Nobody is going to be upset with you for it. Hell, my dad certainly won't. He's always been a big supporter of following your heart, and I imagine your mom is similar since she married him and all."

Talia laughs a little, her skin hot beneath my touch with that persistent blush. Goddamn, she's beautiful. There's a speck of icing sugar on her lip and my mouth waters with the urge to lick it off.

"I don't want all their support and help to go to waste," she says softly.

I shake my head. "Supporting someone you love is never a waste."

Her breath hitches, her eyes meeting mine. The deep green is captivating, even when her pupils are so wide that it threatens to engulf the color.

"What do you want, Talia? Regardless of what you think you're supposed to want."

Talia takes a deep breath, bracing her sugar-covered hands on the counter as though steadying herself. "I want ... I want to bake," she admits, her voice a little shaky but strong nonetheless. "I don't want a marketing degree I'll never use. I want to make cakes and cookies and treats that make people smile. I want to do what I love, and I want..." Talia pushes away from the counter and turns to me fully. She swallows before finishing, "I want you."

Her words light me on fire. I'm so fucking proud of her for vocalizing what she actually wants, but also now very uncomfortable because of the way my cock is pressing against my zipper from her final declaration.

"You can have anything you want," I vow to her. "Whatever you want, cupcake. I'll make sure of it. I'll take care of you and protect you and make sure your world is as sweet as you are."

Talia leans into me, her eyes holding mine. She's the entire world, and I'm the lucky bastard that gets to be in her orbit.

"Will you...will you teach me how to protect myself, too? With everything that happened with Daniel..." she trails off, and it's clear that fear is adding to the fears she already has about her choices.

"You'll never need to protect yourself. I'm never leaving your side, and I will never let anything hurt you again."

"Please?"

There's no way in hell I could ever deny her anything when she's looking at me like that. If I can make any of that easier for her, there's no question I'll do it.

"Okay, cupcake, whatever you need." I take her hand in mine to lead her out to the back garden.

There's more space out here, and the grass provides a nicer landing than the wooden floors inside. It'll still hurt if she goes down too hard, though, but I won't let that happen.

"Alright, let's go through some simple evasive maneuvers you can use to get away," I say, rolling up my sleeves. "The goal isn't to fight back, cupcake. The goal is to get the fuck away. So the second they release you, like how I'm gonna teach you now, you run and you don't look back. Understood?"

She nods, planting her feet a shoulder's width apart and rolling her shoulders back. I'll never let anything happen to her, but if she wants to learn, then she needs to understand how and when to use these maneuvers. And, shit, the way she's standing there watching me like a good little student waiting for instruction is going to be burned into my mind forever.

I explain to her the basics of the first move before I step forward to demonstrate. I've done this move a hundred times, but it's never been so difficult. The second I touch her, have her pressed against me to manipulate her movements, walking her through each step, it sets my blood on fire. I'm sure she can feel how hard I am when she presses against me, but there's no damn way my cock is going to calm down, not when I have my hands on her and she's letting me teach her.

When she has a good handle on the first move, I decide to show her an easy take-down next. I immediately realize my mistake the first time I have her pinned to the grass beneath me, her breaths coming hard and fast from exertion and her blonde hair spread out around her. *Fuckkkk*.

I push through my desire, focusing on being a good instructor. The first time she gets the move right, I fall back onto the grass despite the fact she was nowhere near forceful enough to actually topple me. Still, she got the movements correct, just needs more power behind it.

I rise back on my feet, and Talia stares at me with a pout on her full lips. "You're going easy on me," she accuses with a frown.

I can't help the grin that gets out of me, not when her words spin images in my head of showing her just how hard I could go on her instead. Fuck, she'd be heaven wrapped around my cock, that blonde halo of hair tangled and messy from my hands—

Talia's mouth is on mine before I even realize she's moved. Soft but insistent, her lips claim mine, her tongue darting out to demand entry. I groan, kissing her back like my life depends on it.

One minute, we're upright and kissing like we don't need air. The next, I'm on my back on the grass, landing so hard the air is stolen from my lungs. I blink, finding Talia splayed over me, laughing and cheering for herself with a huge smile on my face.

"Oh, you little cheat," I tease, realizing what she's just done, distracting me in order to perform the take-down fully without

me making it easy for her. I can't deny it, I'm impressed.

"I did it!" Talia cheers, bracing her knees on either side of my hips and raising her hands in the air in victory.

I smile up at her in awe. "You did it, cupcake. You're incredible."

She pauses, her expression softening into something much more vulnerable than before. As if she only just realizes how she's sitting, her hips move, and she gasps when my hard-as-steel cock rubs against her through our clothes. Her pupils blow, and her lips form a little *o* in surprise.

I surge upwards, grabbing her and tugging her closer to me so I can kiss that look off her face. She's pliant and soft on my lap, falling against me immediately, and she tips her head back to deepen the kiss. She's so fucking sweet, so beautiful, so damn perfect.

Talia moans against my mouth. I cup her ass and grind her against me, wiggling her hips as her thighs tighten around me. I do it again until she's whimpering and shaking against me, grinding on me of her own accord.

I break our kiss to whisper, "I need to feel you come around my cock, sweet girl."

Her breath hitches but her movements stop, and I narrow my eyes at her in question. She sinks her teeth into her kiss-swollen bottom lip nervously.

"Um...yes, I want that," she stutters. I know there's a *but* coming. "But I ... well, I should probably tell you that ... uh." She pauses to take a big breath before rushing out, "I've never done this before."

I go completely still, her words starting to register. "Done what, exactly?" My hold on her hips tightens.

"Um...sex," she answers, cheeks going pink.

Fuck. I thought I couldn't possibly be more turned on than I already was, but her admission makes my cock jump and my need to claim her ratchet impossibly higher.

“You’re a virgin, sweet girl?” I murmur, dipping my head to tease the junction of her throat and shoulder with my teeth, making her shudder. “You telling me nobody’s ever been inside that sweet pussy before?”

She nods, and I groan.

“Fuck,” I snarl through gritted teeth, fighting every instinct that tells me to take her right here, right now. Instead, I shove to my feet, taking her with me, hands on her ass as she squeals and holds on to my shoulders.

“What...what are you doing?”

“I refuse to have your first time be a roll about in the dirt,” I tell her, practically sprinting back into the house, straight up the stairs to her bedroom. “By the time I’m done with you, you’re not going to be able to walk, sweet girl. Trust me, you need the bed.”

“Please, Trey. I need... I need...” Talia pants while I sit her on the edge of the mattress, her hands clutching at me.

