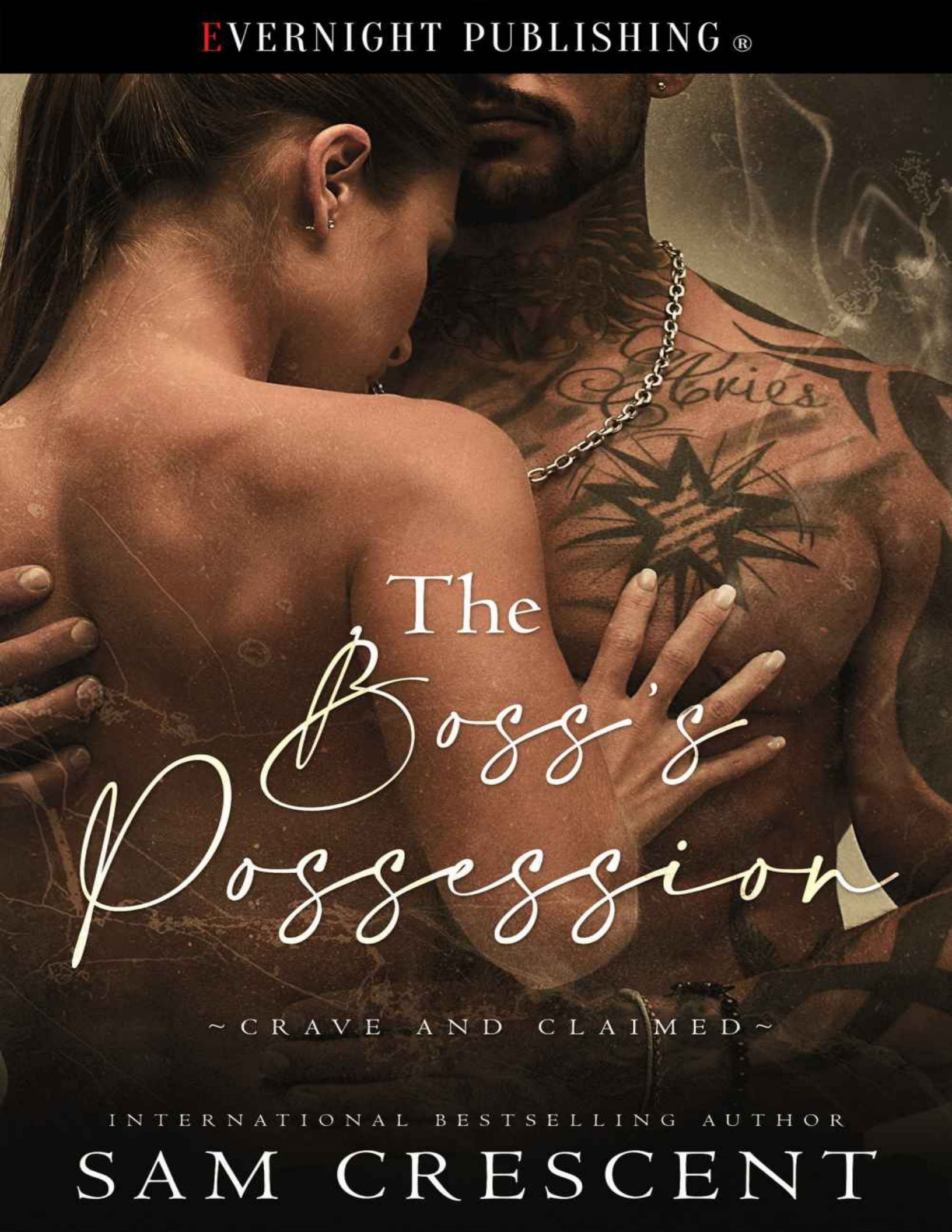


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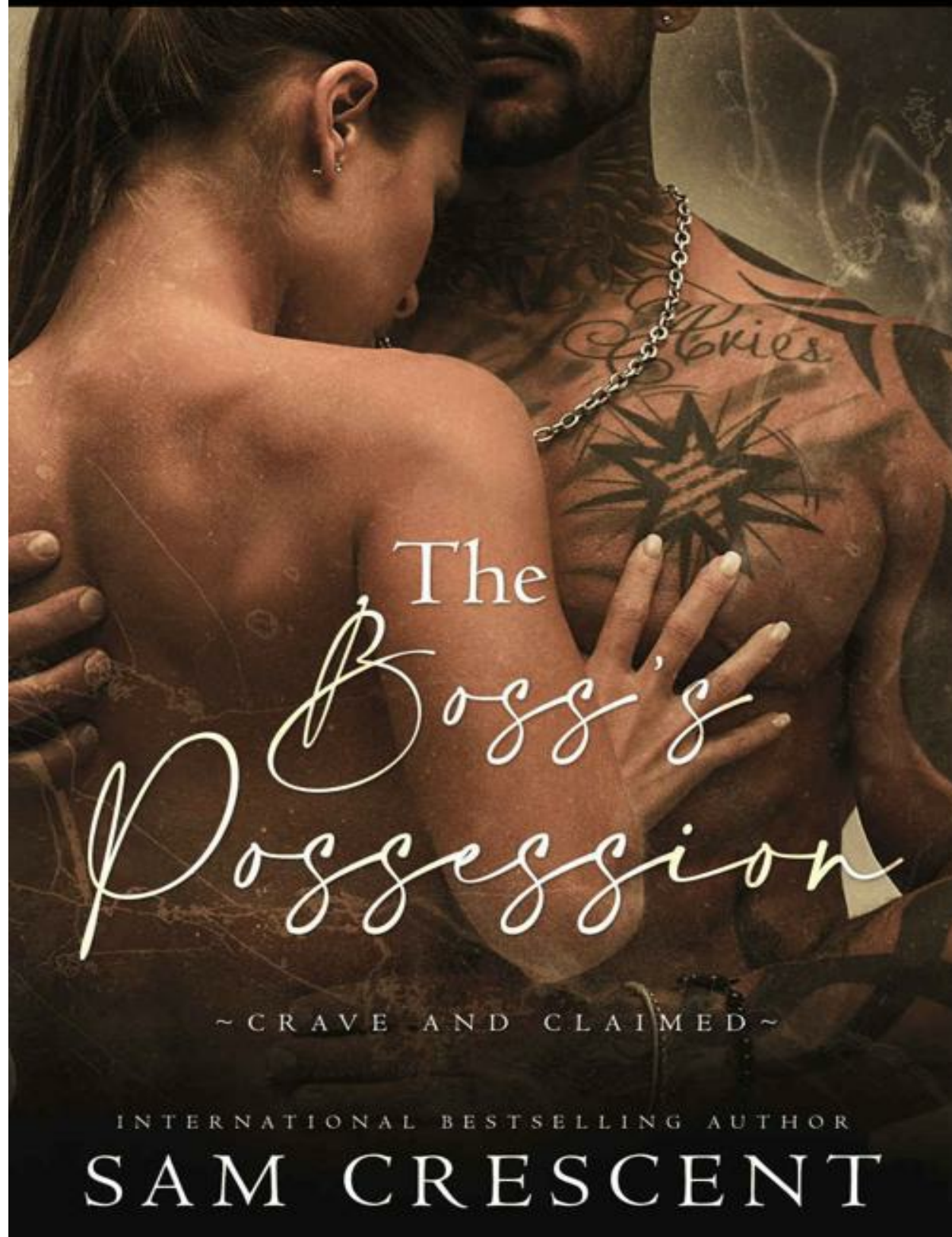
The
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THE BOSS ' S POSSESSION

Crave and Claimed, 4

Sam Crescent

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Prologue

It was not easy to intrigue Carson Dexter. Considering he was the most feared man in the state, if not the country, it took a lot to gain his attention. One of his men told him that Mrs. Lauren Kaye wanted to speak to him. This did make him stop working.

He watched as the older woman, in her seventies, entered his office. It was strange for her to be here, in his nightclub, where he conducted a great deal of *legal* business. He saw Lauren had lost a great deal of weight in the last few months and as he sat back, he happened to notice the lack of spring in her step.

“Mrs. Kaye,” he said.

“Mr. Dexter.”

Without invitation, she took a seat in front of him. They had spoken many times over the past few years. Usually, their meetings left him somewhat frustrated. He had to admire the woman’s grit, though. Of course, when he first approached her to buy her fabric store, he’d done so with the intention of tearing it down to build something more profitable for himself.

Everything had changed by the fifth meeting, when he’d walked into her shop and met Willow Kaye, the older woman’s granddaughter.

He leaned forward, pressing the tips of his fingers together. “You’ve come to me, Mrs. Kaye. I suggest you start talking. I can only assume you’d like to make a deal with me?”

Lauren sighed. “You and I both know I don’t need security for the shop. I run a profitable business, and I don’t need your hooligans for protection either.”

She was unaware that he had men stationed close to the shop, just in case. Normally, he made people pay for his services, but for Lauren, it was free. Well, mainly for Willow, but he also made sure to keep Lauren protected.

“I...” Lauren stopped. “I know who you are and what you do. You’re not a good man, nor are you a kind man, but I know you won’t hurt her. At least, not intentionally.”

Carson stared at the woman, curious where this was going.

“Life is short, you know that, right? I’m sure all of us older people tell younger people how fleeting it is, and I can promise you, they’re all right. Life is way too short. Before you know where you are, you’ve lost your

husband, your daughter, and you're taking care of your granddaughter the best way you know how. Unfortunately, I have fallen to the same illness that took my husband and child," Lauren said.

He knew all about her history. He'd met Archie, her husband, before. He was a good man, a fair man. Since he met Willow, he'd made it his personal mission to know every single detail about the young woman.

Willow Kaye was twenty-one years old, and when she was thirteen, she lost her father to a drunk driver, and three years later, her mother to cancer. At sixteen she was living with her grandmother, and he'd only met her last year. The moment he had seen Willow and witnessed her smile, he knew he had to have her. She belonged to him, and so, little by little, he worked his power. Lauren would be his biggest obstacle.

"You're dying?" Carson asked.

"Yes, and I have to say I'm quite surprised you're not happy about it. I'll no longer be in the way."

Carson got to his feet, not at all surprised to find that Lauren knew he wished to pursue Willow.

"Why have you come to me?"

"I've seen the way you look at her. I know of the men you've got stationed around the street. Even some of the customers that come to us are part of your little team. When I'm gone, Willow will have nothing. She'll have no one and I know it's going to break her heart. She has been dealt a bad hand, has known way too much loss." Lauren bowed her head and he saw her hand clenched into a fist. "But, I know you'll take care of her. You'll keep her safe and you will make sure she never knows a moment of sadness again."

"You're giving me your granddaughter?" he asked.

"I'm asking you to love her. I'm asking you to find it in your heart to want more than pain. Willow is a sweet woman, and I know you're not used to women like her. I'm asking you to take care of her."

"And what do I get in return?" Carson asked.

Lauren smiled. "Something I imagine you've never experienced before in your life."

He waited, curious as to what this older woman thought she was offering. Lauren stood.

"Someone who will eventually love you back. Someone who wants to know that you're okay. Someone who no matter the danger will run toward

you, and never want to see you hurt. I'm giving you the chance to have a family of your own."

Carson wanted to laugh in her face, but he couldn't.

"How long do you have left?" he asked.

"Three months."

"I'll take care of Willow."

Three Months Later

Willow stepped into the fabric store and flicked on the light. Everything was as it should be. Nothing out of place. She sniffled. Today had been an awful day, just like the day she'd buried her father, her mother, her grandfather, and now, her grandmother.

When her grandmother had told her the news, she'd been so angry. For months, she had kept it from her, and Willow then felt guilty for being so angry.

She walked through the shop and was sure she could sense her grandmother there. Grabbing a tissue from inside her jacket pocket, she wiped at her nose. The tears could fall, but she couldn't handle the snot. She came to a stop, and put her hand on a piece of quilting cotton. It was one her grandmother had admired in the last few days.

There had been a lot of people at her funeral. Friends and customers alike, all of them wanting to pay their respects to a woman who had touched them.

The sound of the door opening and closing made her whirl around to see who had stepped into the shop. They weren't open.

Carson Dexter.

He stepped in and she couldn't look away as he closed the door and quickly closed the distance between them. One moment, she stood alone, the next, his arms were wrapped around her. She breathed in the scent of his very expensive cologne. She hated that she needed this so damn much.

He wasn't a good man.

Willow wasn't a fool. She knew what Carson was capable of, who he was. Why people feared him. His name alone invoked fear in many. Yet, he was the only person who offered her any comfort. After her grandmother had told her about the diagnosis, Carson had come to the shop late one night and told her that if there was ever anything she needed or wanted, all she had to do was ask, and it would be hers.

She saw him at the funeral today. Even as people glared at him, he'd stood there, paying respects to her grandmother.

Tilting her head back, she looked up at him and was taken aback as he slammed his lips down on hers. At first, she accepted the kiss. At twenty-one years old, she'd never truly been kissed. He growled against her lips, and Willow felt an answering spark within her body.

This shouldn't be happening.

"No!" She pulled away and screamed. "Today is my grandmother's funeral! How dare you!"

Carson looked at her, and then cupped her cheek. "You're right. Today is not the time for this, nor tomorrow, but know this, Willow. You belong to me, and there's going to come a time when you'll be ready."

He pressed a kiss to her lips and within seconds, he was gone.

Chapter One

Six Months Later

The pain always lessened over time.

Willow paused as she stood in the shop at the cutting table, preparing some of the online orders for dispatch. It had been six months since she stood at her grandmother's grave. The pain never truly went away. There were moments like now, when she was alone, dealing with orders.

Before she passed, her grandmother had told her that she couldn't leave the shop, nor could she allow it to go to ruin. Her responsibility was to the customers and to herself, to continue with her love in the sewing world.

So, each day she got up and came to the shop, and she realized her grandmother had been right. Little by little, the pain had eased and it helped to do something. Her grandparents had loved this store. It had been in the family for nearly ten years — her grandfather's gift to her grandmother for her retirement. Lauren never wanted to retire, just run her own fabric business.

The sewing bug had escaped her mother, but Willow had captured it. From a young age she had loved to sew. It was why she'd built a special bond with her grandmother.

Finishing the order, she placed it in the sealable brown paper bag, secured it, added the logo, and placed it with the other items due for collection tomorrow morning. It was getting late, a little after nine, and she didn't like the prospect of going home alone.

She had her own place. The apartment above the shop was still empty. She'd already gone through her grandparents' things. Her grandmother hadn't wanted her to deal with all of that, so before she died, she had gone through her personal belongings and either sold or kept what she wanted Willow to have.

Willow had struggled during that time, seeing her frail grandmother go through her lifetime of memories. Once again, her grandmother had been looking out for her.

She finished the last of the orders and then, like so many other times before, she glanced toward the door. When would he show up? Carson had kept to his word. He'd given her time and space, but now she was growing tired of waiting.

This wasn't like her. She was waiting for Carson Dexter, of all men.

This was insane for her to even be anticipating his arrival. It wasn't like she wanted to have anything to do with him. He was a bad man, the worst kind of man.

“Stop thinking about him.”

Willow closed the shop, then grabbed her bag and jacket before walking out.

She was aware of the men who tended to linger on the street corners, but she had come to understand that they worked for Carson. Rather than be afraid of them, she felt safe, protected. She gave them a wave and then headed in the direction of her small apartment.

Her apartment was only ten minutes away on foot, which was another reason she loved it. It wasn't in a great location. Her grandmother had been seriously pissed off that she'd gotten her own place, but she didn't want to live with her grandmother. She'd already felt like she imposed on her enough.

Taking care of a sixteen-year-old girl might not have been easy for her. Especially as, in those first few months after her mother died, she'd not spoken. It had been too much. Slowly, with the help of the shop, she'd been able to process her pain and move on.

She walked toward her apartment building. She knew someone must have taken over, as there had been no landlord to pay in the past few months, and she'd noticed a great deal of changes to the décor, and even the people who lived there.

There had even been more security placed at the door. No one could enter without a code. She typed in her code and waited for the door to open. Stepping inside, she made her way to the stairs, then walked up the three flights to her own apartment.

She slid the key into the lock, flicked it open, and then collapsed against the door as she closed it. Willow didn't know when she became aware of someone else in the room or how, but as she opened her eyes, she saw him.

Carson Dexter sat in her one and only chair. His ankle rested over one knee, and he looked so calm, so in control.

“What are you doing here?” she asked.

“Well, I thought I'd at least get a better greeting than that, but I've come to see that you are a stubborn one.”

She glanced at him and then looked toward her door and frowned.

“How did you get in here?”

He chuckled. “It’s easy when you’re the boss.”

She shook her head. “The boss?”

Carson got to his feet and stepped toward her. “Yes, the boss.”

He was taller than her and she had no choice but to tilt her head back to look at him. “You bought this place?”

“That I did, and you’re welcome.” He tutted. “I cannot believe the rent you were paying for this place.”

“Why are you here?” she asked.

“I think that’s pretty simple. I’m here because you’re here. I told you I’d give you time, Willow, but that time is up. I promised your grandmother I’d take care of you, and that’s what I’m going to do.”

“My grandmother came to you?” she asked, a little perplexed.

“Yes, she came to me.” He was within touching distance. All she had to do was reach out and touch him, but she didn’t allow herself to do that. “She told me she was sick.”

Willow laughed. “And she wanted you to take care of me?” She shook her head. “I don’t need anyone to take care of me.”

Moving around him, she put her bag and coat down in the hallway and stepped into the kitchen. It was such a small room she hadn’t been able to fit a table. In fact, she didn’t even own a table as the apartment was so small there was nowhere to put it.