“Sshh, sweet girl. I know what you need.” I drag my hands up her thighs to unbutton her jeans and pull them and her panties off. “Let me take care of you, Talia.”

She nods, her eyes glassy with want, and helps me out by shedding her top, revealing her bare chest. No bra. Fuck, this girl...

I shed my clothes quickly, loving the way she gasps as her eyes roam my body, catching on my cock. Her lips part as she stares at me, and I notice the way she squeezes her thighs together in anticipation.

“So beautiful.” I grip her waist to readjust her on the bed, settling her head on the pillows as I crawl over her. My knee presses between hers, making her spread her thighs to make space for me.

I lower myself down to my elbows, covering her body with mine. She moans as I kiss her, our tongues twining. My hand skates up her waist to cup her breast, her skin so soft and warm beneath me.

I can't wait any longer. I'm shaking just as hard as she is with unmet want.

Talia's eyes snap to mine when I pull away from the kiss to reach between us, guiding the head of my cock to her entrance.

"So soaked for me." I groan, feeling just how much she wants this. I'm not even inside her yet, but the soft heat of her is nearly too much to bear. "Perfect, pretty girl. Such a good girl, aren't you?"

"Yes," Talia whimpers, her hips bucking as though she's trying to get me inside her faster. "Yours, Trey. I'm yours, I need you to make me yours. Please."

In answer, I press in a few inches, just enough to have both of us moaning and swearing. She's so tight, so hot. I knew she'd be damn perfect, but nothing could have prepared me for this. It's even better knowing I'm the only one who will ever have her like this.

"So big. Oh, God." Talia pants as I pull out just to thrust in further, giving her as much as she can take before I have to push harder. I wait, letting her adjust, my heart thumping so hard I can hear the rush of my own blood. Shit, she feels incredible.

"You can take it," I encourage her, moving my hand from her hip to her clit, stroking her in tight circles the way she loved last time. Immediately, Talia cries out, her pussy spasming around me. "That's it. Goddamnit, that's so good, baby."

"More," she begs, rolling her hips and forcing me deeper. Whatever resistance her body had is gone. She gasps and shudders, taking every damn inch of me.

"Never seen anything so beautiful." I rock my hips against her, pleasure shooting up my spine. "Need to feel this pretty pussy come on my cock, sweet girl. You can do that, can't you?"

Talia nods, fighting to keep her eyes open and on mine as I set a slow, deep rhythm, fucking her into the mattress and keeping my attention on her clit.

"Oh, oh. Trey!" Talia's back arches. Her eyes close, her inner walls clutching at me as she comes, threatening to take me

over the edge with how good it feels.

I grit my teeth so I don't end this too soon. The second she catches her breath again, I fuck her the way I've been dying to. I grip her hips and thrust—fast, hard snaps of my hips that make her clutch the bed sheets while she tries to hold on.

“You are mine, sweet girl,” I tell her as I drive us both mad with pleasure. “Mine to fuck, mine to take care of, mine to kiss and touch and spoil. Only. Mine.”

Even as lost to pleasure as she is, Talia nods. “Yours. Only want you.”

Those words in her breathy, needy voice send me right over the edge.

“Gonna fill you up, sweet girl, claim you inside and out,” I growl.

She shouts my name, another orgasm sweeping through her. I bury my face in her neck, kissing her skin as I spill inside her. I've never felt bliss like this before, and minutes pass before I can even see properly again.

Slowly, I raise my head to see Talia's eyes closed and her skin flushed. Satisfaction flows through me, and I wrap her in my arms and turn so we're lying side by side, her leg hooked over my hip and my cock still buried between her plush thighs.

We lie like that for a long time, Talia only half-awake, with me murmuring soft compliments and adoration to her, making sure she knows just how much she means to me.

I'm never letting her go.

Only two weeks until Trey goes back to base, and I'm dreading it.

This morning, I wake up tangled in his arms, using his chest as a pillow, and everything feels right. The thought that I might only get twelve more nights like this makes me want to cry. I don't want there to be a deadline for us. I don't want this to ever end.

It's not just the sex, though the sex is incredible. I'm glad I waited, glad he's the only one I've been with like this because it just feels right. The way he treats me and the way he makes me feel in and out of the bedroom are so much more than I ever dared to hope for.

Trey is better than any man I could've ever dreamed of, and I don't know how I'm supposed to let him go. Well, the answer is that I won't. I don't care how complicated it gets. I'm his and he's mine, and both of us want this to be forever. He's told me a hundred times that he's never letting me go, that I'm his always, that he doesn't care about circumstance or silly details like the fact we're stepsiblings. We'll figure this out. I trust him, but it doesn't stop me worrying.

A ringtone blaring jolts me from my thoughts. Trey jumps to his feet, pulling back the duvet. "I'll go grab that, but I'll be right back, cupcake."

That silly nickname makes me shiver because of the way he makes it sound with his deep, sleepy voice.

Neither of us wants to get out of bed today, but we have to eventually. I watch him leave the room before my gaze flicks to the side, to where my laptop sits on top of my suitcase.

I've gone back and forth about this decision for months, but now, the choice is clear. There's only one right way forward—the path that makes me happy.

I grab my laptop and open my student account, clicking through the college portal until I find the section I need.

The cursor hovers over the blue “Unenroll from your program” button, and I inhale deeply before pushing down.

Just like that, it's done.

I feel lighter, a relieved laugh bursting from me. It's done. I'm not going back. I won't spend another year studying for a degree I don't even want. I won't waste another minute on things that don't make me happy.

I close the window, shutting the door on that part of my life, and bring up a new tab.

When Trey returns, looking edible in low-slung gray pajama pants and his abs on display, I have a document full of the lists of things I need to do to set up my own baking business.

I grin at him as he drops back down onto the mattress at my side, his eyes widening when he looks at my screen.

“I'm so fucking proud of you,” he says softly, making me melt.

I close my laptop and shove it to the side to kiss him, smiling as excitement and nervousness buzzes through my veins. “I dropped out. I'm going to try following my dreams. You make me feel like I can do anything, and I want to believe that I can too.”

“You can,” Trey murmurs against my lips, kissing me again. “You're incredible, Talia.”

I blush, pulling away before I'm tempted to spend the entire morning between the sheets with him. “Who was on the phone?”

Trey sits back, smirking at me as though he can read my thoughts. “A friend from the Navy is on leave in the next city over,” he tells me. “He’s throwing a summer pool party at his home this weekend. He called to invite us.”

I squeal with excitement. I haven’t been to a proper party in months. All my friends are at college, and we all went home for the summer so I haven’t seen them in person. I make a mental note to text our group chat later and tell them I’m not going back in the fall.

“Is that a yes?” Trey asks with a chuckle.