She had enough room for a chair and some sewing supplies, which were set up near the window. Of course, she couldn’t use them late at night. A couple of the neighbors had been pissed at the sound of the sewing machine late at night. There wasn’t even a lot of space to cut fabric. She tended to take her supplies to the shop to cut, and then bring them back to sew.

“You were paying way too much to rent this piece of crap apartment, Willow. It was also infested with rodents, which I doubt you knew about.”

Hearing that, she couldn’t help but look down at her feet, fearing they’d run over her at any moment.

“What?”

“Don’t worry, I fixed those problems for you.”

She pressed a hand to her forehead and gritted her teeth. “Thank you.” She couldn’t be rude to him.

“You’re very welcome.”

“Look, I don’t know what agreement you had with my grandmother, but I don’t need you to take care of me, or feel responsible for me. I can take care of myself.” She put the kettle on the stove, and her stove didn’t emit any gas. This wasn’t good. Her gas stove had always been temperamental, but the landlord hadn’t been a nice guy, so she didn’t want to bother him about it.

“You can take care of yourself? So the stove that no longer works, that’s you taking care of yourself? How about the cupboards with a few packets of ramen noodles, and a moldy yogurt? Is that you taking care of yourself? Do you think I’ve not seen the weight you’ve lost?”

Her clothes had gotten a little big on her, and eating wasn’t fun. Everything reminded her of her grandmother and that pain was too raw, too fresh, and she struggled to handle it.

So, ramen noodles held no memory. Her grandmother never used them, neither did her mother. To get through her grief, it was easy to cut off all the memories.

“So, my doctor will be happy with me. It’s not your place to take care of me, or to ... invade my life.”

“Ah, but you see, you are my business, and if you won’t take care of yourself, then it’s up to me to take care of you.”

Before she knew what was happening, Carson had moved toward her and picked her up over his shoulders. She let out a little cry and then started to slap at his butt, not too hard. She didn’t want to hurt him.

“What are you doing? Put me down!” she growled.

Willow had no idea where they were going or why he was doing this. A guy like Carson could have any woman he wanted. He didn’t need to pursue mousy little Willow Kaye.

They were out of her apartment, and on the elevator.

“This thing doesn’t work,” she said.

“It does now.”

“You’ve been renovating the building?”

“Yes. It is in fact a great investment. Kicked out the people who were fucking the landlord to stay, and those who were cooking drugs.”

“What?” She had no idea about that.

“Don’t worry, I’ve been able to fix everything, and soon it’ll be a good place to live, not that it will matter to you.”

“Why won’t it matter to me?”

“Because you’ll be living with me.”

Carson was not a patient man. He wasn't used to standing idly by waiting for shit to happen. The past six months had been the hardest of his life, waiting, watching, allowing Willow to grieve. She hadn't been alone, though. He had access to the shop's security system, and also added a few cameras of his own, so he could watch her any time he wanted. His men reported to him daily about her activities. They made sure she was safe.

When he wasn't satisfied with watching her, he drove by himself just to look at her, to see how she was doing. He noticed the weight loss. She also hadn't been sewing either, and he knew it was time to act. She had gone on long enough doing this her way.

His car waited for them at the sidewalk, and he eased her into it. She moved to the other door, only to find it was locked. There was nowhere for her to escape.

Sliding into the car, he nodded at Peter, his driver, to move. He pressed a button to raise the partition, and then he turned to her.

"What are you doing?" Willow pushed the hair off her face. The bun had come loose and her brown curls had fallen around her face. She looked so pretty when she was pissed off. He couldn't get enough of her.

"I'm taking you to my place."

Willow shook her head. "You do know this is kidnapping."

"It is no such thing."

"So, you'll stop the car and I can go back home?"

"No."

"What the hell? This is absurd. You can't do this."

"I have and I am."

"I can call the cops."

He chuckled. "And you think they'd respond to your call?"

She sighed. "My grandmother said you were a hothead."

"I'm pretty sure your grandmother called me lots of names. She was a sweet woman, and she knew who she was dealing with, which is why she came to me."

"I don't need taking care of."

"You're wrong about that, because you're doing a shit job of it."

She growled again.

There was such fire inside her. Willow had experienced pain and loss, but she was a fighter. He saw that and admired it. He knew what it meant to

have to fight for everything.

“What can I say or do to make this ... stop?” she asked.

“Absolutely nothing.” He tutted and concentrated his full attention on her. Willow’s arms were folded beneath her breasts. He was pleased to see they hadn’t disappeared with her weight loss. That would have been a true sin. “Do you think I don’t know you’ve been waiting for me?”

Willow looked at him.

He smiled. “You’re surprised.”

“I haven’t been waiting for you.”

“Don’t be a liar, Willow. It doesn’t suit you.”

She pressed her lips together.

“Say nothing, that’s easier,” he said.

“What do you want?” she asked. “Money? The shop? What?”

He reached out and wrapped a curl of her hair around his finger. “There was a time I wanted your grandmother’s shop. It’s in a prime location and what I had planned would make it profitable. However, since meeting you, I decided there was something else I wanted more.”

“What?”

“You, sweet Willow. It’s you I want.”

He saw her take a deep breath. “Ah, I see I have surprised you.”

“Why would you want me?” Willow asked. “I’m not anything special. I’m not ... anything.” She frowned.

“But you’re who I want, and this is going to happen. You and me.” He released her curl and then took her hand within his. She had soft hands. Small hands.

They arrived at his apartment block and Peter drove toward the underground parking. Carson didn’t wait for his door to be opened for him. The moment the car came to a stop, he opened the door and held his hand out to Willow. She hesitated for a second, and he was sure to lock their fingers together as they walked into the building. He went straight to the elevator as he wasn’t interested in prolonging their time in public spaces. He wanted her in the privacy of his penthouse suite.

She tried to pull out of his grip, but her strength was no match for him. He watched her in the reflection of the elevator door. She kept trying to look everywhere and anywhere but at him.

The elevator didn’t take long, and they stepped onto his floor. He pulled out his key, and within minutes he finally had her in his penthouse.

Over the past six months he had made a few modifications. He turned the spare bedroom into her personal sewing room. He couldn't create a woman's touch, as that was down to her, but there was now a closet for her in his bedroom, which they would share.

Willow pulled away from him, and this time he let her go.

She put her hands at her sides and took a deep breath. "Fine. I'm here. What now?"

"Now, we eat."

He had surprised her, and he couldn't help but smile at that. "We eat?"

"Yes, we eat." He removed his jacket and she instantly went for the door, which he locked. "You can try to escape all you want, it's not going to work."

He heard another growl as he made his way into the kitchen. Carson opened the fridge and found the steaks he'd left marinating that morning. The ingredients for the salad were there, and all he had to do was boil some new potatoes. Preparing his own food was a real treat to him. He loved the process. After spending many of his younger years starving and begging for food, he always made sure he had plenty to eat.

In fact, if he took time to reflect on it, there were a lot of things he did based on experiences of his childhood. He always had plenty of food and lots of money. He removed rats from his life, and surrounded himself in power. People feared him, but he was also fair. Provided they didn't cross him or betray him, those that worked for him were handsomely rewarded. It wasn't a bad way to live your life, at least he didn't think so.

"You're going to cook me food?" Willow asked.

"That is the plan. It's late and you didn't have anything in your apartment that would be considered food, so yes, we're going to eat." He looked toward her. "Sit."

She folded her arms across her chest.

"Do you think that bothers me?" he asked. "It makes your tits look mighty appealing." She immediately dropped her arms and glared at him.

Did she even realize her nipples were puckered? His penthouse wasn't cold. Another little thing from his childhood — he wouldn't allow the cold to last. Every place he went had more than adequate heating. It was one of the first things he repaired in Willow's apartment, the heating.

He didn't want to remember the number of nights he spent out in the

cold, or even shivering in his own bed, where a single blanket wouldn't warm him.

Pushing those thoughts to the back of his mind, he focused on the potatoes. They were all cut and he moved to the sink to fill the pot with water. Once that was done, he placed them on the stove and started to warm them up. The steaks were already out of the fridge and getting to room temperature. Next, he moved onto preparing the tomatoes to be grilled, and once that was done, he mixed the salad together. He put the dressing to one side as he preferred to mix at the end.

“When did you learn to cook?” Willow asked.

While he'd been dealing with the food, she'd taken a seat in the chair. He couldn't help but smile.

“I'm self-taught,” he said.

He'd not been willing to ask anyone to teach him the basics of cooking for himself. Once he started to earn his own money, he'd either used books in the library, or cooking shows, and he'd copied them, mimicking what they did.

“It looks good,” Willow said.

Her cheeks began to warm and he had a feeling she was talking about more than just the food. Carson didn't mind at all. She could admire his technique all she wanted.

With the potatoes boiling, he added in some salt and waited about five minutes, and then put the grill plate on to warm up.

Once the steaks were on, everything else came together easily. The potatoes finished quickly as he'd cut them small enough to not need as much cooking time. When the steaks were resting after grilling, he drained the potatoes, added some butter and more salt and pepper, and began to add them to the plate. The salad was next, followed by the rested steaks, and he drizzled some lovely mustard dressing over the greens. Delicious.

Chapter Two

The food looked good. Willow didn't want to acknowledge how good it looked, but she'd always been taught to be polite as well as respectful.

"It looks and smells amazing," she said.

"Don't judge until you try." He handed her a knife and fork and she took it, slicing into the steak. It was so tender. Not overdone, but not too pink either.

She was never a steak kind of girl, but she wasn't going to tell him that. She added some salad to her fork, along with a potato, and took a large bite, chewing through the food. The explosions of flavor made her moan.

"Wow," she said.

He smiled. A truly big smile that made her stop in her tracks as it was so unexpected.

"This is good."

He'd moved them both to his dining room table. Before he started, he reached for the bottle of wine he'd brought with him and poured them both a large glass. She never liked wine, but she wasn't going to be rude to him.

Yes, he'd kind of kidnapped her, but what could she say — "*He stole me, took me to his penthouse suite, and proceeded to cook me the most delicious meal I've tasted in months.*" People would laugh at her.

She didn't expect this from Carson.

Her grandmother, in her final days, had tried to convince her that Carson was a good guy. She had absolutely no doubt that a part of him was good, but a lot of parts of him were awful. Tonight was the first time she had seen him smile. Even when he visited the shop when her grandmother wasn't there, he'd never actually smiled.

His attention had always been nice, and it had taken Willow a long time to realize that he wasn't just being friendly. Actually, it took a customer to warn her that Carson Dexter was after sex. Well, fucking.

"*A guy like Carson Dexter isn't after the long term, sweetheart. He wants to fuck you, plain and simple, and once he has, he'll discard you like all the other women he's been with.*"

She had never seen or heard from that customer again.

A part of her — a tiny speck — found his attention flattering, and above all else, wonderful. Another was a little disappointed that he only

wanted her company for sex. That he wasn't interested in friendship, and she knew, deep in her heart, that it was lame to even think that way, but she couldn't help it.

"Try the wine."

She wanted to tell him no, but instead she took a sip of the wine, and it was nice. Not too strong, nor did it taste like vinegar. She always steered clear of alcohol. Her stomach couldn't handle it.

He chuckled. "You're not a wine lover?"

"No."

"Beer?"

She wrinkled her nose. "I'm more of a milkshake, soda, water, tea, or coffee woman."

"I'll be right back."

Willow was surprised as he got to his feet and within seconds had gone back to the kitchen, and then returned to the dining room with a bottle of water. He also had a new glass, which he poured the water into.

She continued to eat her food, aware of his gaze upon her. Actually, she wasn't completely aware of his gaze until she looked up and found him watching her. She tried to finish her food, but the twisted feeling in her gut wouldn't let her.

"Are you going to tell me what's going to happen?" Willow asked.

"About?"

"You said that I'm now yours. Is this until you get what you want?" she asked.

"And what exactly do I want?"

"Sex?" She hated how hot her cheeks felt, but she wasn't the kind of woman to shy away from tough questions. Even though it made her uncomfortable, she wanted to get everything out in the open, because right now she felt totally uncomfortable. "That's what you want, right ... sex?"

Carson slid his knife across the steak and then put the piece into his mouth and chewed. It didn't take a lot to break it up as it was so soft, almost like butter.

"Yes, I want sex."

"So, is this where you kind of trap me here, have what you want, and then discard me?"

"Discard you?"

"Isn't that what you do?"

Carson stared at her and she waited. "What exactly have you heard?"

"Not a whole lot. Just that you pursue a woman until you get what you want and then pretty much leave her in the trash, and move onto the next one." She shrugged. "I need to know what exactly you want from me, so I can plan around it."

He chuckled. "Do you think what I want is going to be easily given?"

"If it's just sex, that is easy. I've got to be ready to have sex with you." Again, she shrugged. "At the moment, I'm not ready, but if I know that's what the goal is, I'll try and get ready. I don't know how long it will take me, since I've never had sex before."

"Willow, stop," he said.

"What? Me being a virgin has put you off?" she asked, tilting her head to the side, curious about him.

"No. I know you're a virgin, but it's not just sex that I want from you, Willow."

"It's not?" Now she was confused. "What do you want from me?"

Carson didn't answer right away. Instead, he continued to eat his food. Willow tried to eat hers, but her nerves were eating her up.

She was nearly done, and once she put the last piece of steak to her lips, she placed the knife and fork down and waited.

"I want it all with you, Willow," he said.

"You want all what?" she asked, not exactly following.

He took a sip of his wine. "I want to fuck you. I want to come home, to find you doing some mundane shit, either cleaning or, I don't know, sewing, and I want to make love to you. I want to take you out dancing and hold you in my arms. I want to watch movies with you, and above all else, I want to get you pregnant. I want you to have my children and to stay by my side for our lifetime. I want to devote my life to yours, Willow. That is what I want, and that is what I'm offering you."

She didn't expect that. "Are you joking?"

"I'm being serious, and soon you'll realize that I don't say shit I don't mean."

Willow didn't know what to believe. "But ... you don't settle down. You use people."

"I don't know who you've been talking to, but they shouldn't be telling you my business, and I don't appreciate it. They don't know me."

"Why me?" Willow asked.

“Why not?” Carson asked.

“I’m just ... me.” She frowned. There had to be some mistake. Had to be. There was no way he could want her, no way at all.

She nibbled her lip, not understanding what was happening. Her heart beat against her chest. She’d been expecting the worst and instead had gotten an answer that surprised her.

“Talk to me,” he said.

“I ... I don’t know what to say.”

Carson reached out and captured her hand within his. She couldn’t look away. His hands were much larger than hers. During cooking, he’d rolled up his sleeves and she saw the ink on his arms.

She really didn’t know who this man was, or what he was capable of, and yet, he wanted to spend his life with her. It made no sense.

“What if you get bored?” she asked.

“I won’t.”

“How do you even know that? You’re talking about forever and we barely know each other.”

“I’ve watched you for awhile, Willow. I know what I want and my mind is made up. You will be mine.”

She hated that she was thrilled with those words. Why? It made no sense to her, but she couldn’t argue with him. Did she even want to? He was right here, in the moment, talking about forever, and the truth was, that was all she wanted.

Was it wrong to want to fall into his words, to trust them? She had been alone for six months. Everyone she had ever loved had left her in some way. What was going to happen when he did as well?

Willow nibbled her lip, and he found it impossible to not want those lips to be wrapped around his dick. They looked so plump and fuckable.

She suddenly got to her feet and reached for their plates.

“I’ll do the dishes.”

“I have a cleaning crew who will come and do that.”

“No, no, I would like to do them.” She nodded to herself as she was already walking away.

He picked up his glass of wine and watched her ass sway from side to side. She walked into his kitchen and he heard the water going. Getting to his feet, he took a sip of his wine, and then proceeded to watch her as she

cleaned the dishes.

He didn't clean. Carson was happy to make a mess but he always paid someone to come and clean up after him. In his kitchen and with ... pesky little rats.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"It's nothing."

"Getting up midway through a conversation to clean dishes is not nothing."

"Is it a conversation? You want what you want, which is sex and a family from the sound of it, and do I get a say in any of this?"

Carson knew she was attracted to him. He also knew she fought it. He set his wineglass on the counter, moved behind her, and wrapped an arm around her waist. He didn't hold her too tight. He feared if he did, she'd freak out, and that wasn't his intention.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"I'm holding you. You don't seem happy." He pressed a kiss to the top of her head. "There's no rush on this, Willow. I want you to get used to being part of my life. You've got plenty of time to want what I want."

"What if I'm dating someone else? What if I'm in love with someone else?" Willow asked.

He didn't like that. It was on the tip of his tongue to turn around and say he'd slit anyone's throat who came near her, but instead he gritted his teeth. "You're not in love with anyone else, you're not seeing anyone."

She sighed. "I know."

He would have also taken care of anyone she was seeing. Men were weak, and no one would appreciate her the way he did. It would have been easy to remove any obstacle from her life, and without killing them either.

Most men were led by their dicks, and he had an abundance of women who'd be happy to lead him astray. They were all in his employ. He never fucked them. From the moment he met Willow, he'd not been with any other woman. The thought didn't sit well with him. The only woman he wanted now was Willow.

Just her.

All of her.

He pressed his face against her head and breathed her in. Coconut. He loved coconut.

"Are you going to help me?" she asked.

“I cooked, and besides, I *am* helping you.”

She chuckled. “How?”

“I’m holding you. Keeping you warm.”

“I wasn’t cold to begin with.”

“Exactly, and I’m making sure you don’t suddenly get cold.” He wanted to hold her. It had been too long that he’d denied himself the pleasure. Watching her for the past six months without going to her had been like torture for him. He’d seen her pain and all he wanted to do was save her from it.