“Obviously,” I answer with a smile.

“I was thinking you could bake something for us to bring?”

I nod, agreeing immediately, excited to meet his friends and party with him, already mentally planning what recipes to make.

I can hear the music from down the street as Trey holds open the door for me.

I try to grab the cakes and cookies I made from the trunk, but Trey shoots me a look that I know by now means *let me take care of you*, and I step back, letting him carry them for me. I have to admit, I do like being taken care of. Trey makes me feel precious, and I love it.

The sun is high in the sky, and the air is warm, the perfect weather for a pool party. In the bag slung over Trey's shoulder are our swimsuits and towels, but for now I'm wearing a red tank top and denim shorts that show more of my ass than they cover.

Trey had gone feral when he saw what I was wearing this morning, getting all growly and possessive about how amazing I looked but also how he didn't want anyone else to see me like this.

I smile as I feel the tender skin at the top of my thigh, just below the hem of the shorts. I expected him to spank me, but I should've known that wasn't Trey's thing. No, he bit me, so hard it left a mark. It was hot as hell, especially when he kissed everything better after.

I shake my head to clear those thoughts before I drag him into the back seat of the car and recreate the memory all over again. I've gone from a virgin to obsessed with sex in such a short time, but I blame Trey. It's not pleasure I want, it's his brand of pleasure.

Seriously, how am I supposed to focus on anything else when he whispers filthy promises in my ear or murmurs *good girl* when he walks past and claims me all over again in bed, or on the sofa, or on the kitchen counter, or in the shower every day?

It's like living in a dream with him, and I never want to wake up.

I stand close to Trey while he knocks on the door, which swings open almost immediately to reveal a tall, tanned man who yanks Trey into a one-armed hug. I giggle at the shocked look on Trey's face, patting his friend on the back before pulling away and yanking me inside with him.

"Good to see you, buddy," Trey's friend greets with a big grin.

"Nice to see you too, Graham." Trey chuckles as Graham leads us to his kitchen.

"And who's this beauty?" Graham asks.

We pause by the counter full of snacks and drinks where Trey sets down the treats we brought, immediately stealing one for himself.

"I'm Talia," I introduce, holding my hand out to shake Graham's. Instead, he raises my hand to his mouth and kisses my knuckles, making Trey growl a warning around his bite of cupcake. I giggle but pull my hand away and slip it into Trey's instead, showing him I'm still his.

Graham looks thoroughly amused, a bright glint in his dark eyes as he looks between us. "How did you get a girl as pretty as this one, huh, old man?" he jokes to Trey, who rolls his eyes.

"I'm two years older than you," Trey grumbles. "But I can't deny that I'm one lucky fucker to have her at my side."

I blush at the compliments, gazing up at Trey. "I'm lucky, too," I tell him with a smile, pushing up on my tiptoes to kiss his cheek.

Graham chuckles. "Never thought I'd see Trey so domesticated," he teases, making me laugh and Trey grumble again, narrowing his stormy eyes at his friend.

“Where’s Lisa? I need to tell her to get her husband in line,” Trey says, only making Graham laugh harder.

“She’s out by the pool. Come on, she’ll be so excited to meet Trey’s girl,” Graham says to me.

I decide I immediately like him. He seems warm and kind, and for all Trey’s grumpiness, it’s obvious he values Graham as a friend, or else he would’ve done way more than roll his eyes at his teasing.

We grab a drink and head out to the pool, Graham snatching up two cookies from the tray we brought to take out with him.

He hands one to his wife, Lisa, and we all get introduced, both of them insisting those are the best cookies they’ve ever eaten. Graham goes back for another immediately, despite Lisa and Trey telling him to leave some for everyone else. The party is in full swing, people lounging in sun chairs around the pool, others already splashing and making waves in the water.

I sip my drink, and Trey wraps his arms around my waist, tugging me down to sit on his lap as we chat to more of his friends, some he knows from the Navy, others Graham introduces us to as Lisa’s friends. They’re all lovely, and in minutes, I’m laughing and in deep conversation about the best kind of cookies or crackers to use for S’mores.

“You’re all wrong,” Lisa pipes up while we argue about the merits of Graham crackers. She holds up the last bite of her cookie, pointing it at me. “These works of art would beat out every other option immediately. Talia, you need to tell me how to get more of these from you because they’re heavenly.”

I grin, and Trey ducks his head to whisper *told you so* in my ear. I promise Lisa to drop off another batch of cookies so she can test her S’mores theory fully.

Someone turns up the music, and the group we’ve been chatting to decides it’s time to get back in the pool. I leap up to rush inside and get changed, laughing as Trey chases after me. I snatch my bikini from our bag and lock myself in the bathroom, Trey promising to make me pay for being a brat. I hope he does, but not till later. If I let him help me get

changed, we'd never actually get in the pool at all, and we both know it.

When I come back out, I find Trey waiting in the kitchen, gloriously shirtless in his swim shorts. I pause to drool over him, and he presses the advantage, snatching me up into his arms. I shriek with laughter, his strong arms keeping me trapped against him as he strides back out to the garden.

I have about two seconds to remember to hold my breath before he throws me into the pool, to the sound of whoops and cheers from everyone around us. The cool water feels great against my warm skin, and when I resurface, my hair is plastered to my face and shoulders, and I'm laughing so hard my chest hurts. When I manage to pull my hair out of my face, I find Trey standing at the edge of the pool with a grin on his face, and I smile up at him from the water.

"Two can play this game," I tell him before sending a huge splash of water in his direction. He's too slow to move away and gets soaked, but my distraction works well. Seconds later, Graham finishes sneaking up behind him, and Trey shouts as his friend shoves him into the pool before jumping in right after.

Graham and I high-five through laughter. Trey shakes his head to get his hair off his face, giving us both a stormy glare that's considerably less dark thanks to the amused smirk on his mouth.

Trey strikes back faster than I can counter, grabbing me by the waist and yanking me closer to him, water splashing everywhere. One hand on my waist, the other tangled in my drenched hair, Trey leans down so his lips skim the shell of my ear when he whispers, "Has my sweet girl turned into a brat?"

I cling to him, trying to hide the way his words affect me. I love the way he talks to me like this and how he treats me with such adoration even when his voice has that edge of warning that I love. But, I'm a good girl at heart...and I love the way he rewards me for it.

"No," I whisper back, pushing closer so my nipples, peaked with arousal through the thin fabric of my bikini top, press

against his chest. “I’m your good girl.”

Trey growls, his hands tightening on me, and I feel his cock jerk with arousal at my words. I grin, kissing his shoulder as Graham yells at us to get a room.

Trey grumbles about wanting to murder anyone who dares to look at me in my swimsuit, but to do that he’d have to let me out of his arms. Considering we’ve been stuck together since we got in the pool, I doubt that’ll happen. Still, it’s nice to have him all protective and possessive, and no matter how many times I get splashed with cool water, my face stays permanently flushed.

We stay in the pool until the air grows cool and the bright sun begins to slip down towards the horizon. The first time I shiver, Trey has us up and out of the pool in seconds, refusing to let *his girl* get cold. Some of the others are starting to fuss around a firepit, and as Trey grabs a cozy towel to wrap around my shoulders, Lisa hurries inside in search of matches.

The music has been lowered a little, but drinks are still flowing while everyone gathers around on the patio, the air full of laughter and chatting.

“Come on, cupcake. Let’s get you warmed up.” Trey wraps his arm around my waist to lead me inside.

I nod even if I’m not all that cold. I would like to change out of my wet swimsuit, though, and tie my hair up out of my face.

Trey follows me into the bathroom, locking the door behind us with a *click*, and drops our bag onto the tiled floor. My towel drops too, and in seconds, he strides forward and slams his mouth to mine, both of us groaning as we kiss.

“I’ve been fucking dying to touch you all day,” he growls against me, his hand tugging on the wet ties of my bikini until the wet fabric flops to the floor, leaving me completely exposed. “Fucking edible, sweet girl, that’s what you are. That swimsuit...” he trails off with a rough groan, nipping at my bottom lip, his hand cupping my breast, squeezing possessively.

“Trey...” I moan, trying to keep quiet as he pinches my nipple, sending shocks of pleasure through me.

“Can you keep quiet for me, sweet girl?”

I nod despite not being entirely sure I can. I’m absolutely willing to try, though.

As soon as he has my answer, he lifts me, sitting me at the edge of the counter near the sink. I part my thighs on instinct, biting my lip as he shucks off his wet shorts, his cock hard and ready for me.

Both of us are worked up from the teasing whispers and touches in the pool, and I have to muffle my moan by burying my face in his neck. Trey holds my hips and drags me onto his cock.

He fucks me hard and fast, his hands gripping my hips the only thing stopping me from sliding all over the damn counter. Pleasure sweeps through me, and I shake with the effort of staying quiet.

“You’re doing so well for me, sweet girl,” Trey groans against my ear. “Taking my cock so perfectly. You were made for this.”

His dirty mouth is going to be the death of me, but I’ll die happy. My nails dig into his shoulders as heat blooms low in my stomach, my orgasm closing in rapidly. I don’t know if I can stay quiet through this. It’s already so hard.

“Let me feel this pretty pussy come all over my cock,” he demands, and my bliss spikes higher.

I can’t help the noise that escapes me as my orgasm barrels into me. It only grows hotter when Trey presses one hand over my mouth to muffle my moans. He thrusts into me a few more times, extending my pleasure before finding his own. I shudder as I feel him fill me, loving the look of bliss on his face. Knowing I can make him lose his mind the way he makes me lose mine has me feeling warm all over, the happiness lighting me up.

We clean up quickly, and I manage to wrangle my tangled, damp, chlorinated hair into a bun before heading back outside.

I focus on acting as normal as possible, not at all like I just got railed in the bathroom. Nobody says anything, but I'm sure the blush on my cheeks gives me away.

There's a barbeque going now as well as the firepit, and I settle on Trey's lap as we toast marshmallows and eat burgers, conversation flowing until hours have passed in a beautiful haze of happiness. I feel so content, like everything in my life has been leading up to this.

I've finally found where I'm supposed to be—in Trey's arms.

My clothes are hanging beside Talia's in the wardrobe, our suitcases tucked beneath the bed side by side. Her clothes from last night are strewn over the floor, mine folded and stacked on the chair in the corner.

Neither of us is wearing clothes—I tear her off hers the second I get the chance every day—and she's cuddled up on my chest, breathing softly and even.

I haven't slept on the sofa since she gave me her virginity. Fuck, even the thought that she's mine in every single way, that no other man will ever get her like this, wakes my cock up again. Talia has quickly established herself as my everything, including my stepsister. But fuck that, aside from teasing her with that little forbidden aspect in bed, it doesn't change anything. Hell, I didn't even know I had a stepsister until three weeks ago.

And now? Well, I'm never letting her go.

I'm due to return home back to base in less than a week, and I'll be damned if I'm leaving Talia behind. It would be like ripping out my heart and leaving it here. Impossible, unthinkable. She's mine.

She's coming with me. I haven't broached that conversation with her yet. Every time the topic of me leaving comes up, she shuts it down, changing the subject, and I pretend I haven't noticed.

But we can't avoid it forever.

Talia stirs on my chest, yawning wide, her eyes fluttering open. She smiles sleepily up at me, and no matter how much time I spend staring at her, her beauty never fails to stop me in my tracks.

“Morning, cupcake.”

“I love waking up with you.” She sits up a little to kiss me and sighs happily as I dip my head to kiss her neck, loving the way she arches into my touch.

“You’ll wake up like this every day for the rest of your life if I have any say in it,” I say against her warm, soft skin, brushing her hair out of her face.

“Mmm,” she hums happily. “Yes, please.”

I’m about to answer her when a muffled noise from downstairs makes us both go still.

A key in the door. Two voices. The roll of suitcase wheels on the wooden floor.

Fuck.

Talia and I leap out of bed in an instant, both of us rushing to dress at record speed. I’m used to having to get ready at the drop of a hat, but Talia’s not and she stumbles trying to pull her leggings on, falling back onto the bed.

I make it out of the room just as our parents get to the top of the stairs.

Dad sees me and grins broadly. “Trey! There you are. We were wondering why the house was so quiet!”

What the fuck am I supposed to say to them? I stand in front of the bedroom door, unsure how to approach this. I could’ve sworn they were due back tomorrow not today, but evidently I got my dates wrong. And Talia and I hadn’t come up with any sort of plan for how to explain anything to our parents.

I clear my throat, trying to smile back. The woman next to my dad is obviously Talia’s mom. She has the same green eyes and delicate features.

“It’s so nice to meet you, Trey. I’ve heard so much about you!” Lucille greets me warmly, stepping forward to hug me.

At that precise moment, the door behind me opens and Talia walks straight into my back with an *oof*.

The air goes tight with tension, and my instincts prick up as my dad’s eyes look between me, her, and the bedroom door. The door we’ve both just come through. At 9 AM. It doesn’t take a genius to put the pieces together, and the second my dad’s eyes widen, I know he’s figured it out.

“Talia,” Lucille says, frowning at her daughter.