She was so fucking sweet.

So pure.

Still innocent.

He wanted her all to himself and there was no way he’d let anyone hurt her. Before he had even staked his claim on her, he’d stopped all other potential dates. The moment he met her, he knew she belonged to him, and because of that, he’d intervened in every way he could.

There had only been a couple of men. He got them to stop visiting the shop and distracted them with well-paid-for women, who had been told to entertain them and then leave. Simple as that.

To Willow, she had merely been stood up, but he’d been there, waiting, keeping an eye on her. His men were also there to watch her. She was to be protected at all costs.

Willow finished the dishes and she chuckled. “You’ve got to let go so I can dry them.”

Carson let her go, but rather than allow her to do the dishes on her own, he grabbed a towel and began to help.

“Ah, so not only do you cook, you know how to dry dishes?” she asked.

“I know how to do it all. I simply pay people to do it for me.”

Willow kept smiling, but he saw it diminish as they came close to the end. She was nervous.

He knew sex wouldn’t happen tonight. First, he wanted her to get used to his presence. Only then would sex be in the cards. And the rest of their lives would be in motion.

Carson had no intention of wearing a condom. The moment he fucked Willow, he planned to make her pregnant. He couldn’t wait to see her ripe and swollen with his child.

“I think I should give you the tour,” he said. He reached for her hand and took her through his penthouse. “You’ve seen the kitchen.” He took her to the living room, the dining room, which of course she had already seen, but he was trying to make her relax. He showed her his office, the bedroom, and even took her to the en suite. “But there is one room I really want to show you.”

“Is it a torture chamber?” she asked.

He burst out laughing. “You tell me.” He twisted the doorknob and swung it open, and reached for the light switch, illuminating her sewing room.

Willow stepped inside and gasped.

“Holy shit,” she said and then covered her mouth.

“I wasn’t sure where you’d want everything, but I researched and with the help of your grandma—”

“Grandma helped you?” Willow asked.

“Yes. She was rather impressed, if I do say so myself.”

Willow laughed. “Oh my ... this is insane. This is what I have always dreamed about. Back home, Mom and Dad were hoping to convert the basement to something like this, but they never got around to it, and then ... yeah. Wow.”

“So, these are new machines. All your stuff will be here tomorrow, including your fabric.” He moved to the far wall. “Again, your grandma made some selections of fabric and in different lengths as well. It was her parting gift to you.”

Willow pressed her lips together and he saw the tears in her eyes. “Thank you.”

She walked up to him and he didn’t know if she was going to slap him, but she suddenly threw her arms around him.

“Thank you.”

“I hope you like it.”

“Grandma liked you, didn’t she?”

He smirked. He couldn’t help it. “I don’t know if she liked me, but when I said I was building a sewing room for her granddaughter, she seemed to like me a little more.”

“And I can use it?” she asked.

“Whenever you like.”

“I’ve always wanted my own sewing room. I know Grandma said I

could move in with her, and there was a lot of space, but I just ... I didn't want to intrude and I wanted my independence, you know. This is ... there are no ... thank you so much."

"Hopefully, it works." Carson had an idea of Willow being barefoot, heavily pregnant, and wandering this room. Once she was pregnant, he knew it wouldn't be long before he'd need to purchase a house. He was already checking available properties to find one that would suit their needs.

"What do you mean?"

"In helping you to see a life with me. To want to be with me."

Chapter Three

The following day in the shop, Willow tried not to think too hard about the previous night. After the revelation of her new sewing room, Carson had taken her to the bedroom. He'd given her some time to get ready for bed before he returned to join her.

Willow had tried to fall asleep before that happened, but she couldn't. Carson had known she was wide awake as well. She had watched him while at the same time trying to hide her face. He'd left fully dressed and come back to the room, wet, with a towel wrapped around his body. A heavily inked body. The towel had covered his ass, but she'd seen the ink that decorated his back. Images and words melded together, which were hard to focus on while attempting not to look at him.

He'd dried his body, pulled on a pair of boxer briefs, and then climbed into bed. Willow had gasped when he reached across the bed, wrapped his arms around her body, and then pulled her close. At first, she had struggled to fall asleep.

The past six months she had fallen asleep in tears.

After being tense in his arms for most of the night, she hadn't expected to sleep. Willow didn't know what happened, but one moment she had struggled to fall asleep, and the next, she had woken up, feeling relaxed and completely at peace.

Carson held her throughout the night.

In the morning, Carson had woken, kissed her lips, and then prepared breakfast. He dropped her off at the shop by eight, and now she stood, shop open, with a few customers milling around.

There was a list of customer orders waiting to be finished. She noticed a few of Carson's men out in the street. They didn't interfere with her customers and she was thankful no one avoided entering just because they were there.

Whenever people came to the desk, she served them and then got back to filling orders. Her grandmother had insisted on expanding their business to the internet, which had been genius, as they had regular customers online as well.

She loved fondling fabric and serving people, helping them find the correct items for their projects. They also had a project wall within the shop for customers who'd used the fabric they supplied to create their own

designs.

It was at moments like this when she missed her grandmother. The shop was slow that day, and cutting orders was fun, but it was nice to always have someone to chat with.

Around lunchtime, she felt the air in the shop change and when she looked up, she saw Carson had stepped inside. A couple of women stopped and watched him. She saw the interest in their eyes as they followed him. Willow was surprised by the spark of jealousy that hit her square in the chest and had no right to rear its ugly head.

“Afternoon, beautiful,” he said, pressing a kiss to her lips.

She accepted the kiss, wanting the women to back off. “What are you doing here?” she asked.

“Is that any way to greet your future husband?”

She still couldn’t quite believe he was being serious. This was Carson, after all, and she doubted he ever joked about anything.

“Future husband?”

“Yes. This is where we’re going.” He took hold of her hand. “How’s business?”

“Slow, but I’ve got some online orders.”

“What have you had for lunch?” he asked.

She tilted her head to the side. “You’ve come to see me about lunch?”

“Yes.” He reached out and tucked some hair behind her ear. “Have you eaten?”

“Not yet.”

He tutted. “Completely unacceptable.”

“I can’t leave the shop.”

“Don’t you worry.” He pressed a kiss to her lips. “I’ll be back.”

Willow didn’t even know what to say or do. He had never come into her shop to just kiss her and then leave to get lunch.

She touched her lips, and was sure she still felt him. Pulling her hand away, she focused on the shop. One of the women smiled at her.

“That man is fine,” she said.

Willow chuckled. “Thank you.”

“If a guy like that told me he was going to be my future husband, I’d ask for the ring and a trip to Vegas. He could be mine within the hour.”

Willow smiled but she wasn’t about to tell the woman who he was or what he was capable of. How he instilled fear into many men and even

women. This woman was happy with Carson. The next had a disapproving stare, which she took care of and served.

They left as Carson returned with a small bag.

Willow frowned. "What is all this?"

"Food. You're not taking care of yourself, so I have to."

"I can't close the shop."

"Ah, I've always wondered what it would be like behind the counter."

She had to have stepped into an alternate universe. Carson Dexter was a scary man, and yet he was talking normally to her, and he even sounded playful.

"You've never worked in retail?" she asked.

"Never."

"How is that even possible?"

He shrugged. "When you need money, and you don't have a lot going for you but the ability to use your fists, that's what you work with."

"Your fists?"

"Yeah, I was a fighter."

"Okay." She told herself she didn't want to know more, but that was a lie. "Chinese food?"

"Yep, I know a place on the corner, does amazing noodles. You've got to try them."

Willow had a vague memory of when they first met, Carson suggesting they go out for noodles.

"You're not fooling me, you know?"

"Fooling you about what?"

"This, the noodles, all of it."

Carson snorted. "I'm not trying to fool you."

"I ... I know what you do."

Carson held out a pot of noodles to her as well as chopsticks. "And I know what I do."

"Why are you being so nice to me?"

"You're going to be my wife and last time I checked, getting a woman to be comfortable with me doesn't involve going all killer on her ass."

Willow knew she shouldn't have found that funny. There was nothing funny in what he did, but she couldn't help but laugh.

Shaking her head at what he said, she opened the pot and sniffed. It

smelled amazing. Garlic, ginger, chili, along with other flavors she wasn't sure of, but her mouth watered. She was so hungry.

The steak he'd cooked last night had been so good. Breakfast had been boiled eggs and toast, also good.

Willow hadn't taken care of herself the past few months. The truth was, she didn't feel like she could, nor was there a point.

"How does it taste?" Carson asked.

She used the chopsticks, scooped up a bunch of noodles, and started to eat. For Willow, there was no ladylike or delicate way of eating noodles, not when you were so hungry, and she was starving. They tasted so good. The instant hit of hot, sweet, salty, and spicy met her tongue, did a magical dance, and she chewed, closing her eyes in Heaven.

"How do you find these places?" she asked.

"I eat a lot of food and I know good food when I taste it. Also, how do you feel about dancing?"

"I don't dance."

"Tonight, I'm taking you dancing."

"Carson, you don't have to do that."

"I've got some business to handle, and I want to take you out. You need to learn to relax and enjoy yourself."

She rolled her eyes.

"You know I find that sexy when you do that."

She did it again, but this time overly exaggerated, and she couldn't quite keep the smile off her face. He was a goofball. Which was so odd, calling Carson Dexter a goofball.

He was deadly.

Scary.

But oddly, charming.

She finished her noodles, and he had also taken a trip to a bakery where they served mousse.

"Where did you find all of this?" she asked.

"Well, as a kid, when you're starving, you learn to appreciate what you find. You also discover the best places that way."

"Starving?" Willow asked. "You were hungry as a child?"

"Yes." Carson finished his mousse and Willow could only stare at him.

"I can't imagine ... I'm so sorry."

“Willow, it has taken me a long time to get to where I am, it hasn’t been easy and most of the time, it’s been filled with a lot of pain and suffering. It takes one to completely experience to truly understand it, and I do. I know what it’s like to have no money, to be on the streets, to fight for scraps. I’ve lived it. I’ve done it. I won’t do it again.” He picked up their trash and then kissed her lips. “I’ll pick you up tonight.”

“I’ve got all these orders to do,” she said.

“Then do them quickly. You’re going dancing tonight.” Carson left the shop and she frowned at his back. He was being a pain in the ass.

Dancing.

She didn’t go out and party.

Willow was determined to put her foot down and tell him no. He couldn’t force her to go out to some nightclub. She wanted to stay home, which would be his home. If they stayed home together, alone, what would happen?

She imagined him naked, his wet body moving toward her, and it was such a shock, she had to look up to see if anyone noticed her getting aroused. *Stop thinking about that!* Work was not the time nor the place to be thinking about sex with Carson.

Carson saw Willow standing outside of her shop, looking sexy as fuck. He’d sent one of his men with a dress he wanted her to wear, and it emphasized her curves to perfection. Her large tits were pushed up and cupped in almost a love heart neckline. The bodice curved in at the waist and flared out over her hips. She looked so fucking sexy. The heels she wore were not too high, but enough to flatter her shape. Her ass looked divine.

He did have some work to complete at one of his nightclubs, but he also wanted to take Willow out. For her to get used to being with him in public. He didn’t know who told her about him, but it wasn’t shocking news. Her grandmother had known, so for all he knew, Lauren had attempted to warn her granddaughter away from him at one time. That hadn’t worked. Nothing would keep him away from Willow.

He climbed out of his car and moved toward her, then wrapped an arm around her waist. Willow didn’t fight him as he pressed a kiss to those plump lips.

“It’s a little too tight,” she said.

“It’s perfect.”

She wrinkled her nose. "I don't see how it is."

"This is how it's meant to fit."

Carson silenced her protest with another kiss and then took her hand, leading her back to his car. He helped her inside and told Peter, his driver, where they wanted to go.

"Have you been to a nightclub?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"Ah, you're in for a treat."

"I must sound very boring to you."

"Why?"

"I don't ... I've ... partying and drinking, it doesn't sound like a lot of fun. I prefer to stay home, you know. Sew."

He smiled. "That doesn't sound dull at all."

"Ah, so you sew?"

"No, I don't sew and you know that." He winked at her.

Her hands were locked together and he saw how nervous she was. He took one of her hands within his, lifting it to his lips and kissing her knuckles.

"Relax."

"That's easy for you to say. You've been to nightclubs before."

"They're not scary places. Did your grandparents tell you they were?" he asked.

Willow laughed. "No. They wanted me to go out and party, to have a life. Grandma was worried I was hiding from life."

"And are you?" he asked.

She shook her head. "No, I'm not hiding, it's just, I've never, I don't ... ugh, I don't make friends easily, and I guess going to nightclubs on my own just didn't appeal to me." She frowned. "Are we seriously talking about this?"

He wanted her to relax. The nightclub wasn't far. It was early and he wished to conduct his business soon. He already had food waiting for them inside his office. There would be time to enjoy some food, do work, and then dance.

Peter pulled up to the nightclub, and the doors were not even open.

"I think I'm overdressed."

"No such thing."

He loved the dress he'd chosen, which showed off her curves, and he couldn't wait to get his hands on her. Most of the day, he'd wanted to be

alone with her, touch her, make love to her, fuck her. There was nothing he wouldn't do for this woman.

Walking into his nightclub, he saw that the men and women were preparing to receive customers. The floors were being mopped, the bar was fully stocked.

They all turned toward him in greeting. He nodded at them and took Willow with him.

He got to his office. Peter knew when he'd parked the car, to come in and stay at the bar and keep an eye on everyone.

Arriving in his office, he was pleased to see that the food waited on his desk.

"More food?" Willow asked.

"I know you're feeling nervous, but starving yourself will not do."

"How do you know I feel nervous?"

"You're shaking." And it had nothing to do with arousal. He was taking Willow outside of her comfort zone.

"I won't tell Willow to stay away from you."

"You won't? I thought you already had?"

"No, I haven't, but you've gone to these lengths, and don't think I don't know about the additional cameras," Lauren tutted. "You've got to promise me, you'll give her time. Willow is nervous. She struggles with change, and new things make her nervous. She avoids living. Archie and I, we tried. We did try, but she has always been so skittish. Even as a youngster, it took her several attempts to get in the pool. So, what I'm asking of you, Carson, if you have every intention of claiming my granddaughter, you give her everything. You've got to show her what living is about, but above all else, you've got to promise me you will love her."

It was one of their few and final conversations. He'd noticed Lauren was getting weaker, but he did like the older woman.

Willow didn't know that when the news came to him of her final passing, he did shed a tear. Carson never cried. He hadn't felt true emotion in a long time, not happiness, not sorrow, certainly not grief, but with Lauren, he felt it.

"I'm fine," Willow said, lying.

He pulled her into his arms, cupping her cheek. She put her hands on his waist.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

“You need to relax, Willow. I’m not going to hurt you. I will never hurt you.” He brushed her lips with his. “I’ve got you, and the people outside aren’t going to hurt you either. I won’t let them.”

“How do you know you can stop them?” she asked.

“Because I know what I’m capable of, and you’re mine.” He sunk his fingers into her hair, pulled her close, and kissed her hard. She released a moan, and he just couldn’t get enough of this woman.

His cock was already hard as a rock. It would be so easy to take her to his desk, spread her legs, and fuck her there and then. But Willow’s first time would not be in his office. She was going to be as desperate and as needy as he was. Breaking the kiss, he forced himself to step away. His balls were fucking blue with how many times he’d been aroused with no follow through.

Last night had been his own special kind of torture. He never wore anything to bed as he preferred to be naked. Holding Willow, as she wore a flimsy nightshirt, feeling her ass nestled against his dick, finally having her in his arms, had been a dream as well as utter torture. It had been worth it, though. He had slept. With Willow in his arms and the scent of coconuts surrounding him, he’d slept peacefully. He’d waited for Willow to fall asleep before he’d found his own peace.

Pulling out a chair, he waited for her to sit, and as she did, he pushed the chair beneath the table.

“You have a dinner table in your office?” she asked.

“No, this was taken from downstairs.” He went to his desk and found the food waiting for him. Carrying it to the table, he put a plate of meatballs and pasta in front of her, and took a seat opposite.

“Did Grandma tell you this was my favorite?”

“Yes.”

Willow smiled. “I’m starting to think she had a little bit of a crush on you.”

“No, Lauren knew I was going to take care of you.”

“How did you and my grandparents meet?”

He noticed she didn’t like to linger after he made his claim or told her that she belonged to him. One day soon, he’d get her to react, but until then, he was happy for her to pretend it wasn’t happening.

“Awhile ago,” Carson said. “There were a string of burglaries in the area. I wasn’t happy, and I extended my security services to many people on the street, your grandparents included. I met Archie, and he told me he didn’t

need to pay for no security.” Carson chuckled. “He had a baseball bat and a magazine. Told me he’d protect his woman’s shop.”

Willow gasped. “Oh, my, really?”

“Yep, and you know what, he wasn’t wrong. A couple of nights of him staying in the shop, he caught the burglar.” Lauren and Willow didn’t know that Archie had called Carson, not the police.

“I know how this shit works, son. I’m not a fool. He steals from you, I don’t call the cops. Now, I consider this dealt with, you and me, and you’re not going to give me no trouble.”

Carson had to wonder if that was how Lauren knew who he was and what he did. He never gave Archie any trouble, and whenever he heard of anything happening in the area, he always stopped by.

Archie’s death had been tragic. He’d been upset by Archie’s passing as well, but he had made sure to keep an eye on Lauren after that. When he met Willow, he’d known she was his, and since then, he had made it his mission to claim her.

Chapter Four

The nightclub was alive with activity.

Willow sat at the bar, sipping some fresh orange juice while she waited for Carson to be done. They had shared a meal and it was kind of nice to think of her grandfather and Carson sharing an interaction, even if it did seem kind of strange at the same time.

Peter, Carson's driver, sat close to her.

"Have you worked for Carson long?" Willow asked.

"Many years now."

He'd been told to sit with her, by Carson, and she felt a little guilty.

"If you want to go off and party, I don't mind. There are a couple of women who would love to dance with you."

Peter held his hand up. "I'm taken."

She hadn't seen the wedding band.

"Oh, er, so sorry."

Peter chuckled. "Don't worry about it, and besides, Carson told me to stay here to keep an eye on you, so that's what I'm doing."

"I can take care of myself."

"Starving yourself isn't taking care of yourself."

Willow frowned. "Does everyone have a food fetish? I ate, just not well, nor a lot, and yeah, it wasn't that great."

He chuckled. "We're all taking turns watching out for you."

"I bet Carson does this a lot, doesn't he?"

Peter finally turned to look at her and he had a frown on his face. He didn't say anything but she felt the need to elaborate on what she meant.

"You know, getting you to take care of women he has an eye on." Her face was heating up and words were just spilling from her lips and made no sense at all.

"No, Carson has never done this."

"What?"

The music was loud but she must have misheard him.

Peter leaned in. "Carson has never pursued a woman. He has never cared about a woman's protection before. You are the first and you are important to him."

She was shocked. Carson had said the same thing, but she hadn't believed him. She was the first woman he had cared about.

Peter sat up and she didn't need to turn around to know that Carson was there. Peter nodded and then Carson stood in front of her.

"That was rude," Willow said.

He held out a hand to her. "Dance with me."

"I've got my drink."

Carson nodded his head and the bartender came to take it away.

"Hey, I was drinking that."

"And now, you're going to dance with me." Carson took her hands and he started to pull.

Willow wanted to tell him no, to force him to stop, but she also didn't want to cause a scene. She had no choice but to follow him as he pulled her onto the dance floor.

"I don't dance," she said.

People were pumping and grinding against each other. When she was at home, she tended to sway her hips once or twice, and that was if a song even registered on her mind. Most of the time, not. She wasn't quite into music.

"Neither do I, but there's nothing wrong with just swaying together."

The song was loud, and the people around them looked close to having sex, they were all over each other.

Carson wrapped his arm around her waist, pulled her close, and with the dress she wore, she felt every inch of him as he pressed against her. She nibbled her lip and released a moan as he began to sway them to his own beat. They were not in tune to whatever music was playing.

At first, Willow felt out of place. This was not what she wanted to do.

"Look at me," he said.

She wanted to tell him to fuck off, but again, she wasn't known for being rude. Instead, she stared into his eyes and waited.

"Feel what I do and follow me."

It sounded so easy for him to say that, but for her, she struggled at first. Then it was like something clicked inside her head and within her body and she was able to move to the beat he created. The people around them faded and all Willow cared about was Carson.

When they started to dance, she had her hands at her sides, not wanting to be part of the beat, and then she wrapped her arms around his neck, holding onto him as he took them on his dance.

She didn't know how long they were on the floor, but Carson broke

the spell, took her hand, and then moved her away from the dance floor. They didn't go back to his office, but stepped outside, into an alleyway.

He pressed her up against the wall and kissed her hard. One of his knees pressed between her thighs, and she didn't want to break the spell he'd wielded over her. Wrapping her arms around his neck, she kissed him back, feeling the hard ridge of his cock as he pressed to her stomach.

Carson was aroused for her, by her.

He traced his tongue across her lips and she moaned his name, desperate, hungry for more, and then he growled her name against her lips, before breaking the kiss.

Her mouth felt swollen and she couldn't help but run her tongue across her lip, feeling the tingle from his touch.

Carson groaned. "Come on," he said.

Once again, he held her hands, and rather than go to a car, they walked past the long line of people waiting to go into the nightclub.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

"A midnight stroll."

"It's midnight?"

She didn't have a watch on and the time had faded fast.

"Yeah, it's midnight." They stopped near the opening of a park, a streetlight illuminating the sign.

"I can't believe the time," she said.

He chuckled. "How was your first nightclub?" he asked.

"Time-consuming."

He cupped her waist and laughed.

She liked to see him smile. "How was business?"

"Eventful, but you don't have to worry about that."

"I don't?"

"No."

"You were very rude to Peter," she said.

"He's used to it. He knows what I require of him."

"Are all of your men loyal to you?" Willow asked.

"Yes, and women."

"You have women working for you?"

He kissed her lips. "Come on, let's go for a walk."

"Er, I think the park is closed."

"Not to me."

He stepped inside the park and Willow's heart raced. "This is illegal, I'm sure of it."

"Come on, Willow, are you telling me you've never done anything naughty before?"

"No, never. I don't do this kind of thing. You're a bad influence on me," she said. Her hands shook a little and she tried to hide it, but it was impossible to do so. They were in the park, and they were not supposed to be. There was no one else around. Nibbling her lip, she tried to think of a reason to escape.

Carson grabbed her hands and pressed her up against the nearest tree. "Relax."

"You do realize that security is here, don't you?"

He chuckled. "And you're scared of being told off?"

"I don't want to get arrested." Her heart pounded.

"Willow, trust me."

She took a deep breath.

He kissed her. "Relax."

"No, I can't relax."

Carson sighed.

"I'm sorry. I told you I was boring."

"You're not boring, and you know what, I don't mind. We'll leave."

He grabbed her hand and as he did, there was a sudden light shining close to where they stood.

"Hey!"

Willow gasped. Holy crap, they were going to get caught. Carson didn't have to tell her to run, she had already tugged on his hand and was running in the opposite direction from the way they came. Carson kept up with her and she didn't even take a chance to look toward him or to look back. All she wanted to do was get free of the park. She heard the security officer chasing them.

Carson pulled her toward the main gate, and seeing his car parked with Peter waiting for them was a relief. He nudged her into the car and they were already pulling away from the park before the man was able to catch up with them. She looked behind and they were already too far gone for the man to see them.

Collapsing against Carson, she did something she never thought she would do when faced with being caught by the law. She burst out laughing.

That hadn't been fun, but for some odd reason, she couldn't help but laugh.

The park had indeed been closed last night. Carson knew the security guard and had arranged it. Lauren had given him the suggestion to take Willow on an adventure. She felt her granddaughter had been too afraid of living.

They were never in any real danger with the law or with anyone last night. He'd never put Willow in that position. She would always be safe. But he'd seen the fire in her eyes. The energy. She'd been alive last night and he knew it was an experience he wanted to give her, time and time again.

"We're here, sir," Peter said.

He glanced at the security footage of Willow in her shop one last time, and then terminated the connection. He placed the phone inside his suit pocket, securing it in with a zip. Peter had climbed out of the car and opened his door for him.

Carson took a deep breath of the fresh air. He always relished the freedom of breathing. Inhaling. Exhaling. Finally, without another word to his loyal driver, he walked inside the warehouse where a man was hanging upside down. Piss covered his clothing and the floor. The guy had pissed himself. This was something Carson was used to.

Men liked to betray him, or hurt his business. Like this man, who frequented the brothels he owned. Only two nights ago, one of the women he'd paid to service him had ended up in the hospital.

Now, Carson didn't set out on his path to own women. He didn't want to be a pimp. Yes, he was aware brothels made a great deal of money. There were a lot of men who would pay their entire fortune for the right woman. Not that he could judge, he'd do anything for Willow. Prostitution wasn't something he'd been interested in. However, many, many years ago, several women had approached him and begged him to set up a suitable employment so they could be safe while conducting their business. They had offered him a percentage of the profits they would earn, and in return, he would provide the accommodation and security. At first, he'd declined but then they'd told him what was happening on his street corners. The pimps, the torture, the force.

Once he realized what was happening, he had no choice but to do something about it. He found the house, put his name to it, and since then it had been a very profitable alliance.

There were rare occasions like now, when one of the men got a little

too excited or downright rude. This man, hanging upside down, was rude. The woman he was with was in the hospital. He'd beaten her badly. Her face was messed up, and she had several broken bones as well. To Carson, that was unacceptable. Usually he allowed his men to take care of the problem, but after going to see the woman in the hospital, he knew this was his area of expertise.

He removed his jacket, placed it in Peter's capable hands, and then turned toward the man who'd pissed him off. Today he intended to spend the day with Willow. It was going to be a surprise. He'd be her little shop assistant. Not that he had any interest in helping run a fabric shop, but if it meant spending the whole day with her, he'd gladly do it. Instead, he got the call before he could announce his surprise to his woman. Now, he was pissed.

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. She was asking for it. She begged me to hit her."

Carson tutted. "Do you not realize you were filmed the whole time. She begged you to stop."

The guy who was supposed to be keeping an eye on the cameras had also met an untimely end. He didn't like men who shirked their responsibilities. If he'd not stepped out for a smoke, a long-ass fucking smoke, the woman would have been rescued sooner. As it was, the beating took ten minutes, the time it took for the man to leave, smoke, take a piss, and then return to his job. The damage had been done.

The man screamed. "Why does it fucking matter? She's a slut. She doesn't deserve this. I paid her. She should learn to shut her fucking yap."

Carson had always been a fighter. It was in his nature to strike back. He didn't know the woman personally, had no interest in knowing her personally. He'd seen the footage, and while she'd begged and tried to escape, this piece of shit wouldn't let her go, and now, as his punishment, Carson wouldn't let him go.

He wanted to use his fists, to pummel his flesh until he bruised, bled, then died. But if he did that, he'd cut his knuckles. Fighting for as long as he had, he knew the consequences and wasn't willing to pay them.

So, one of his men handed him a bat. It was thick, wooden, and would get the job done. He swung, hitting the man. It wasn't long, maybe the second swing, when he started to scream and beg for mercy. Carson didn't stop.

There was a reason he was fucking king, the boss of this city. He

ruled it with an iron fist. No one crossed him. No one hurt his property or damaged it.

By the time he was finished, the man stopped screaming, but Carson had made a fucking mess of his suit. There was blood all over it.

Dropping the bat into the pool of blood, he stepped back and told his men to take care of it. Peter waited with his jacket, but he wasn't going to wear that over a bloody shirt. The piece of shit had ruined his clothing.

Peter left to go to the car, returning minutes later with a clean one. Carson stripped down, tossing his clothing into the puddle. Everything would be taken care of. Just like the woman in the hospital. He'd settled her medical bills and paid the necessary compensation to her, so she wouldn't have to worry about work for several months. Long enough to recover.

He'd already found someone else to watch the security footage for all incidents. No one would mess with his property.

Back in his car, he pulled out his cell phone, pulled up the direct link he had to Willow's shop, and then continued to watch as Peter drove him across the city, back toward her shop.

When they arrived, it was very busy. He saw a couple of sale signs on the inside windows, stating there was a percentage off. He didn't wait for Peter to open his door. He climbed out and made his way into the shop to see Willow at the cutting table.

Carson was used to the attention. All gazes turned toward him, and he smiled as Willow finally lifted her head. She was one of the last women to do so, but he'd forgive her. She was incredibly busy.

"Morning, beautiful." It had only taken him two hours to deal with work, and now he could bask in all things Willow. The scent of coconuts was driving him crazy.

"Have you brought more food?"

"Not yet, but I figured you'd prefer to eat your food at lunchtime."

"Ah, so what are you doing here?" Willow asked.

He didn't mind that women were watching. "I thought you could use a hand."

Willow stopped cutting and turned toward him. "Use a hand?"

"I'm going to be your assistant for the day."

"Oh, honey, you cannot turn him down."

Carson smiled at the woman, who turned bright red once he did. "See, I'm a good guy to have around."

“And you don’t even know how to handle the register.”

“But I can measure and cut.” Carson held his hand out for the scissors. “How about it?”

Willow licked her bottom lip and he had to wonder if she was thinking a lot of sexy thoughts. He knew he was.

“Fine. Okay, fine.” She handed him the scissors. If you have any problems, let me know.”

She gave his arm a squeeze and left to go to the counter, where two people were already waiting to be served.

Returning to the woman, he saw at least three more women were holding fabric in their arms.

Okay, he could do this. How hard could it be, cutting fabric?

Chapter Five

It was hard for Willow not to find Carson attractive as she watched him hold fabric, open the folded pieces, and then line them up on the cutting table. There was a nice new pile of remnants she would have to measure and mark up, but that wouldn't be a problem.

The women adored Carson.

Yes, he was feared. She noticed a couple of women had stepped inside and left immediately. A few men as well.

Willow had placed a brand-new fabric order to get ready for the winter fabrics, and since they had a huge supply already of summer fabrics, she had to make space for the new ones. Her grandmother always did a stock clearing sale after ordering fabrics. The amount of fabric she bought would determine the markdown price.

It was always a big success and helped to bring feet back into the shop. The online orders had been going through the roof as well. When that happened, Willow always made sure to check through the system, take the bolts that had been hugely popular, and put them to one side.

By lunchtime, Carson seemed exhausted, so she gave him a break to go and get them some food. She finished the sudden rush at the shop, and rang up the last customer when Carson returned with the noodle pots again.

Her mouth watered at what possible delight he had brought. His obsession with food was adorable.

“My lady, my boss,” he said.

She couldn't help but chuckle. “So, how hard can it be?” she asked.

“Fuck me, cutting fabric is hard. I'm pretty sure some of the ladies messed up the material just to make me look inadequate.”

“Oh, no, they didn't. That was entirely you.”

He glared at her and she gave him a beaming smile for the trouble.

“You're a vixen, has anyone told you that?”

She winked at him. “Some fabrics are a little difficult, but once you get used to them, they're fine.”

He handed her the pot of noodles and she took it, opened the top, and yep, her mouth once again watered. She took the offered chopsticks and began to scoop out noodles. She moaned as the flavor took over, and she closed her eyes.

“I'm glad you like my food choice.”

“I more than like it. What made you decide to come to the shop today? Isn’t Carson Dexter a very busy man?”

“I am a busy man but after dealing with some unsavory business, I wanted to come and see you. Do you still love the shop?”

She glared at him. “I’m not selling.”

He held his hands up in surrender. “I’m not buying.”

She laughed. “I remember before my grandparents got this place. My grandma always wanted to own her own fabric shop. It was so important to her. Her only dream really. It was Grandpa’s retirement gift to her. I remember when they started this business, I was eleven years old, and I begged her for a job.” She chuckled. “I would come and work on the weekends. Through the week I had to focus on school and my education, but I was always with her on the weekend.”

“It sounds lovely.”

“Did you have grandparents?”

He shook his head. “No. I didn’t have anyone. I don’t even know who my mother was.”

“What?”

“I was an orphan. I got fostered out to a lot of bad people. Shit people. It’s why I know what it’s like to starve and have no interest in being without food and money. I didn’t have a family.”

“I had no idea.”

“It’s not information I make public.”

“I couldn’t imagine not having anyone. I mean, I know I’ve lost a lot of people I care about.” She stared down at the noodles and felt an overwhelming punch of grief.

Carson put his food down and walked around the counter. Within seconds, she was in his arms, and in a strange way she had a feeling it would all be okay. She didn’t know why she thought that way, only that she did.

“I’ve got you,” he said. “It’s going to be okay. I’ve got you.” He kept repeating those words.

Willow closed her eyes and breathed him in. Wrapping her arms around his waist, she gave into him, holding him, not wanting to let go.

He stroked her hair. “I bet your grandmother is happy knowing you’ve got this place.”

“Didn’t you want to buy it from her?” Willow asked.

“Yes, I did, but not anymore.” Not from the moment he saw Willow

so fucking happy here.

Willow sighed. She pulled away from him and then wiped at her face. "I'm okay. I'm fine."

He watched her for several seconds to make sure. He didn't leave her side, and reached for his pot of noodles.

"Sometimes I have no idea what to talk to you about," Willow said, picking up her own pot.

"You can talk to me about anything."

"Why me?" she asked.

This made him pause as he looked toward her. "What?"

"You heard me. There's nothing special about me, Carson. I'm not an idiot. I know who you are. I've heard the whispers that follow your name."

"And that doesn't scare you?"

She shrugged. "Sometimes, but then I've also seen some of the shop owners down this street say your name, and they look relieved. How can I be upset by that?" she asked.

He smiled.

"You could have anyone in the world. You're a good-looking guy." He was pure sex, that was the truth. "Why me?"

She was just an ordinary girl. Men and women never stopped in the street to admire her beauty. She wasn't special. She had no powers. She was just a woman trying to get by in the world, who'd experienced a lot of pain and loss. So why did he want her?

Carson put his food back down and cupped her face. She looked into his eyes. They were a shocking blue, unlike her brown ones. She felt like she was falling into him. His eyes reminded her of the ocean, the calm before the storm. She couldn't look away, even if she wanted to. She was held still by his gaze.

"It was your smile," Carson said.

"My smile?" She frowned.

"Yes. The way you stared at me, you made me stop and I just couldn't look away. I didn't want to. Walking away from you that first day without taking you with me was one of the hardest decisions I'd ever made."

"I find that hard to believe."

"I thought about you. For the next week. I couldn't get you out of my head and part of me had to wonder if I made it up. I thought there was no way I could be so drawn to a woman. I never had been in my life. But, after a

week, I came back to see you. I wasn't wrong. You were amazing. Beautiful. You became a reason for me to get up in the morning."

Tears filled her eyes. It was so beautiful, the way he looked at her.

She didn't know what to do, so she put her hands on his chest and slowly began to slide them up, wrapping them around his neck. Going onto her tiptoes, she pressed her lips to his and kissed him. There was nothing else she wanted to do at that moment.