Talia’s eyes are wide, and she’s paler than usual as she steps out from behind me, accepting her mom’s hug. Lucille pulls away, gripping Talia’s arms and studying her daughter’s face with a look of concern.

“Trey, what’s going on here?” Dad asks me, his voice taking that same tone I haven’t heard since I was a teenager making his life difficult.

But I’m a grown fucking man now, and his disapproving tone won’t do anything to stop me from protecting my girl. Talia takes a step away from her mom, her green eyes finding mine. She looks panicked, and I need to make everything better. She stiffens but eventually relaxes when I wrap an arm around her waist and pull her against my side, showing her I’ll protect her.

My dad and Lucille look like their eyes are about to bug out of their heads.

“Trey, explain this now,” Dad repeats, glaring at me.

“Tal, sweetie. This isn’t what it looks like, right?” Lucille’s eyes are still comically wide.

Great. This is going fucking fantastically.

I inhale deeply, staying as calm as I can. But Talia speaks before I can. “Look, I know this might be a lot to take in, but—”

“You can’t mean—” Lucille starts, then my dad butts in.

“You’re stepsiblings! This is—”

“Please, listen. It’s just—” Talia tries again, but the conversation has devolved into a mess of our parents’ sputtering and completely ignoring Talia’s attempts to actually tell them what the hell’s happening.

I hold her close even as the tension between us all rises, and my dad is comforting his new wife while looking at me with a mixture of confusion and shock.

Talia’s voice cracks as she tries once again to speak and is immediately spoken over, and that’s it. That’s my limit. I get that they’re confused and maybe angry, but nobody gets to hurt my girl.

“Be QUIET!” I bark, my voice the same sharp command I use when I’m helping train new recruits. Immediately, our parents shut up, their mouths falling open. “I understand that this is not what you expected, but considering I didn’t even know you had gotten married, you don’t get to be outraged right now. Talia is mine, and no amount of your protests will change that. Frankly, I don’t care if you have a problem with it. You don’t get a say.”

“Trey—” my dad tries again, but I hold up a hand and shake my head.

“No, you either both stay quiet and let Talia give you the explanation you’ve so rudely interrupted for the last five minutes or you leave again and take some space,” I tell him, holding his stare.

My dad’s jaw tenses. “I think some space is needed,” he grinds out, looking between me and Talia again before sighing and taking his new wife’s hand, tugging her back with him.

I’ve basically just kicked them out of their own house, but I don’t give a shit. They’re clearly not ready to talk this through, and I won’t let them make Talia cry. Space is for the best.

We all head downstairs, and our parents immediately go back through the doorway they just came in.

Lucille’s voice is a little shaky as they pause over the threshold. “Let’s all have a few hours to process this, and then

we need to talk. Okay?” she asks, and I feel Talia nod against me. “Seven o’clock at the bistro?”

I incline my head in agreement and close the door behind our parents.

THE BISTRO IS A COZY, warmly lit restaurant that would’ve been lovely under any other circumstances. But sitting across from our parents in tense silence while the poor waiter tries to make conversation to lighten the mood puts a damper on the nice surroundings. Talia’s knee bounces under the table while I order for us both, and the waiter scurries away to put in our food order and grab our drinks.

I wait a few more seconds, but when nobody speaks, I sigh. I won’t have Talia feeling this uncomfortable all night, and we’re all adults here. We should be capable of having a damn conversation.

“I assume you’ve both taken time to calm down?” I start, resting my hand on Talia’s thigh beneath the table, stroking my thumb against her through the fabric of her black dress.

It’s Lucille who answers to my surprise. She leans forward, elbows on the table, and looks at her daughter with a soft expression on her face. “Are you happy, sweetheart?” she asks, her voice full of motherly love.

Talia relaxes instantly and relief flows through me.

“Yeah, Mom,” Talia answers without hesitation, leaning closer to me so our shoulders brush. “I’m happier than I’ve ever been.”

Lucille’s shoulders drop as she sighs, nodding. “Good,” she says simply, sitting back in her chair with a smile. “Well, that’s all that really matters, I suppose.”

“We took the time to talk about all of this,” my dad adds, scratching his head and looking a little uncomfortable. “It took us by surprise, kids. Surely you can understand that?”

I chuckle, and Talia snorts at that. “Hardly the way we hoped to tell you,” I say.

Dad nods, looking between Talia and me. “While this is hardly the way Lucille or I pictured our kids finding love,” he continues, “neither of us want to get in the way of your happiness.”

“Oh thank God,” Talia mutters in a sigh of relief, tilting her head back to look at the ceiling.

I grin at her, and Dad and Lucille laugh.

“I guess our worries about you guys not getting on were unfounded,” Lucille says as our drinks arrive, taking a sip of her wine.

Talia blushes bright red, which instantly makes my blood heat, and grabs her water, taking a big gulp.

I turn to her mother, inclining my head. “Having Talia in my life is the greatest gift I’ve ever had,” I tell her honestly, making her eyes light up. “I’m glad that both of you have decided to accept it, but in truth, I wouldn’t have let her go even if you hadn’t. She’s everything to me.”

Lucille softens at that, and Talia’s eyes are wide as she turns to me. It takes everything in me not to tell her how much I love her right there and then, wanting to be alone with her when I do.

“You’re a good man, son,” Dad says, offering Talia and me a smile. “I don’t doubt you’ll do right by her.”

The mood feels instantly lighter, though I imagine it’ll take a while for the edge of awkwardness to fade. When our appetizers arrive, talk turns to safer topics like Dad and Lucille’s honeymoon and work.

Talia steals a bite of my bruschetta, which makes me grin.

From out of nowhere, her mom asks, “So when do you have to leave for college again?”

Talia chokes a little, sipping her water while I rub her back. She grimaces a little, and I squeeze her thigh in silent encouragement and reassurance.

“I...um...well, actually, I’ve been meaning to talk to you about that,” she starts, straightening her shoulders. “I’m not

going back. I dropped out.”

For a second, nobody speaks, but then both Dad and Lucille talk at the same time.

“Oh, good—”

“It’s about time!”

Talia’s mouth drops open in shock, but I smile at her.

“Told you they’d understand, cupcake,” I say, raising a brow.

“You’re really okay with it?” Talia asks, frowning at her mom and my dad across the table. “After all the help you guys gave me?”

Lucille pins her daughter with a look. “Well, as long as you tell me you’re finally going to set up your own baking business, then absolutely. You were never passionate about that course, sweetheart, but David and I only wanted to support you in whatever path made you happy. Your talent deserves to be embraced, though, and I think you’ll be happier than ever...especially now.” She grins my way as she adds those last words, and I smile back gratefully.