Carson slid one of his hands to the back of her neck, and the other moved down toward her ass.

A gasp left her lips, and she tightened her hold on him. His tongue traced across her lips and when she opened her mouth, he plundered inside, deepening the kiss. She wanted to go on and on kissing him, but the sound of the doorbell stopped her.

Willow had no choice but to stop the kiss, even though she had no desire to do so.

Carson was not an innocent man. He spent all his life fighting. He'd tortured men, killed them. There had been many women in his life. There was nothing he hadn't done, and yet, that kiss with Willow kept playing in his mind. Her lips felt so fucking good, and all he wanted to do was to feel her again.

The shop began to drive him insane. He wanted to close it, take Willow to his penthouse, and show her exactly what the kiss had done to him. He continued to work. By the end of the day, he even got better at handling the fabric, so it didn't go everywhere. The remnants he'd created had gotten less.

He was tired and when Willow went to the door, flicked the lock into place, and twisted the sign to say they were closed, he wanted to get on his knees and thank her. Fucking hell, it was hard work. Harder than he thought it would be.

"It's not always like this," she said, giggling.

"You find this funny?"

"You looked like you were saying a prayer. This was a very good day. Very busy, but now I've got to do some of the internet orders."

"Seriously?"

She nodded. "Normally, I do many of them throughout the day, but we've been so busy, I haven't had time. It shouldn't be much to do."

He watched as she went to the back of the shop where he knew the office was. Carson followed her. She bent forward, clicked on the computer, and papers started to print. He saw a small pile was already printed.

“It has been a very good day.”

“Online orders?”

She nodded. “It shouldn’t take too long.”

So, Carson went with her, gathered up the fabric, and this time Willow cut while he attempted to package them. In the end, he was the cutting guy, and she was the folding and packaging expert. Time flew by, and before he knew it, three hours had passed. Most of the orders had been completed, but she had done enough.

Peter waited for them outside. Carson helped Willow into the back of the car. She sighed, resting her head.

“I’m so tired.”

He told Peter to bring them to one of his favorite takeout places. Carson called ahead to ask for his special, times two. They stopped there to grab food, and then Peter took them back to his building. The elevator got them to his penthouse suite.

He made Willow sit down on the sofa while he prepared their food. Another bottle of wine was opened, and he poured himself a glass, then got Willow some water. She looked at him like she was in Heaven. Carson held a plate filled with delicious lasagna, salad, and garlic bread.

“Oh, wow, you know everyone, don’t you?” she asked.

She took the plate from him, and before he even got chance to sit down, she moaned.

“Oh, my, this is so good.”

He watched her as she closed her eyes, and he loved to see her enjoying her food. Carson relaxed, taking a bite of his own food. This had been one of the many things he’d wanted — to enjoy her company and relax. They ate in silence, but he didn’t mind that today. He was more than happy to just enjoy the moment.

“Will you be joining me tomorrow?” Willow asked.

“I don’t know. I might be busy with my own work.”

She chuckled. “It was nice to have you at the shop today. It’s made me realize that I might need an assistant.”

“An assistant?”

“Yeah. Before I lost my grandma, it was me and her. Now it’s just

me, and it is a pretty successful shop. Grandma knew what she wanted it to become, her plans, and I'm hoping to continue them."

"Don't forget to add your flare to the mix."

She smiled. "I won't. How do I go about employing someone?"

"Let me handle it."

"You'll find someone to work at the shop?"

"Yeah, I'm pretty good with that kind of thing. I reckon I can find you someone."

She nodded. "Okay, then."

"What are you looking for?"

"Someone who likes to sew, would help. Someone who loves fabric, who wants to work at a fabric shop."

"I'll find someone." He would make sure it was someone who could protect his woman as well.

He wasn't sure whether to choose a man or woman for the job. He had a few candidates in mind, as they had also helped him when it came to designing Willow's sewing room. They helped Lauren get the room just right for her.

Willow reached out and cupped his cheek. "I want to kiss you," she said.

"Okay." He wasn't going to complain about her wanting to kiss him. "My lips are yours."

She leaned forward and Carson kept his hands to himself, even though it was hard. All he wanted to do was touch her, but he'd promised himself to go slow, to give her time to get used to his touch.

Willow brushed her lips across his, and he couldn't help but reach out and kiss her back. She released a little moan. It was so subtle. His hand twitched as he wanted to reach out and sink his fingers into her hair, grab her ass, and pull her against him. He wanted to feel her soft body next to his.

"Touch me," she said.

Carson didn't need her to repeat that instruction. He grabbed her ass and then hauled her over his body so that she straddled his waist. She dropped her hands to his shoulders, and it broke the kiss. She giggled, and then he moved her into position so she felt the hard ridge of his dick pressing against her core.

Willow gasped.

"That's what you do to me."

“I, er, I’m not...”

“I know,” he said. He leaned up and pressed his lips to hers. “I know you’re not ready, and I’m not going to force you. I’ll never do that to you. I’m happy to wait until you’re ready, Willow. Always.”

He pulled her down and brushed his lips against hers. “All I need from you is a kiss. Kiss me, baby.”

She cupped his face and kissed him. This time, her tongue traced across his lips, and he touched his to hers. Willow didn’t stop, and he fucking loved feeling her body all over him. Did she even realize that she was thrusting against his cock?

Sliding his hands up her body, he cupped her tits, while she moaned, which he swallowed down. They were so big and so ripe. He wanted to suck on them, but instead, he slowly slid a hand down toward her thighs. She wore a skirt today, so it was easy for him to touch the inside of her thigh.

“Do you trust me, Willow?” he asked.

She hesitated for only a second, but he paused in moving his hand.

“Yes,” she said.

“I have a way of making you feel good, and I need you to trust me, can you do that?”

She nodded her head. They had stopped kissing when his hand touched the tender flesh of her thigh. Carson moved her back on the sofa, lifted her legs up, then pushed the skirt up to her waist. Her hands went between her thighs, attempting to hide her pussy from him.

“Trust me,” he said.

He took her hands and moved them above her head.

“If I hurt you, or you’re uncomfortable, tell me to stop. I’ll do it.”

She nibbled her lip and then jerked her head.

“Relax,” he said.

“That’s easy for you to say but I don’t know what to do,” she said.

He chuckled. Did she have any idea how turned on he was by that simple statement? His woman was innocent. No man had touched her. She was all his to do with as he wished. And he fucking loved that. Carson knew he shouldn’t care, but there was only ever going to be one man to touch Willow, and that would be him.

He got to his knees, and then traced up either side of her thighs, going toward her pussy. The tips of his fingers skimmed the edge of her panties, and as pretty as they were, they were in his way. Carson tore her panties from

her body, and then stared down at her naked cunt. So pretty. There was a small smattering of hair, covering her lips, which he didn't mind at all.

Touching the lips of her sex, he spread her open and saw her swollen clit. She was soaking wet, and by the time he was through with her, he wanted her to be dripping.

His cock was so fucking hard, it was painful to be in the tight confines of his pants, but he didn't release himself. Today was all about Willow, this wasn't about him. He wanted her to feel good.

She moaned his name as he used the tip of his finger to lightly stroke over her swollen nub.

“Carson!” She arched up.

“You're so sensitive.” He pressed a kiss to her thigh, then to the other thigh, traveling up her legs, to get to her pussy. He took his time, heightening her arousal as he did so, wanting her to be hungry and desperate for him.

His name continued to spill from her lips and he loved the sound as it echoed throughout the room. Carson knew he would never get enough of her. She drove him crazy with need. The scent of her pussy made his mouth water, and he wanted a taste. No, he wanted to get his fucking fill. He wanted to drown in her arousal, completely immerse himself in it. To have Willow know what true pleasure felt like, and to know that when it came to him, there was nothing to be afraid of.

Sliding his tongue through her slit, he touched her clit, then slid back and forth. He worked her sweet nub, listening to her sounds as he worked her toward an orgasm. He wanted to plunge his tongue into her pussy, but when he took her virginity, it was going to be with his cock.

Flicking her clit back and forth, he used his teeth, causing just a small jolt of pain, only to soothe it with the flat of his tongue, and then suck it back into his mouth. He felt the change within her body, and he knew she was close.

Carson drove her toward the edge, set her on fire, and then, when he tipped her over, he was there to catch her. He milked every single last drop of her orgasm until she couldn't handle any more, then he stopped and held her as she caught her breath.

Chapter Six

Willow couldn't focus the next day. She was so acutely aware of Carson as he walked around the shop. Sex. His tongue. His mouth. The feel of his cock between her thighs. It was all relevant. She kept thinking about him, and it drove her insane.

Growing up, she'd never been interested in boys. After her father died and her mother passed, she'd been sixteen, and the guys had all seemed so immature. Also, she hadn't been interested in the opposite sex. She had turned to what she loved — sewing. She'd rather be sewing something than be out partying with random guys. That hadn't changed, even when she turned eighteen.

Her grandmother had told her she needed to get out and enjoy life, but Willow hadn't. She worked. She sewed. That was how she lived from the time she stayed with her grandparents until she found her own place, and now.

Then there was Carson. Even that first day they met, Willow had been drawn to him. She'd noticed him the moment he walked into the shop. Now, she lived in his apartment, slept in his bed, and his face had been between her thighs last night, and she couldn't get it out of her head.

He'd come to work with her today. His jacket was in the office and he'd rolled up his sleeves, showing off his ink. She couldn't look away. Focusing on work was tiresome today.

Carson left the cutting table and moved toward her. Willow tried to get the counter looking nice and neat. His hands appeared either side of her, trapping her in.

“Hello, Willow,” he said.

Her nipples tightened. Her pussy grew slick.

Carson pressed his body against her back.

“Hello, Carson.”

“Do you want to tell me what's wrong?”

“Nothing is wrong. I'm doing my job.”

He chuckled. “Oh, I think you are doing your job, baby, but I also think something else. I don't think you're very happy, are you?”

“I don't have a clue what you're talking about,” she said.

His lips brushed her neck.

Why was her neck so sensitive all of a sudden?

“Nothing?” he asked.

“Nothing. I’m just working.”

“Ah, but you see, I know differently. I see how hard your nipples are, baby. I know you’re thinking about last night, and I’ve got a feeling you’re thinking about my tongue between those sweet legs, am I right?”

She gasped as one of his hands moved from the counter to touch her between the thighs. Today, she’d opted for jeans, but now, she wished she’d gone for a skirt so she could feel his hands on her body.

To the outside world, no one would have a clue what was happening. To onlookers, it would appear he was trying to show her something. He was trying to show her how her body reacted to his touch.

“Last night was just the start, Willow. There’s so much I can show you. So much for you to learn, all you have to do is trust me, and want me.”

The shop was empty.

“You have to learn to live, Willow. Spending all your time working and sewing will not allow you to meet the man of your dreams. Trust me, I know. I had to leave the house to eventually meet Archie.”

One of her grandmother’s many rants.

Willow had been happy to be alone and without a single care in the world. Then Carson had entered her world, and she wanted to experience everything with him. He opened up temptation and rather than be afraid, she wanted to dive in and explore it with him.

She spun around in his arms and stared into his eyes. “I’m ready,” she said.

The words fell from her lips, and the moment she said them, she thought she’d regret it, but there was no regret.

Carson stared at her.

“We’ll close the shop and I’ll take you back to my penthouse,” he said.

“I ... I have a room upstairs.” It was her old bedroom from when she lived with her grandma.

He shook his head. “No, we’ll go back to my penthouse.”

“Are you waiting for me to change my mind?” she asked.

“Willow, even when I’m inside you, if you tell me you’ve changed your mind, I’ll stop instantly. It won’t be easy, but for you, I’d do anything.” He pressed his lips against hers and she watched as he pulled away.

Her lips tingled and all she wanted was for him to kiss her again.

She got moving, made her way to the office, grabbed their jackets and her bag. Carson never carried anything other than his jacket.

They worked together to close up shop, and she had to wonder how he knew what he was doing, since he'd only worked with her yesterday.

Stepping out of the door, she flicked the locks into place, and then saw Peter waiting for them. Her cheeks heated as she climbed into the back of the car. Carson told them where they were going, and she had to wonder if Peter knew.

Staring out the window, Willow watched the city as they passed by. It was so busy with lots of people, and she was curious about them all. She wondered what they were thinking or doing. But, she didn't say a word, and instead kept to herself and just watched. When they got to Carson's building, her heart started to race.

Nerves traveled up her spine, but she didn't want to stop. This was what she wanted.

Carson got out of the car first, came around to her side, and held a hand out for her to take. She slid her palm against his, and he helped her from the car. He kept hold of her hand as they walked to the elevator.

They had taken this journey together a few times, and Willow couldn't believe what was about to happen. She watched the elevator buttons light up each number, taking them to the top floor.

Stepping out of the elevator, Carson didn't let go of her hands. He kept hold of her as he let them into his penthouse, and then focused on her as they walked all the way back toward the bedroom. He told her she could make this stop at any time.

Staring into his eyes, escaping into their blue depths, Willow didn't want to run. She didn't want this to stop. There was a small thought in the back of her mind that he might lose interest in her after this. She would no longer be a virgin. He would know what it meant to be with her, and while she fell for him, he might lose interest.

Willow fingered the edge of her t-shirt, and then lifted it over her head and tossed it to the floor. She dealt with the button of her jeans, pulled down the zipper, and wriggled out of the fabric, kicking them aside, until she stood before him in her lingerie.

Carson wrapped an arm around her waist and pulled her in close. "Let me." He flicked the catch of her bra, removed it from her body, and then he tore her panties off.

“They were a favorite pair,” she said.

He tutted. “You’re better naked.” His hand slipped down toward her ass and he cupped the flesh, making her gasp.

His hard cock pressed against her stomach.

Willow didn’t like that she was the only one naked. She reached for his shirt and began to slide the buttons through, opening it up. He’d ruined at least two pairs of panties. She grabbed the shirt and pulled it apart. Buttons sprayed across the room. She had the skills to fix his shirt, and she put her hands on his chest and started to touch him.

Carson felt her hands shake against his body. She was nervous.

Willow had surprised him today. All morning he’d seen Willow looking at him, and he just knew she’d been thinking about last night. Feeling her orgasm against his mouth, tasting her sweet flesh was all he’d been thinking about as well. In fact, all night he’d thought about it. He spent the whole night with a hard-on. Never had he experienced this kind of blue balls before in his life. But, he hadn’t reacted. He dealt with his dick that morning in the shower, and then to have Willow looking toward him and knowing what was going through her mind, had been a new kind of torture.

Carson had promised himself to go at her pace, but he’d not expected to feel so fucking consumed. Sex hadn’t played a big part in his life. Yes, he had fucked random women, but none of them had mattered. They merely scratched an itch he had.

Willow was different. She dominated his world. All he wanted to do was stake his claim on her.

She reached for his belt, and he took over. He undid his belt, unzipped, and pushed his pants to the floor. Willow was wide-eyed. Within seconds, his boxer briefs were gone, and he watched her, mesmerized to see what she’d do. She had no practice.

He wrapped his fingers around his dick, worked from the base up to the root, then back down again. He did this repeatedly, working his cock.

“Tell me if you want this to stop,” he said.

“No, I don’t want you to stop.”

He smiled. “Then go and lie down on the bed, Willow.”

She nibbled her lip.

Carson had no choice but to take over. He wouldn’t push past her boundaries.

She laid down on the bed, and Carson didn't make her wait long before he joined her. He pressed a knee against the bed, then crawled between her thighs. He took hold of her legs and spread them open. His gaze fell to her sweet pussy.

"I'm going to lick your cunt, Willow." He wanted to have her soaking wet when he finally slid his cock within her tight walls. It was going to hurt.

"You don't have to do that, Carson. I'm ready."

"And I'm going to make sure you're ready." He pressed a kiss to her thigh, and then began to work up her body, like he had done the night before.

Touching the lips of her sex, he spread her open and instantly touched her clit. He didn't prolong the experience, he flicked his tongue back and forth across the swollen nub. Tonight, he didn't build up her anticipation, he had one goal in mind — to get her slick and aroused.

Her first time was going to be painful and he hoped to minimize the pain.

"Carson!"

His name came out in a pleased cry. He'd gladly hear her call his name all fucking day. It was what he wanted more than anything.

Drawing his tongue back and forth, then around her clit, he drew an orgasm from her, and held her in place as he did so. She was so fucking perfect.

He didn't give her time to come down from her peak. He worked her clit with his fingers as he moved up the bed, and then he let her go, long enough to grab his cock, press the tip to her core. Staring into her brown gaze, he slammed balls-deep inside her, tearing into her virginity.

Willow tensed up and the pleased moans that came from her lips were replaced with a painful scream. Her hands clenched and she pushed at his body.

Carson stayed perfectly still and waited for the moment she told him to stop. He wanted to gain her trust, for her to know he'd listen to her, that she didn't have to be afraid of him.

Willow didn't say a word. He saw the tears in her eyes. He'd caused that. Him. Taking her virginity caused this pain, and he hated himself for it. He couldn't stand to see her cry.

Carson moved, and keeping his pelvis stiff and his cock still within her, he wrapped his arms around her. He kissed her lips, her face, trying to take the pain away.

“I’m so sorry, baby, I’m so fucking sorry.”

He never apologized to anyone for hurting them. Dishing out pain had been part of his job description. When people said the name Carson Dexter, they didn’t associate it with someone who cared or had feelings.

Everything he felt was for one person alone — Willow Kaye. She was his only weakness.

He held her tightly against him as she cried. If only he knew how to beat the shit out of himself, he’d gladly do it. He had promised to hurt anyone who tried to hurt Willow, and yet he’d been the first one to do it.

Chapter Seven

The pain lessened. Willow had known it was going to hurt. She hadn't quite expected it to hurt as badly as it did, but she guessed Carson wasn't a small man. He had a large penis. A penis that was very much inside her, and very hard, and after the pain subsided, she wanted to feel something more. Sex couldn't be that boring.

Carson released her and stared down into her eyes. "Do you want me to stop?"

She had a feeling he wasn't used to asking such a question.

"No, I don't want you to stop." She had never been so bold, but she put her hands on the base of his back and slowly moved down, going toward his ass. "I want you to ... fuck me."

It felt so weird to say those words.

Carson groaned.

He pulled out of her and she was about to complain as she thought he was stopping, only for him to suddenly slam back inside her. This time there was no pain. There was pleasure. She gasped as he began to do it again, pulling out until only the tip of him remained, and then plunging inside her.

Another gasp. She felt something twitch inside her.

Carson took hold of her hands, locking them above her head, and he continued his slow, long strokes that were sparking a need within her. She wanted him to go harder and faster.

"Do you want more?" he asked.

"Yes."

She didn't know if it was possible for him to give her more, but then Carson surprised her by going harder, faster, and he seemed to hit her deeper. Pleasure exploded inside her. She didn't want him to stop and began to thrust her hips up to meet every single one of his thrusts. He felt so good.

"Fuck, I'm not going to last."

Willow watched as he took over, driving inside her, pounding his cock within her, and she felt a small, mini climax, and then his cock jerked and she knew he'd reached his climax.

The veins on his neck protruded and he released a growl. Afterward, he pressed a kiss to her lips and he let go of her hands long enough to wrap them around her. She loved feeling him surround her.

"I didn't want to hurt you," he said.

“It was always going to hurt.”

Now that the reality had set in, she couldn't help but feel a little anxious that he was going to lose interest.

He kissed her neck, her chest, and then he sat up. “I'm going to run you a bath. You're to stay here. No moving.”

Willow tried not to wince as he pulled out of her and she admired the curve of his back as he disappeared into the bathroom. Going up to her elbows, she looked down and groaned. Blood and ... semen.

Crap. Carson hadn't worn a condom. What did she do? Did she have to tell him?

She heard the bath running and Willow tried to make as little a mess as possible but that was hard to do as his cum dripped from her body. Willow stood at the edge of the bed when he returned to the bedroom.

“What did I tell you?”

“Carson, you didn't wear a condom,” she said.

He wrapped his arms around her and before she had chance to protest, he'd picked her up and carried her through to the bathroom.

“Carson, listen to me.”

“I have listened and I know.”

“What?”

He eased her into the water. It was nice and warm, and it smelled like coconuts, her favorite smell.

“But, I could get pregnant.”

He cupped her cheek. “I'll be back.”

“Carson!”

He left the bathroom and she took a deep breath. What did that even mean? He knew he'd not worn a condom. Of course he had to know. He was a guy and he wasn't a virgin. Neither was she, but that was beside the point. Shouldn't he have remembered to use a condom?

He didn't return to the bathroom right away.

“Carson!” She all but growled his name, annoyed that he had left her with this question hanging over her head. She hadn't been thinking about protection, nor had she been thinking about babies. There was a lot she hadn't thought about. Today had been about sex, about pleasure, nothing else.

“Carson!”

He stepped into the bathroom, carrying the blankets.

There had been blood on them. The evidence of her virginity. She

watched as he put them in the laundry basket, and then hummed to himself as he moved toward the bath. She had no choice but to slide forward as he climbed in the back behind her.

“What are we going to do if I get pregnant?” she asked. “It only has to take one time.” It was crazy to think that right now, this very second, she might be pregnant with his child, while she was also worried that he’d lose interest.

“Then we’ll be having a baby,” he said, as if it was the most natural thing in the world, which of course it was, but that was beside the point.

“What?”

“You heard me, baby,” he said. “If you get pregnant, then we’re having a baby.”

Willow couldn’t not look at him as they were having this conversation. She spun around to face him. Carson moved her so she had no choice but to put her legs either side of his waist and straddle him, which was a distraction in itself. He was hard as rock again.

She felt a tightening between her thighs as she had no problem with having sex with him again. What had they been talking about?

Dick.

Sex.

Semen.

Kids.

Babies.

“You want to have babies?” Willow asked.

“Yes, I do.”

“With me?”

“I don’t see anyone else here,” he said, laughing.

“But, what if you grow bored with me?” she asked. It sounded so lame, hearing her say those words out aloud.

“Bored with you?” he asked. “Do you really think that’s possible?”

“I, er, yes, of course it is. You’ve gotten what you wanted, right?”

Carson sighed. “And you think sex is all I wanted?”

“That, and my virginity?”

“So, I’ve taken your virginity, don’t you think I should stick around for some more sex?”

She frowned. “This is ... you’re confusing me, and you’re doing it on purpose, why?”

He chuckled. “You’re very wrong if you think I only want sex from you. Trust me, I want it all.”

She wanted to know exactly what *all* was. She knew what he had told her in the beginning, but had he really meant it? Was this a couple of weeks, a few months, a casual fling, a bit of fun? The list went on and on and to her seemed almost endless in possibilities.

“I can feel you thinking, Willow.”

“I’m not thinking.” She frowned because that was very much the truth. “I just don’t know exactly what you want from me.”

“Do you want me to spell it out for you?” he asked.

Did she? It was on the tip of her tongue to say “Hell, yes,” but then a part of her held back, which made no sense. She was the one who had started this conversation, not him.

“Make sure you want the answer,” he said.

Insufferable man. This was what her doubts were about. Did she really want to know the answer to the questions? There was so much she didn’t know.

If he told her he wanted an easy fling, would that matter? What if he put a deadline on it, would she care? Then she allowed herself to think of the possibility of forever, did she want to spend her life with this man? Toward the end of her life, her grandmother had adored him, but she knew who he was, what he was ... could she spend her life loving this man?

She leaned back against him and closed her eyes.

Part of her wanted the answer, but another part of her was uniquely terrified of exactly what those answers would be, and the truth was, she wasn’t ready to know, not quite yet. She could wait. There was plenty of time to just enjoy what they had. She placed her hands on top of his and then slid them down, locking their fingers together.

“I enjoyed that,” she said.

He brushed his lips across her neck. “You enjoyed me taking your virginity?”

“Not the pain part, but everything before and after, that was nice.” She smiled. “I think I’d like to do it again.”

She felt his cock stir beneath her.

Maybe this would be where she had her fun, and where she delved into the prospect of living and enjoying her life, which was what her grandmother always wanted. She didn’t think Grandma Lauren had wanted

her to spend her years with Carson Dexter, but for some odd reason, Willow felt it was a perfect way to spend her life.

Willow ran through the apartment, her naked ass on clear display, and he fucking loved it. He didn't want to hurt her. Since taking her virginity last night, he knew she was feeling a little sensitive. Damn it, though, his cock was desperate and wasn't playing fair with his plans.

Willow arrived in the living room, placing the coffee on the table in front of them.

She let out a cry and then attempted to cover her body. He may have woken her up, tickling her. Willow was an incredibly ticklish person. Also, he wanted his cock balls-deep inside her cunt, and to feel her screaming his name. The only way to do that, especially as she had work to do in the shop, was to wake her up early. He had kept her awake for most of the night, in fact, he'd kept her awake all of it, only giving her about an hour to sleep.

"Don't you cover your body from me," he said.

"What kind of monster wakes someone by tickling them?"

"The kind that has other plans in mind, kind of like chasing his woman through his penthouse apartment," he said.

Willow stopped and her mouth opened just slightly. He could think of many things to do with that mouth, but instead he focused on the woman, on her sexy, curvy body, and how hard his dick was. He was so aroused.

Staring at her across the room, he wrapped his fingers around his length and worked from the base up to the tip, then back down again. "Do you see this?" he said.

He watched as she nibbled her bottom lip. Did she even realize how tempting she was, how hard she made him?

"I see you."

He smiled.

"This is what I woke up with." He couldn't recall a time in his life when he'd had such a raging erection and it was all because of Willow. Everything he did and felt was because of her.

"And do you need me to ... help you?" she asked.

"Yes, I do."

She did that sweet smile of hers. "How?"

"I want you to come here." If she wanted to be instructed, he was more than happy to guide her. No problem at all. In fact, as she walked

toward him, he noticed the pronounced sway of her hips as she walked toward him. The slight bounce of her full ripe tits just begging for his mouth to suckle them. He wanted to bend her over the nearest surface and plunder her cunt, but he held himself back. He didn't want to hurt her, or scare her.

Willow stepped right up to him. "What would you like?" she asked, tilting her head to the side.

"Get on your knees."

She didn't argue with him.

Again, he didn't know if he should be happy or a little afraid that she followed his instruction so beautifully. With her on her knees, it was a sight even his imagination hadn't gotten right. This was even more perfect.

"Is this what you want?" she asked.

"I want you to suck on my dick. Tell me now if that's too much for you," he said.

Her gaze went to his cock, and she licked her lips. "No, it's not too much."

He was going to explode. There was no way he'd be able to contain himself with that sweet mouth, mere inches from his dick.

"Open your lips," he said.

She did as he instructed.

"Push out your tongue and now, give me your hand."

Her tongue came out, and she held up her hand for him. He wrapped her fingers around his length and showed her how he liked to be touched. Carson tightened her grip to just the way he liked it, so she knew what she was doing. Next, he moved closer, pressing the tip of his cock, which was covered in pre-cum, and slid it across her tongue.

She moaned, taking him between her lips and sucking him in deep. The sensation was so shocking, he couldn't help but close his eyes as he thrust his hips closer to her, wanting her to take all of his cock. When he hit the back of her throat, the temptation to just slam balls-deep inside her was so strong, but seeing as it was her first time taking a dick, he went easy on her, allowing her to get accustomed to the feel of his cock.

In and out, he worked his cock into her mouth, opening his eyes so that he could enjoy the view. He didn't want the moment to stop. Her untutored touch shouldn't affect him, but it drove him crazy and he knew he was so close. If he wasn't careful he was going to blow his cum into her throat, and that was not where he wanted his precious load to go. No, he

wanted it balls-deep inside her, soaking her womb, her very fertile womb. He wanted her pregnant, with every single attachment to him as possible.

He wanted to consume her world, to show her everything, as long as she was by his side, with his name and his ring on her finger. That was one of his next steps — to marry her, to bind her to him so completely there was no escape.

“Your mouth is so perfect, but I need that pussy, Willow,” he said.

He pulled out of her mouth, moved to the sofa, and sat down. “Come here.”

She got to her feet and walked toward him. He saw the blush staining her cheeks, and he was so enraptured by the sight, it was impossible for him to look away.

His Willow.

His woman.

Soon, she’d be his wife and the mother of his children. He never expected to have kids, certainly didn’t anticipate falling in love, but here he was, and more than ready to commit. He was taking it at her pace, allowing her to get accustomed to the idea of being with him and only him.

Carson took her hand and moved her over him so that she had no choice but to straddle his waist. Putting his hands on her hips, he guided her over, and then released her with one of his hands to reach between their thighs, taking hold of his dick, lining it up with her entrance, and then slowly making her take him.

He watched her face, making sure he wasn’t hurting her. There was no pain.

Touching her clit, he stroked over her nub with only his cock a little inside her. Just a few inches and she held herself still. He watched her face as he teased her.

“Do you want my dick all the way inside you?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“Then I want you to come and the moment you do, I want you to take it all.” This way, he would know he wasn’t hurting her and Willow would be the one setting the pace.

“I ... I don’t know if I can.”

“You will come.” He commanded it and when it came to Willow, she would learn to answer his call.

He stroked her clit, using two fingers, moving either side of her, but

using enough pressure to start to build her orgasm. He felt a difference in the tightness of her cunt, how she squeezed him, and all he wanted to do was take over, but this way, she held the control. Once she took him in deep, he'd take over, and then he'd fuck her exactly how he wanted to.

Carson couldn't look away. Willow was so open, so expressive. She was a fucking dream. He was used to women trained in the art of manipulation and seduction. Willow was pure and her purity belonged to him, all of him. She was everything.

She screamed his name as he hit the right spot and the moment he did, Willow thrust down onto his length, driving him into her. He didn't let go of her clit, stroking her, forcing her to ride that wild wave of pleasure and using his dick like a gear stick to prolong the experience.

"That's it, baby," he said. "Take it. Love it."

She writhed on his dick, working her orgasm over his length. He knew the moment she couldn't take it anymore and he let her go, returning his grip to her hips, and now he took over. Thrusting inside her, driving in deep and hard, watching her face as she met him, thrust for thrust.

He wanted to see her craving his touch, to fuck him back, to be there with him in the moment. Carson was so close. There was no way he couldn't be after watching her. She was exquisite. This was what he'd been waiting for and there was no way in hell he would ever let her go. She was all his.

His orgasm struck him hard and he pulled her down on his length. He flooded her womb wanting to make her pregnant, hoping that this moment sealed the deal. He was normally a patient man, or in theory he was, but it would seem when it came to Willow, his patience would only last so long.

Chapter Eight

Two Months Later

Willow stared at the date and couldn't help but nibble her lip. She had skipped her period. It should have appeared mid-month, but now she couldn't pretend it was down to stress or anything else. In fact, she had skipped two periods.

Tapping her pencil on the calendar, she slammed the book closed. There was nothing to worry about. Women skipped their cycle all the time for so many different reasons. There were way too many to count. This was one of those times. There was no way she was pregnant.

She had to stop and as she did, she stared straight ahead.

Pregnant.

That was a word she'd been trying not to think about. She and Carson hadn't exactly been safe when it came to having sex. He'd not worn a single condom.

There went the worrying again. Shit. Crap.

She had no idea what she was going to do.

Running fingers through her hair, she tried not to think, but it was next to impossible. With the shop, it was a slow day, which tended to happen not long after a sale. The new stock had already arrived, and she'd uploaded them to the website and watched them pretty much fly out the door. It had been that fast.

In the past two months, her life had taken a dramatic turn. First, Carson had found someone to help her, and Miley was a dream. She was in her forties, passionate about sewing, and had even started up a blog on the website, documenting her own pieces from fabrics supplied by the shop. They had a massive surge of emails with pictures as well as details of the pattern, which had been a raving success.

Right now, Miley was currently talking to their only customer, a cup of coffee in her hand and a huge smile on her face. She was a lovely woman, married with three children, and Willow didn't have a single clue where Carson found her.

Either way, she was more than happy the woman was found, because she made working at the shop a lot easier. They could have one of them serving customers while the other cut online orders. Within two months, they had become a well-oiled machine. She still didn't know where Carson had

found her.

Miley returned to the counter with the customer and rang up her order. “Thank you so much for coming. Please let me know if my idea works.”

“Will do, Miley, thank you.”

Willow smiled and said goodbye to the customer. “What idea works?”

“She doesn’t like the idea of having to slip-stitch the armhole closed, and I think I know a way that might help her.”

“That’s awesome.”

“Are you okay, sweetheart?” Miley asked, reaching out and putting the back of her hand against her head.

“I’m fine. You don’t have to worry about me.”

“I beg to differ. You look a little ... sick.”

“I’m fine.” She looked down at the calendar and even though she didn’t want to be thinking about that little niggle in the back of her mind, she couldn’t let it go. “Can I ask you something?”

“Yeah, sure.”

“Do you know of any reason a woman, might, you know, skip a, er, you know ... cycle?” She felt her cheeks heating. Her grandmother was so much better at this than her. Lauren always knew what she was trying to say and often would cut her off and explain everything. She missed her grandmother.

“Well, the obvious one is pregnancy, and then of course there’s stress and there can be other factors as well. Why?” Miley asked.

“No reason.”

Willow knew there was a line that Miley wasn’t allowed to cross. She didn’t know what Carson had told Miley, but either way she didn’t know this woman well enough to explain that she might be pregnant with Carson Dexter’s child.

“Do you think you’re pregnant?” Miley asked.

“I er, no, I don’t, it’s fine. Forget I ever said anything.”

“Willow, I know we haven’t had a lot of time to be friends or anything, but I am here for you, whenever you need me. I’m here, and I know it’s not a lot, but I can help.”

She shook her head. “Please, don’t worry about it. It’s perfectly fine.” Willow looked at the time and saw it was close to five in the afternoon. “I think we can close up shop for tonight.”

Moving away from the counter, Willow went to the door, closed and locked it, then stepped back up to the counter.

“I’m here if you need to talk, Willow,” Miley said. “I’m a reliable person.”

“You work for Carson,” Willow said. She didn’t want to tell Miley the truth, that part of her was happy to be pregnant, if that was what she was, and another part feared what it meant, if she was.

This relationship had been a roller-coaster ride so far, at least to her. Carson was a man, no, he was a force to be reckoned with. She had seen the way people looked when he entered a room — a mixture of fear, admiration, and anger. He commanded respect. The men who worked for him were loyal to him and only to him.

When they were out together, there was no getting away from what he was. Even as he tried to give her as normal a life as possible, it was still there. He was a king, a boss, and to many he was everything. She was nothing.

There were women who vied for his attention. She saw them attempt to give him their numbers. He never took them. Carson always scrunched up the piece of paper and tossed it back at them, offended by them trying to take him.

Willow couldn’t help but smile as he always had a sweet look for her.

They finished closing the shop and Carson had already arrived to pick her up. She also noticed Peter, the driver, was with them as well.

Miley moved away from her side and immediately went to Peter’s and Willow watched the two embrace. Peter kissed Miley passionately and then opened the front passenger door.

Carson held his hand out to her, and she took it. She slid into the car, moving over to the far seat, and she saw that the partition was already up.