“Yes, yeah. I mean, I’m going to set up my baking business finally,” Talia tells them, still looking a little shocked. “Thank you, both of you. I hope you know how grateful I am for the way you’ve supported me.”

“You can thank us with that chocolate cake of yours,” Dad tells her, making her laugh and agree readily.

We’re a long way off from a normal family, but by the time we’re finished with desserts, Talia is walking with a spring in her step and the future feels clearer than ever.

“I can’t believe I’m not dreaming.” Talia sighs and pats one of the many, many decorative couch cushions, fluffing it up until it’s perfect. “Like, how is this my real life?”

She’s talking more to herself than to me, but I chuckle and step closer to her regardless, tugging her away from our new couch and into my arms.

“It’s real, sweet girl,” I murmur in her ear, and she leans back into me, her body fitting perfectly against mine. “Need me to remind you just how real this is?”

To emphasize my point, I press her ass against me so she can feel the way my cock hardens for her.

Talia makes the prettiest little whimper and tilts her head back to meet my eyes. “Not until the cakes are out of the oven,” she tells me with a raised brow, pulling away a little. “I don’t want them to burn.”

I grin and let her go. She’s right, we can’t fall back into bed just yet. Not just because of the vanilla cake I can smell baking in our new oven, but because of the surprise I’ve got up my sleeve.

I follow her through to the kitchen, staring at her while she’s staring at our house like she’s still waiting for it to suddenly disappear. She trails her hand along the freshly painted white wall, humming as we step into the large, bright kitchen.

I meant it when I said I wasn’t leaving her behind when I came back to work. Now, three weeks after we left our parents’

house, Talia has turned the house we bought into a home. I wanted her to have the space she needed to start her business from our kitchen, and my girl deserved a place of her own. I started looking for houses off base as soon as she agreed to come with me, and this was the first one we saw. It's perfect—a spacious three-bed with a modern kitchen space big enough for two fridge-freezers so Talia can store all her cakes safely.

I don't exactly blame her for thinking this is all a dream. I'd feel the same if it wasn't for the fact there's no way in hell my dreams could ever come close to the absolute bliss of my life now. When I left for my dad's place for my break, I never in a million years predicted how much my life was about to change.

And fuck, I'm beyond grateful for it.

I thought I was decently happy before. I liked my job, I had good friends. But now? Now I know nothing I've ever experienced before could ever match the light Talia brings to my life.

She's everything to me.

And I hope that soon, she'll be my wife too.

Talia hums a tune under her breath and drops a few drips of pink food coloring into the bowl of frosting she's mixing up. I obviously introduced Talia to everyone when we came back and bragged about how talented my girl was. As a result, she has three orders this week—two birthday cakes and one huge batch of double chocolate chip cookies. She's still working on getting her marketing and socials all set up to share her skills more widely, but at the rate she's going, she'll be overrun with orders before long.

I can't wait to see her get all the praise and success she deserves. God, she's fucking amazing, just as sweet as the icing she's making, talented and beautiful, and all mine.

While she's distracted, I head out the French doors to the back garden. It needs work done. I've mowed the grass, but the flower beds need tending, and Talia has plans for a firepit like Graham's.

Still, it's green and lush, if a little untidy, and the perfect private place for what I need. I add the finishing touches to the display I'd spent all morning setting up while she was focused on baking, stepping back to admire my work.

It's just starting to get dark, making the neon letters and fairy lights stand out more. There are chocolate-covered strawberries, champagne, and macarons set out on a white picnic blanket, and I've set up a hammock towards the back of the garden between the two decently large trees that's big enough for both of us.

"Hey, Trey, what's—" Talia's voice calls out.

I whirl on my heel, finding her paused in the doorway, an icing-coated spatula in her hand and a shocked expression on her face. Her hair is tied up away from her face, but some golden strands have escaped, framing her flushed cheeks.

"Come outside, cupcake," I say softly, grinning.

The spatula drops to the floor, and she rushes out, barefoot and stumbling as she runs towards me.

"Trey, what's all this?" she whispers, voice a little shaky, eyes wide, taking it all in. She turns and reads the glowing letters framing the picnic blanket, and her breath hitches.

MARRY ME?

By the time she spins back to me, I'm down on one knee, careful not to disrupt any of the food or drink on the blanket around me. In my hand is a pink velvet box that Talia's eyes are locked on, the beautiful green depths wide and glassy with unshed tears.

As she watches, I open the soft box to reveal the sparkling white gold ring inside. Her bottom lip wobbles, and she gasps, her hands flying to her heart.

"Talia," I begin, emotion filling my voice. She's turned me from the gruff, stony man the Navy taught me to be into a man who would do anything to see her smile. Strangely, I don't resent the softness she's brought out in me. I can't, it's hers. I'm hers, and she's mine in every single way.

“Trey...” she breathes, then pauses, letting me continue.

“From the second I walked into that steam-filled bathroom and found a beautiful stranger in my shower, you changed my life,” I say with a laugh, echoed by her breathless giggle. “You swept me up in a whirlwind of powdered sugar and cherry shampoo and that gorgeous blush.” I grin as she rewards me with that pink flush of her cheeks I love so much. “And I knew from the start that you were meant to be mine. You are mine. I thought I was happy with my routine, but now I realize how wrong I was. Because I didn’t even know the meaning of happy until I found you. And now that I have, I can’t ever let you go.”

I reach my free hand out to her, and she steps forward, putting her left hand in mine and smiling down at me.

“Talia, my sweet girl. Will you marry me?” I pull the ring free of the box and hold it over her hand, waiting to slip it onto her finger.

“Of course, I will,” she says without hesitation, her voice thick with emotion that’s echoed by the frantic thud of my heart. “Yes, Trey. I’ll marry you.”

With a grin so wide my cheeks hurt, I slip the band onto her finger. A perfect fit.

The radiant cut diamond glints in the light of the fairy lights, but she’s not looking at the ring. Instead, she’s staring at me. I rise to my feet, and she jumps into my arms, wrapping her arms around my neck and pulling me in for a kiss. I catch her, one arm around her waist, the other hooking around the thighs she’s wrapped around my middle, squeezing her close to me.

She’s warm and sweet and so soft as she leans into my chest, her lips on mine, our tongues sweeping against each other in a slow dance that carries so much love with it.

Talia breaks the kiss first, her chest rising and falling fast with her rapid breaths. She squirms to get me to put her down, but I refuse, instead lowering us both to the picnic blanket with her in my arms, so she’s sitting in my lap.

She unwinds her arms from my neck to hold up her ring, squealing with excitement.

“Almost as pretty as my girl.” I watch her turn her hand this way and that to inspect the jewel.

“It’s gorgeous,” she gushes, eyes shining with love. “The most beautiful thing I’ve ever owned.”

I chuckle at that, leaning forward to kiss the sensitive skin at the crook of her neck. “And you’re the most beautiful thing I’ve ever owned,” I tease her, nipping her neck.

“You don’t own me,” she replies with a bit of sass, but the way she wriggles on my lap, grinding herself against me in the process, shows us both exactly how much she doesn’t mean that.

“Oh, is that right, sweet girl?” I growl softly against her skin, my hands tight on her hips. She moans a little, hands grabbing my shoulders. “Do you need a reminder of just how much you belong to me?”

“Yes,” she replies immediately, the word breathy with another small moan.

In the next second, I flip us so she’s on her back beneath me, the picnic blanket bunching up around our bodies as I push my thigh between her legs. She bucks her hips, arches her back, and gasps while I kiss her again. Her ring catches in my hair when she runs her hands through it, only making me even more feral for her. My girl. My cupcake. My soon-to-be wife.

I spend the rest of the evening ignoring my plans of champagne and strawberries in favor of something—someone—far sweeter.

EPILOGUE

TALIA

Two Years Later

“Those are for your cake, Lucy!” I say in a baby voice to the little girl shoving a handful of chocolate chips into her mouth with chunky fingers.

My daughter giggles at me, with a chocolatey grin that’s impossible not to smile back at. Her blue-gray eyes crinkle at the sides, and her chubby cheeks curve with her happiness. “So cheeky,” I add, tickling her sides and making her laugh harder.

I scoop her up from the counter, checking she hasn’t gotten chocolate all over her new party dress, and clean her hands and face quickly.

“Let’s go find your sister, all right?” I ask Lucy, settling her on my hip.

“Ooh Powey!” Lucy agrees, shouting her twin sister’s name. Lucy hasn’t quite mastered the *L* sounds in her sister Polly’s name, but if I’m being honest, the way she pronounces it is so cute that I kind of don’t want to teach her how to say it properly.

When we found out we were expecting not one but two baby girls, Trey and I decided to name them after our moms. Lucy, after my mom Lucille, and Polly, after his late mom Paulina. Their names are a homage to all the love that came before

them, and the girls are the happiest, most loved babies on the planet, so it fits perfectly.

The party is just starting, and as Lucy and I head out of the kitchen in search of Trey and Polly, the doorbell rings. I change my path to answer it, and Lucy tries to launch herself out of my arms and into my stepdad's as he and my mom step inside.

“There's my birthday girl!” David coos at her.

He grabs her and tosses her in the air, catching her as she squeals and shouts, “Again! Again!”

I shake my head at their antics, but I'm smiling wide.

It took a while for our family dynamics to find their feet, but after nearly three years, and with Trey and I married with kids now, we found our new normal. Mom and David are happy for us, and the whole stepsibling thing is barely ever mentioned anymore. Except for when Trey likes to make me blush like crazy with the reminder in his dirty talk sometimes.

Mom hugs me tight, closing the door behind her, and we set off to find Trey and my other daughter. They're in the garden, Polly giggling as Trey pushes her on her swing set.

When they spot us, Trey brings the swing to a stop much to Polly's frustration. Her frown immediately flips when she sees my mom, reaching out her little arms in a demand to be picked up. My mom heads straight to her, grabbing her out of the swing and telling her all about all the presents they brought for their birthday.

The twins are one today, and though I'm pretty sure they're far too young to have any idea of what a birthday even is, they've already been spoiled rotten. The swing set was an early present from Trey and me—early because Trey was too excited to see the girls' reactions to wait to put it up.

He's the best dad I've ever seen and absolutely dotes on our babies and me. While our parents entertain the girls, he heads inside with me, cornering me in the kitchen. I grin up at him, so happy that I can burst with it, leaning into him as he wraps

his arms around me, trapping me between the counter and his body.

Well, I'm not sure it counts as being trapped if I'm perfectly happy and willing to be caught like this.

"I can't believe they're a year old already," I sigh, shaking my head. This year has been a whirlwind, and so much better than I ever imagined it could be. "They're getting so big."

"They're practically teenagers already," Trey teases, making me slap a hand playfully against his chest.

"You know what I mean," I say back. "They're not little babies anymore."

"They'll always be our babies." He leans closer to whisper, "And you'll always be my sweet girl. But if you miss having babies, I can solve that problem tonight."

I blush bright red, shove him away, and gasp. Trey laughs at how obviously that comment affects me. My thighs squeeze together, arousal pooling between my legs at his suggestion.

"Behave," I tell him, and he raises a brow in response. "Or at least wait to make me all flustered until after the party."

"As you wish, cupcake." He throws me that smirk that makes me melt.

The doorbell rings again, and Trey goes to welcome the rest of the guests while I finish up the final details on the twins' unicorn and princess-themed birthday cake.

My business, *Sweet Tooth Cakes and Bakes*, has taken off wildly. I'm booked out for months for birthdays and celebrations and events, and it's the dream job I always hoped it would be. I love everything I create, but the girls' cake is my favorite to date. Covered in pale pink glittery fondant, topped with a fondant rainbow and unicorn, and their names written in frosting. I just need to finish up the bottom border and stick the candles in.

Trey pops his head into the kitchen to give me the *all-good* nod, and I light the candles, carrying the cake out to where everyone is gathered in the garden.

We all sing, “Happy birthday,” as the girls coo and clap at the sugar-laden treat made especially for them, and Trey and I help them blow out their candles while everyone claps.

The girls get the first slice obviously, and then Trey cuts up the cake to hand out to everyone. I thank our family and friends for both the compliments on the cake and for coming and celebrating our girls with us.

After a few hours of treats, tearing off wrapping paper, and laughter, Lucy and Polly finally crash and give in to sleep in their cots, and Trey and I converge in the kitchen to finish tidying up.

It’s not late, but given that the girls like to wake us up at 5 AM every day, 7 PM feels like 11 PM. I laugh at the thought, smiling as I think about just how much my life has changed—improved—in the past three years.

All thanks to the man doing the dishes in front of me.

Trey turns to me, eyes roving my body, and I shiver as I drop the handful of napkins and treat wrappers into the bin. Trey dries his hands on a kitchen towel, then strides towards me, a dark promise gleaming in his stormy eyes.

Instead of grabbing me like I thought and hoped he would, Trey grabs a cupcake from the tray on the counter, takes a bite, and hums happily.

“Nearly as sweet as you are,” he says as he swallows, eyes trained on me. He steps closer, cupcake still in hand, and runs a finger through the strawberry frosting on top.