“Is Miley ... Peter’s wife?” Willow asked.

“Yes, I thought I told you,” he said.

“No, you didn’t tell me. That would have been something I very much remembered. I was wondering where you found her.”

“Peter heard me ask one of my guys to find a competent woman with experience within the sewing community, and he asked if his wife could come for an interview. I told him she had to bring proof of her sewing experience. It turns out she makes a lot of their clothes and she’s obsessed with sewing. She wanted to find similar work, where she could explore her sewing. I met her, saw how motherly she was, and figured she would be a

good choice. If you don't want her, I can find someone else. From what Peter has been telling me, it's been a great fit."

"No, it's fine, honestly, she's amazing and the customers love her. We all do. There's nothing wrong with her."

"But?"

"No buts, she's a perfect fit." Willow smiled and then rested her head on his shoulder. "I missed you today."

"Is everything okay?"

"Yeah, everything is fine." She closed her eyes, feeling so incredibly tired. Willow wanted to tell him about her suspicions, but for tonight she would just enjoy his company without the stress of wondering if he was going to get rid of her the moment he got bored. It was a crazy thought, but it was one she couldn't seem to shake.

Carson didn't know how to get Willow to admit she had skipped her cycle. Since they had been together, she'd not had one, not since they started to have sex, and certainly not after.

He made sure to make love or to fuck her every chance he got, keeping up with his promise to Lauren by allowing Willow to experience everything. There was a lot to add to her list, including sex in his office at his nightclub. They had also enjoyed each other in a restaurant bathroom as well. Admittedly, the dress she had worn had been indecent, and he couldn't wait to be inside her. Men had admired her that night and he had loved it, knowing she was his. Willow hadn't even noticed the stares, she had been completely oblivious to them.

He'd taken her everywhere, creating new memories, from the zoo, to the park, to nightclubs, to restaurants.

Willow came into the bedroom and she looked pale. "Can we stay in tonight?" she asked.

"I think we need to talk."

She stopped, her back going ramrod straight. "What do we need to talk about?"

Carson reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out the pregnancy test kit he'd found. "I know you haven't had your cycle, Willow."

"You brought a home pregnancy test?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

“I think we both need to know the answer,” he said.

Willow clasped her fingers together. “Are you sure you want to know that kind of answer?”

“I want to know.”

“But—”

He got to his feet and stepped toward her, cupping her cheek and tilting her head back. “What are you afraid of?” he asked, running his thumb across her cheek.

“I’m not afraid.”

“Then let us take this test, together, and we can see if we’re pregnant or not.” He held the kit up, and Willow stared at it as if she was afraid. “Tell me.”

“What if it ... changes everything?” she asked.

“What could it possibly change?”

“We never promised each other forever,” she said. “And there are always women waiting for you, wanting you.”

“Willow, are you jealous?” he asked.

He had noticed women still giving him their numbers, even when he was with Willow. Not once did he take anything they offered. His heart, his fucking soul, belonged to Willow. He was at her feet all the time, fucking begging for whatever attention she would give him. No other woman even compared to her.

She frowned and then growled. “Yes! I am jealous. I hate it when women completely ignore me and slide their numbers to you. It’s so rude and offensive. I’m right there and it’s like they expect you to dump me for them, which okay, that could happen, but even still, aren’t we all supposed to be like girlfriends or something? Ugh, I don’t know, but this is a big deal, Carson. This is a baby. We never talked about a baby.”

He threw the test onto the bed and cupped her face, tilting her head back. “You’re right, we have not talked about it a lot, until now, so let me speak.” He quickly pressed a kiss to her lips, because he just couldn’t resist them, nor did he want to. “You and I ... there’s no going back, Willow. You belong to me. You’re mine, and I will not let you go. I haven’t been using condoms because I want a child with you. I want to have lots of babies and to fill a house with the sound of their laughter. My luck, I’ll probably get screaming, but I want it all.”

“You do?”

“I know I’m not a good man. A good man would walk away right fucking now, and allow you to find a nice man, a man who doesn’t have people shitting themselves when he walks into a room. But I’m not a good man. I will never be a good man. I’m me, Willow. I will do whatever it takes to keep you, to love you, and to have only you.” He pressed his lips against hers and she moaned, wrapping her arms around his neck.

“I think I love you,” she said.

Carson broke the kiss and stared into her eyes. “And I know that I love you.” He let her go, reaching for the test. “I want you to take this. I need to organize all the necessary doctors to take care of you. I want you to be pregnant, and if you are, we’re flying to Vegas, and your ass is mine.”

Willow gasped. “You call that a proposal?”

“I don’t need to propose. You and I both know I’ll get what I want.”

She took the test from him. “I’ll take the test, but you’re not going to be in the room. I have to pee on a stick, and even though you don’t need or want boundaries, some of us do.”

He chuckled. “I’ve got no problem assisting you.”

“Boundaries. Toilet business is a boundary.” She shook her head and he watched as she stepped inside the bathroom. He moved closer to the door.

“Tell me what you’re doing,” he said.

“Are you for real?” she asked.

“Totally real.”

“I’m reading the instructions first. It says the test will take a couple of minutes to register and that it’s pretty accurate. Of course, it doesn’t use the words ‘pretty accurate’. Are you sure you want to know?”

“I want to know, Willow.” He put his hands either side of the door and waited.

Time seemed to stand still and it drove him crazy. He had tried to keep his life as far away from Willow as possible, but there were moments, like when he walked into a restaurant, where the owner quivered in fear. He couldn’t hide shit like that. He wanted to, but it was impossible. There was a lot he couldn’t hide.

Willow never asked questions, which he fucking loved about her. He never brought his work home with him. Gone were the days of changing his blood-soaked shirt in his home, or bringing his men to the penthouse to talk strategy. None of that shit was allowed to touch Willow.

He had changed his world for Willow. There was no way he would

ever be able to step away from this life. He didn't want to, and he'd worked his fucking ass off to get where he was today. No one was taking it away from him, but he would do everything in his power, even create war, to keep Willow safe.

She opened the door.

"We've got two minutes." She pressed her lips together.

"Two minutes?" He took her hand and then stepped inside the bathroom. She'd placed it on the counter next to the sink. He moved in behind her and put his hands on either side of her body.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"Well, I think if it says you're pregnant, I get to fuck you as my reward," he said.

She snorted. "And if it says I'm not pregnant?"

"Then I get to fuck you to make you pregnant."

Willow looked at him through the mirror. "So it's a win-win situation for you."

"Baby, haven't you realized by now, I don't lose, not ever?" He kissed her neck and she released a moan.

The two minutes were a long fucking time and his dick was hard as a rock.

"Carson," she said.

He looked down at the stick. "What does it say?"

"It says that I'm pregnant."

He grabbed her dress and pushed it up to her waist. He tore at her panties, got rid of them quickly, swiped them from her body, and tossed them aside. He eased his pants open, pulled out his dick, and within seconds he was balls-deep inside her.

Staring at her reflection, he saw the plumpness of her lip, the flush to her cheeks. It wasn't enough for him, he needed more, because he was greedy. Shoving the dress down her arms, he released the catch of her bra, and now she looked perfect. Her tits on show, her nipples were so big, he loved to suck on them, and it wouldn't be long before she was heavily pregnant with his child. He couldn't fucking wait.

His mission was to keep her pregnant.

Carson had never considered himself a family man but for Willow, he would do anything it took.

"Please," she said.

He cupped her tits, teasing the nipples, before sliding down toward her clit. Stroking her nub, he heard her cry out, his name a constant as it spilled from her lips.

“Come for me, baby. I want to fucking fill you with my cum,” he said. He noticed that she loved it when he talked dirty to her.

He had no problem doing whatever his woman wanted.

“Do you love my cock in your pussy?” he asked.

“Yes, please, don’t stop,” she said.

“I’m not going to stop. You’re going to take it all.” He grabbed her hip and pounded inside her, going to the hilt, and when she came, he gave her time to get over the peak, and only then did he focus on his own release.

Flooding her womb as he came, he was thinking about the child he had already placed inside her.

His child.

His woman.

They were his fucking world.

Chapter Nine

Two Months Later

Carson didn't waste any time. The moment he found out she was pregnant, they flew to Vegas, and she was now Mrs. Willow Dexter. There was no hiding that she was pregnant anymore. Willow put her hand on her stomach, feeling the slight bump of their boy or girl. They didn't know the sex yet. The first time, it had been too early to tell, and the last time, the doctor had said their child was shy. This of course had been hilarious to Carson, the thought of his child being bashful.

Willow had to admit, if it was a boy, she hoped he'd be nothing like Carson's father, but certainly like hers.

"I don't like this," Miley said.

She looked up.

In the past two months she had gotten close to Miley. The woman was so nice, and yes, she was aware of what her husband did and who he worked for. When Willow had asked about it, she had merely said, love is love, and she wouldn't have Peter any other way.

Willow had to admit she wouldn't have Carson any other way either.

"What don't you like?"

"Okay, I'm pretty sure there's a dodgy guy watching the shop," Miley said.

"A dodgy guy? You do know that Carson has men watching us all the time. It might be one of them." Willow stepped away from the counter. There were no customers, but they did have a busy morning. She had put the last postage label on the latest online order as he moved to where Miley stood.

"It's just a guy on a street corner."

"Yeah, and do you see any of Carson's men around?"

Willow couldn't spot anyone and she frowned. "Maybe they're having a break, or it's shift change. I don't know how Carson works." She shrugged.

Watching the man, Willow couldn't help but feel something bad was going to happen. He kept looking at the shop, and he did seem jittery.

She pulled out her cell phone and placed a call to Carson. It went straight to voicemail.

"Can you call Peter?" Willow asked.

Miley was already on her cell phone. "It's busy, what the fuck."

Neither of them had a chance to react other than to duck as a brick was thrown right at them, smashing the glass. Willow couldn't believe it, but then something even worse happened. Something else was thrown, this time with fire attached to it. She watched it hit the fabric, smash, and whatever fluid had been inside it spread across the fabric, igniting it.

"Shit." Miley grabbed her arm and Willow had to be pulled from the shop. Everything went numb around her.

This was her grandmother's shop, and within seconds it was aglow with fire. At some point, Willow heard the fire truck heading their way. She was so freaking numb. Everything her grandmother had given to her went up in flames. Miley held her and Willow hadn't even realized she was crying, until that very moment.

Carson hadn't come. Why hadn't he answered his phone?

She stared at the phone, which was aglow with Carson's name, but she clicked "ignore." Willow wasn't going to talk to him, not now, not as she watched the fire crew try to temper the blaze.

Miley continued to hold her, and they had garnered a spectacle. She didn't care. All she saw was her grandmother's smile when she had been about to open the store. She'd been there to witness it and had worked in the shop that day, even though she'd been young. Ten years ago.

So much had happened in ten years. She lost her father, her mother, her grandfather, and her grandmother, and now she had lost the freaking shop.

Carson eventually arrived but seeing as they were surrounded, Willow didn't cause a scene. Peter was there for his woman. Carson held her tightly. The moment his arms wrapped around her, she hated how quickly she felt safe. Pressing her face against his chest, she wanted to hate him for not being there, for not picking up the phone, but what could he have done? He wouldn't have made it in time. There was no reason for her to hate him. This anger should be directed at the person responsible, not him. She loved Carson, so fucking much. He wasn't the reason her shop had gone up in flames.

"I've got you, baby," Carson said. "I've got you."

She sobbed against his chest as she let it all out, wishing this was different.

Her grandmother's shop, the one piece she still had of her, was gone.

“It happened so fast,” Miley said. “I had seen him on the street the moment I got there this morning. At first, I didn’t think anything of it, but then we had the morning rush, which was amazing, and this guy was still there. He was looking shifty.”

Carson listened to Miley’s description. He already had men obtaining the security footage from the shops and the streets surrounding Willow’s shop. Carson wanted to know why his men weren’t in position.

Staring across the living room, he saw Willow curled up in a ball. She had gone to sleep. He had brought Willow and Miley back to his place, which was something he never did. Peter was there, holding his wife.

They had been in a meeting, an important one with one of the MC clubs he dealt with. Whenever he was with them, all cell phones were turned off. It was the only time he had turned off his cell since finally staking his claim on Willow, and now he was pissed off.

“I told Willow and she walked over, and she must have seen the same thing I did. She started to call you, but it went to voicemail, and then she told me to call Peter, and the same thing happened, but then I remembered you guys were at a meeting.”

Carson glared at Peter.

“I only told her that I wouldn’t be available for a couple of hours in case she needed me, that’s all.”

“Private business is not meant to be discussed.”

“He doesn’t tell me anything else, I promise. Only when and if I can’t get in touch. That’s all.”

Willow sighed and then sat up. She ran fingers through her hair.

“How are you feeling?” Miley said.

“I’m fine.”

She returned her gaze to Carson.

“Miley and Peter were just leaving. The police are investigating the fire.”

Willow nodded. “I’m tired.”

She got to her feet and walked away without another word. Carson knew she was hurting. He didn’t make excuses for her behavior, but he did show Miley and Peter out, ordering them to be careful.

Carson didn’t know who would be stupid enough to try to take him on, but he was more than happy with the challenge of finding out.

Closing the penthouse door, he flicked the lock into place and then

went to find Willow. She wasn't in the bedroom, but he did find her in the bathroom, already soaking, standing beneath the water.

"I'm showering," she said.

He stepped into the stall.

"Do you not understand private spaces?" she asked.

He pressed his hands either side of her head and smiled. "When it comes to you, no. There is no such thing as private spaces, because, Willow, you are all mine." He put his fingers beneath her chin, forcing her to look at him. "What's going on?"

"Nothing."

"Baby, you think I don't know when you're pissed. I do, and I know you're angry right now, so why don't you tell me what I can do about it? Tell me what's wrong?"

"You didn't answer the phone and I know it's crazy. I'm not angry at you, I'm angry at that ... that ... monster who set fire to my grandmother's shop. How could anyone do that!" She all but screamed.

He went to her and wrapped his arms around her but Willow was not in the mood to be comforted. She tried to stop him, but he didn't let her. Now was not the time for her to be angry.

He pressed his lips against her head. "I've got you."

"My grandmother gave me one thing to take care of, her shop. That was all, and look what I've done."

He cupped her face and forced her to look at him. "You didn't do anything, baby. You hear me, you didn't do anything. None of this is your fault."

She openly sobbed.

"How can it not be my fault? I was meant to take care of her shop, her ... legacy, and now it's all gone."

"And you're going to have a new shop," Carson said. "Trust me, you will have that store back. I promise you."

Willow wrapped her arms around him and sobbed.

He held her, hating that he'd not been there to stop this. According to Miley, there wouldn't have been time. Once they realized the man had the intention to harm, the damage had already started. Fire in a fabric store, yeah, that wouldn't be pretty.

Willow didn't know that Carson had told the police he needed to be informed who the culprit was.

“What happens if you never find him?” Willow asked.

Carson pulled back and frowned as he looked at Willow.

“Don’t give me that look. You and I both know you’re not going to let this stand. I’m not a fool, Carson. I know who you are. I’ve known since the beginning and I know what you’re capable of. This man, whoever he is, got your attention.”

“I’m going to deal with it.”

“Why?”

“Because no one makes my woman cry. No one goes after my woman and gets away with it, Willow. You’re mine, I love you more than anything else in the world, and I promised your grandmother I would give you a good life. I would make you happy. Seeing you sob, heartbroken, I’m not keeping my end of the deal, and that is unacceptable. They will pay.”

Willow stared at him and then nodded. “Okay.” She pressed her head against his chest. “I love you, Carson.”

Oh, he knew she loved him in that moment. Willow had just accepted him for exactly what he was — a monster. A man who was going to find the one who had hurt her, and he was going to punish the bastard for it.

Chapter Ten

Carson stared at the man tied to a chair.

It had been two weeks since Willow's fabric shop had burned down. The fire department had said the building wasn't salvageable, and so he had people looking for the perfect building for Willow to rebuild, which didn't take long.

He would have found this piece of shit sooner if it hadn't been for his concern over Willow. Leaving her at the penthouse all day didn't sit well with him. In the end, he had to ask for Miley's help. The older woman had taken Willow back to her home, and they had sewing days. During that time, they made plans for the new shop, and what fabrics and haberdashery items they were going to order.

There was already a folder thick with ideas, and the frown on Willow's face had been changed into one of anticipation. He already told her money was no object. The insurance company was already investigating, and he had people in place to make sure that wasn't a problem. Willow didn't cause this fire.

Staring at the bastard in front of him, Carson remembered him. He was a gambler, addicted to the tables, and when he ran up a debt so high, he had no choice but to deal with him. It had started with broken legs, broken arms, until he earned the money out of him, and then tossed him out on his ass.

The man was barred from all the casinos and private establishments he ran, including those he didn't. His name got him what he wanted.

It would seem his addiction had sent him over the edge, and he'd reacted. He had heard of the news of Carson's marriage, and it hadn't taken long to figure out where his wife worked, or come up with a plan to torch the place.

The men had been called to an incident at one of the bars, which was why Willow's shop had been exposed. The whole incident was rare and Carson knew it was never going to happen again, as he looked at the man quivering in the chair. They were in the basement of one of his casinos. Carson sat in the chair opposite as the man perspired profusely. He'd already pissed himself.

The stench was disgusting and Carson had every intention of removing his clothes before he left, so Willow never got a whiff of this scent.

She deserved a lot better, which was why he wasn't going to allow the cops to handle this. No, he already had an agreement in place, as they handed this piece of shit to him.