Before I realize what he’s doing, he swipes the frosting across my bottom lip, then leans in, kissing me deeply, sharing the sweet strawberry taste between us. I moan against him, pressing closer, pushing up on my tiptoes to deepen the kiss, heat igniting low in my stomach.

Trey grabs my ass and lifts me in one smooth motion onto the counter. Instead of kissing me again like I expected, he holds up the cupcake again, smirking at me. I squeal when he pushes my skirt to my waist and smudges sticky frosting over my inner thigh.

I watch with wide, eager eyes as Trey lowers himself to his knees, pushing my knees further apart to settle between them. His tongue meets my sensitive skin, warm and seeking, and he laps up the sweet, pink frosting from my thigh. I shudder, burning up as the warmth of his mouth trails higher and higher until his face is pressed between my legs, kissing me over the lace of my very wet panties.

“You’ve given me a sweet tooth,” he mumbles as my hips jerk into his touch. “Let me have my fill of your taste, sweet girl. Then I’ll fill this perfect body up again and again until I get to see this soft stomach swell again.”

Dear God, his dirty tongue is going to actually be the death of me. It’s been three years, but I’m sure I’ll never get used to the filthy things he says or the way they send my desire to new trembling heights.

“Yes,” I whisper, voice breathy and full of need.

Trey fulfills his promise until neither of us can keep our eyes open anymore, and we collapse into bed, panting and sated and so damn happy I smile even as I fall asleep.

EXTENDED EPILOGUE

TREY

Five Years Later

“I can’t believe we’ve been married for eight whole years.”
Talia sighs on our way to our hotel room from the pool.

She’s wearing some thin cover-up thing over her blue bikini, but her skin is still damp, making the thin pink robe translucent as it grows wet. Basically, it covers up exactly nothing. Which suits me just fine because now I have the perfect view of her ass while she climbs up the stairs in front of me. I have to rip my eyes away from the sight, my cock stirring with interest in my shorts. There’s not a single moment of a single day that I don’t want her.

We get to our room, and I lean around her to swipe the card for entry. “Best fucking eight years of my life.”

She grins as we step inside, turning to look at me over her shoulder, wet hair stuck to her skin so she looks like some sort of irresistible siren I’m more than happy to jump into the water for.

“Mine too,” she agrees, heading for the bathroom and shedding her robe at the doorway.

As much as I want to jump in the shower with her, I resist. We have tickets to a Broadway show and then a reservation for dinner and drinks at a fancy restaurant Talia mentioned once she really wanted to visit, and I know she’ll be devastated if we miss either of those things.

I'm excited for them too, but not because I particularly care about the musical or the food. No, I just like seeing the excitement and joy on my wife's face. I love the way she lights up or does that happy little moan when she eats something she loves. Plus, I called ahead and made sure to pre-order one of every dessert on their menu so she could try one of everything I knew she'd love.

Our kids, all four of them, are with our parents for the weekend so we have two days together uninterrupted by our two sets of twins. We adore our girls, of course, but I'm more than excited to have my wife to myself all weekend with nothing to distract us from each other.

While she showers, I unpack the dress I bought her for tonight then get dressed in a suit, my tie the same purple as her dress. When the shower turns off, I open the door, knowing she hasn't locked it just in case I change my mind and join her, and pass her the dress.

"What's this?" She takes it from the other side of the door.

"For you," I tell her with a smile. "Put it on for me, sweet girl. You'll look amazing."

"It's really pretty but...it looks tight," she says a little skeptically, and I catch an edge of self-consciousness in her tone.

I tut my tongue off my teeth. "Put it on like a good girl," I instruct, knowing she won't be able to disobey that order.

Sure enough, she shuts the door again, and fifteen minutes later, she reappears. Her makeup is done, simple and accentuating her natural beauty, with a blush on her cheeks that I can't tell whether it's from makeup or her own flush. Either way, I love it.

She's right, the style of the dress is tight. I knew that when I ordered it. Then again, it's in her size so it shouldn't be uncomfortable to wear. In fact, as I look her up and down, it fits perfectly.

"You look fucking incredible, cupcake," I tell her, my voice a little rough with lust.

She shuffles on her feet a little, looking down at herself. The dress is a deep purple, simple but pretty, made of soft, clingy fabric that accentuates every delicious curve and swell of my wife's body. Fuck, she's the hottest woman alive.

"It's really pretty," Talia says, but she's pulling at the fabric over her stomach as she speaks. "I just ... I don't think I have the body for something so clingy."

I step towards her, yanking her close to me so she can feel just how much I think her body is utter perfection. She gasps a little, eyes widening.

"Why would you say that?" I ask in a low voice. "Every inch of you is fucking amazing, Talia. It always has been. Before the babies and after them. This amazing body carried our babies, two sets of twins at that. How on earth could I not want to worship you even more than before, huh?"

She blinks at me, head tipped back to stare up at me with those captivating green eyes I love so much.

"You need to stop saying things like that or else we're never getting out of this room tonight." She presses closer to me and trails her hand down my chest to my belt.

I chuckle, then groan when she palms me through my pants. Fuck, she breaks through my resistance so damn easily.

"Fuck." My grip tightens on her waist. "Let's see how fast that pretty pussy can come for me then or else we'll be late."

She grins, her hands fumbling to undo my belt.

"Challenge accepted."

We end up twenty minutes late, but fuck was it worth it.

The End.

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Book 33: [Easter Daddy](#)

Book 34: [Detective Daddy](#)

Book 35: [Dean Daddy](#)

Book 36: My Italian Stepbrother

Book 37: Biker Daddy

Book 38: My Irish Roommate

Book 39: My Russian Protector

Book 40: Mafia Daddy

Book 41: Bodyguard Daddy

Book 42: My Russian Roommate

Book 43: Italian Professor

Book 44: Mob Boss Daddy

Book 45: Paying Daddy's Debt Collector

Book 46: Sheriff Daddy

Book 47: Olympic Obsession

Book 48: Russian Daddy

Book 49: Maid for Daddy

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Book 1: Jealous

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Book 3: Stalker

Book 4: Discipline

Book 5: Obsession

Book 6: Control

Book 7: Motorcycle Man

Book 8: Possessive Puppy

Book 9: Possessive Mechanic

Book 10: Lawyer

Book 11: Nanny For The Italian Mafia

Book 12: The Italian

Book 13: Butcher of Belfast

Book 14: Addiction

Book 15: Psycho Professor

Book 16: Principal Obsession

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Book 37: Stepbrother's Obsession

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Book 5: Dad's Doctor Friend

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