Getting to his feet, he moved closer, and then crouched down to stare up into the man's eyes. He'd been trying to avoid eye contact, and now he was pissed off enough that he wanted the fucker to look at him, to see him, to know that he was going to be in a world of pain by the time he was through with him.

"Look at me," Carson said.

The man whimpered and closed his eyes. He wasn't doing as he was told, and Carson didn't have time for this shit. Pulling out a blade, he slammed it into his foot, only stopping when the tip of the blade didn't go further.

Screams erupted throughout the basement. Carson closed his eyes and relished the sound. It was rare for him to take this kind of pleasure. All his life, he'd fought to get where he was. He'd been more than willing to kill, to maim, to terrify. This man wasn't leaving the basement alive. He knew that. Carson's men knew that. The cops knew that.

There was no way he would allow him to live. If he did, there was a chance it would come back and hurt Willow. He couldn't have that. Not on his watch.

Drawing the blade out of the man's foot, he looked up into his eyes. There was now real terror staring back at him, and Carson smiled. This is what he wanted.

"I told you not to fuck with me," Carson said. "You found the woman I love. The woman I would do anything for, and you took something away from her, and that has pissed me off. That shop belonged to her grandmother, and there's no way for me to replace all those memories, so you know you're going to die today. You cannot live. You cannot be allowed out of this room. Don't worry, I'll make it quick."

Carson didn't make it quick. He made sure the man screamed and begged.

As he did, all he kept hearing was Grandmother Lauren's request that he do everything in his power to make sure her granddaughter got a good life, the best kind of life. By the time he was finished, there was nothing left of the man. He was dead.

Willow was his. No one attacked Willow, and he knew with his men

present that there wouldn't be anyone who didn't know about it. The rumor would spread about what happened if you went after Carson's woman. Willow would forever be safe.

He contacted the men he used to clean shit up, and handed them his clothes. The shock on their faces was something he wanted. He needed for them to know he meant business. If they came after Willow, they were going to get killed, and not in an easy way. It would take time, he'd be creative.

There were more clothes waiting for him in his office. Peter was there, as he always was.

"Where's Willow?" Carson asked.

"She's with my wife at the shop."

They had found a shop and he knew Miley was encouraging Willow's vision to make the place exactly like her grandmother's shop.

"Take me there," he said. He left his office, with Peter following.

As he walked through the casino, he felt the gazes of men and women. There was a time he'd stop, mingle, and bask in their awkwardness around him, but today, all he wanted to do was to be with his woman.

His pregnant woman.

They hadn't had time to truly enjoy the fact they were going to have a baby. He was going to be a daddy. The very thought of being a dad terrified him, not that he'd tell Willow the truth. He never had a fatherly role model.

Sitting in the back seat of his car, he knew the rumors would spread like wildfire. For a time people would be afraid to even look in her direction, but he didn't care. This was the first time Willow was exposed and lost a memory, something she treasured, and his promise was broken. He'd never break it again.

"I promise to you, Lauren, if you can hear me, I will take care of Willow. I will love her with all my heart. I will treasure her. I will make sure not a moment goes by when she doesn't feel loved or cherished. I walked into your shop that day, intent on being pissed off, and instead, I met an angel, my angel, and I knew I'd do anything in my power to make her happy, and I will make her happy."

Carson didn't say the words out loud, there was no need to. They were deep in his soul. A vow. A promise that he would make to Willow, his wife, the love of his life.

Arriving at the store, there was no opening sign, as there was a lot of work to do. The doors were locked and he had no choice but to knock on the

window to gain their attention. Willow came running over, flinging open the door and smiling at him.

“Carson, you’re here.” She threw her arms around him and he smiled as he held her close.

Pressing his face against her body, the scent of coconuts surrounded him. He’d become highly addicted to coconuts in the last few years. They made his mouth water.

“I missed you. We had all the new shelving installed today, and it looks amazing. Well, it will be a huge help when our first fabric orders arrive, which I think will be tomorrow.” She stopped hugging him but took his hand, locking their fingers together, to pull him into the shop.

Miley went to her husband and followed suit.

“Look.”

The shop had been thoroughly cleaned as it had been closed for many years. The FOR SALE sign had been up so long, it had started to crumble. The main structure was secure, it just needed some love, and Willow had been more than happy to provide that.

The windows were no longer thick with dust, but almost sparkled. The floor was clean. No more dust, cobwebs, or stains that had been there from spillages. The scent of decay wasn’t there, but a strange mixture of pine and lemon filled the air.

She had donned dungarees and an old T-shirt to start cleaning. Willow looked adorable, especially as her round stomach seemed to protrude against the front of her dungarees. They didn’t know if they were having a son or daughter yet, not that he cared. He would love them both regardless.

“What do you think?”

Carson didn’t even realize she’d been talking to him, wanting his opinion.

“It looks fantastic,” he said.

She chuckled. “You’ve not heard a word I’ve said. I’ve been asking you for advice. Remember, you did help me in my own shop for a couple of days.”

He had. “I think you know what you’re doing, and you need to stop second-guessing yourself. Just think about what you want and what your grandmother wanted, and then you’ll have the answer.” He wrapped his arms around his wife, and then pressed his face against her neck. “Are you done for the day?”

“There’s not much else to do,” Miley said. “All we need to do is wait for the fabric to arrive.”

Willow looked at him and smiled. “So I’m all yours for the rest of the day.”

No, she was all his for the rest of their lives as he wasn’t going to let her go. She belonged to him now.

She was all his.

Three Weeks Later

There were a few setbacks at the shop. Some of the orders got lost during their journey to the shop, and Willow had to chase them down. There were a few wrong orders sent, which was very rare. However, she never announced online or locally the exact date she was going to open until she was one hundred percent certain.

Her grandmother always told her not to be too excited, to learn to take her time and only make decisions when she absolutely had to. Her impatience nearly got the better of her, but she forced herself to remain focused on the goal, and that was to have an amazing shop to open.

So, on the correct day, her baby had decided to constantly kick her stomach, which made her wonder if she was having a boy, but then she had to wonder if it was a girl, who also liked to kick to get her own way. Either way, she didn’t allow it to stop her from working. Opening the shop on a Saturday at nine o’clock, she had been so nervous.

The online store had also been launched, and she was nervous about the time they had spent away. She remembered that day she had to email all her customers to explain what had happened, and why she had to issue a full refund with an apology. Each time she wrote it, she felt like a failure.

Willow pulled out of her thoughts as Carson slid his hands onto her shoulders. “You’re thinking too much,” he said.

“I’m nervous. I remember when my grandmother first opened her shop. Grandpa was there, and she was so worried she’d made a mistake. This had been an investment from their retirement fund, and I knew they had no choice but to make it work.” Willow felt tears spring to her eyes. “Wow, I feel so scared right now.”

He pulled her against him. “Don’t feel scared. You ran a successful shop. Nothing is going to change.”

“The location has changed.”

“But the people haven’t, and that is all you need to remember. You haven’t changed, nor has anyone else.” He pressed a kiss to her head. “I also happened to check your social media accounts. There were a lot of people happy to hear that you were opening again. Just be patient, wait, they will arrive.”

Willow wanted to sink against him and to believe him, she really, really did, but that was hard to do when the store had been open ten minutes and still no one had turned up.

She felt a little sick. Carson kissed her neck and she closed her eyes. What would she do if she couldn’t do this like her grandmother?

“Here we go,” Miley said.

Willow opened her eyes, and much to her surprise, she saw two women entering.

“Well, well, well, this is a sight,” one of the women said, rubbing her hands together.

Willow recognized her as a regular customer from her grandmother’s place.

Two customers were a start, and while she and Miley helped them to locate the fabrics they were looking for, more people arrived. Carson had told Peter he was to help with the cutting of fabrics.

By lunchtime, their opening had been a huge success. Willow didn’t know if it was because of her husband as he’d removed his jacket, rolled up his sleeves, and had started to cut the necessary lengths of fabric the women had wanted.

Willow knew he’d taken care of the problem. The person who had set fire to her grandmother’s place was no longer living. She didn’t know how she knew this exactly, just that she did. Willow thought it would bother her, but she had come to accept Carson for who he was. She understood the frightened glances from people and had even seen them take a wide berth to get away from him — none of that mattered to her.

“When you find someone you love, you learn to love them for all of their quirks. There is no turning back from love, sweetheart.”

Her grandmother always had words of wisdom to share.

“Look, Willow, if you don’t love someone straightaway, that’s fine, because let’s face it, if they’re great in bed, nothing else matters.”

Willow couldn’t help but smile at that one. She had been so mortified. That had been the first day she had met Carson. Throughout the day, she felt

herself drawn to him.

Not once did he give those women the smile that she had come to know and love. He didn't glance down their bodies, with the knowledge he'd be balls-deep inside them later. No, those knowing smiles, those intense looks were all for her. It was hard for her to miss.

By the end of the day, she was tired and her feet hurt. She let Miley and Peter go, knowing that Carson would always have other men watching the shop. He had told her he'd be able to see her all the time with the security system he had built in. Carson had also admitted that whenever he wanted, in the old shop, he could see her as well. There were also three men, paid to simply watch the shop in different locations. Again, she didn't mind. This was what Carson wanted.

Sliding the locks into place, Willow spun around and looked at her husband.

"Well, are you still nervous?" he asked. His gaze went from her eyes, down, lingering on her tits, then on her round stomach, going toward her pussy, then down to her feet and back up again.

"What are you thinking?" she asked.

"Why?"

"Because, I've never seen you look at another woman like that before. I know you only look at me like that, and I have to wonder what's going through your head as you're looking at me." She tilted her head to the side.

He chuckled. "I'm thinking about you naked, knowing I'm going to strip you naked, spread those perfect thighs open, touch that sweet clit, and have you come in my mouth, and then, I'm going to come inside your cunt." He took a step toward her then another, then another, until he was close to her. "Your very fertile cunt, which is all mine." He pressed his nose against her neck. "And I have to say, Willow, I want to fuck you so damn badly right now."

"Then do," she said.

Her pussy was soaking wet. Her need came over her instantly, and there was no getting away from it.

Carson took her hand and she had no choice but to follow him, not that it was a problem. She would follow him anywhere. He led the way out of the main store, to their office. There was no need to close the door. The desk was completely bare, apart from the computer on top.

Carson moved her toward the desk and placed her hands flat on the

surface. “Don’t move.”

He lifted the bottom of her dress and then she felt the panties she wore being tugged. The sound of tearing fabric filled the air and she released a gasp of surprise. Should she have been surprised? He always abused her panties like this. Carson hated her wearing them, but then, she loved to feel him tearing them off.

His hand cupped between her thighs, his finger gliding through her slit, teasing her clit, and then delving into her pussy.

“You’re soaking wet, baby. Have you been thinking about me all day?”

“Yes,” she said, moaning his name as he moved his fingers up to tease her clit.

“Good, because I know I’ve been thinking about you.” He strummed her clit and she felt close to exploding. The pleasure was intense. “Come for me, Willow.”

She moaned his name, shocked by how quickly she found her release. The pleasure was so intense and instant. It consumed her whole body, and Carson didn’t stop playing with her, driving her higher and higher.

“That’s a good girl,” he said.

She heard his zipper as it slid down and she was acutely aware of his movements. It was a relief to feel the tip of his cock as he pressed it against her core, and then, slowly, achingly slowly, pressing all the way inside her. Another moan escaped her, and then his hands were at her hips as he plundered inside her. He didn’t stop until she felt the hit of his balls against her pussy.

“You feel so good,” he said. “So fucking good.”

Carson started to thrust, going slow at first and then speeding up, taking his time, and Willow loved to feel every single inch of his cock as he did this.

“Fuck, Willow, baby, I love you, I love you so fucking much.”

He growled out the words as he tightened his grip on her hips and went faster and deeper within her. She didn’t want him to stop, not for a moment. She loved the feel of him and loved the words coming out of his mouth.

She reached between her thighs as she knew he loved it when she did this, and started to stroke her clit. The moment she did, she heard his moan, and the sounds of their slapping bodies echoed around the room.

“I’m not going to be able to last. Come for me.”

At his command, a second time, she came, this time Carson followed her, and they both came together. Their moans filled the room, echoed off the walls, and consumed the two of them. He pulled out of her, lifted her up, and then placed her on the desk, cupping her face and kissing her.

“I love you,” he said, repeating the words over and over.

“I love you too, so damn much.”

And that was the truth.

Epilogue

Five Years Later

Carson stared at his daughter, who looked the image of her mother as she wandered around the fabric store searching for something for her mother to make her. Willow was at the desk, heavily pregnant with their third child while he carried his son in his arms, who was two years old, but decided he was too tired to keep on walking.

Never, in all his years, would he have imagined following around his five-year-old daughter, Lauren, and holding his son, Archie, while his wife served customers, pregnant with their third baby.

They didn't know the sex. Neither of them wanted to know as they rather liked the surprise on their birth.

Carson had thought they would only ever have one child, Lauren. That first birth had been a nightmare, at least it had to him. For Willow, she didn't have memories of the screaming or the pain she'd been in. All she remembered was the immense pleasure when their baby girl was placed in her arms. He remembered, though. The pain as she screamed and he had to hold her hand throughout. She'd been covered in perspiration, and she'd struggled through the first birth.

He had to admit, though, watching little Lauren grow had been a fucking dream. Their little girl was so cute, so adorable. At first, because she caused her mother so much pain, Carson had been worried that he wouldn't love her. Anyone who hurt Willow was in his shit book, but late one night, Willow had been so exhausted, and Lauren had been screaming. He had no choice but to go to her, and as he picked her up, this wave of love and protection swept over him. He loved his little girl and all anger had abated. His anger wasn't at this precious baby, it was at himself. So, he promised himself no more babies. That didn't work. Whenever he was with Willow, all he wanted to do was fuck her, make love, to be balls-deep inside her, and without a condom as well.

Archie was born three years later, and now she was pregnant with their third baby. He had kept his promise to her grandmother. She had never known sadness. He took care of her and worked tirelessly to make sure his world doesn't touch hers.

After the last shop was burned down, the rumors had run rife, and he allowed them to spread. He wanted every single person to know that if they

messed with Willow Dexter, death would come to them. At all times, there were three men watching the shop. Willow had become quite used to them being close by, and he knew his men adored Willow. She had made them sweaters for the colder months, and even attempted sleeveless shirts and shorts for the warmer months. Each year, she made sure to close her shop for two weeks over the Christmas period so they could go home to their families, and she always made them something. She also happened to make sure he paid them a Christmas bonus. She believed his men were bored, when the truth was, with all the attention they got, there were men more than willing to take care of his wife.

He wasn't jealous, though. She hadn't changed from being married to him. Willow was a good person throughout. She had also gotten close with Miley. The two were the best of friends and ran the shop together. Carson didn't care, so long as each night she came home with him.

"This one, Daddy," Lauren said.

He was a little embarrassed to know that she'd pulled out a bolt of French terry, that would make the warmest, snuggest pajamas ever. Yes, he would also have to take a picture, because they had cute little bears all over, and they were also pink. His little girl loved pink.

"Is that the only one?" he asked.

Lauren giggled, holding a hand to her mouth as she rushed away and came back holding a second bolt, and this one he knew as jersey. How he knew these things was not a mystery. At Willow's request, they had days when he would come into the shop, roll up his sleeves, and cut the lengths of fabric needed. He truly believed his muscles had gotten thicker in the arms, and that his wife was using him to make sales.

The scent of coconuts invaded his senses and he felt Willow's arms wrap around his waist.

"Did she pick her fabrics?" she asked.

"Yes, Mommy, look."

Lauren held up the fabrics, Willow smiled, and it melted his freaking heart.

He was the luckiest man alive. If anyone saw him right now, they wouldn't be shaking in their boots, they would see a family man, not the boss. No one ever got confused with him, though.

His love was for his family.

His hatred was for all those who opposed him and threatened the life

he'd built.

Willow smiled up at him, and he lost himself in her gaze. It had been five amazing years, and he knew the rest of their lives would be just as great.

She was the only woman to claim his heart, and after all, belonged to him.

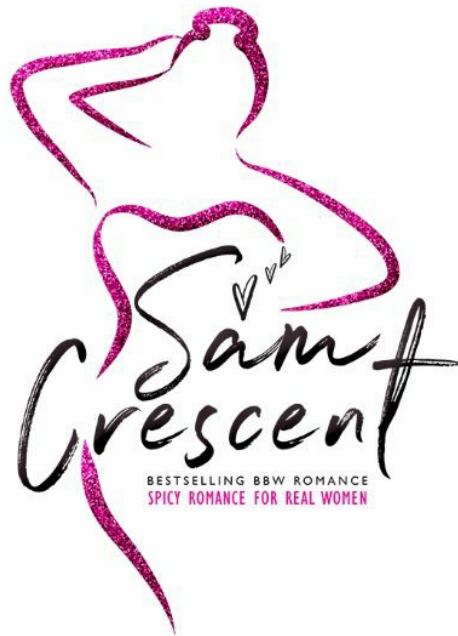
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MAFIA MONSTER 'S FORCED BRIDE

Mafia Brides, 1

Sam Crescent

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Sample Chapter

Alex Smith—no, that wasn't right—Alex Greco glanced around the luxurious sitting room at the many different faces of the world she had married into. Not willingly. No, her father had come home one day, sat her down, and told her that he had big plans for her. Whenever he had big plans for her, she knew they were lies. The truth was, he had big plans for himself. Not that she hated her father. Liam Smith was a scary man. Abandoned as a child, he grew up on the streets and fought his way out, earning himself a reputation and wealth that rivaled the mafia family she was currently sipping drinks with.

No champagne, not for her. A bad experience on her eighteenth birthday put an end to her alcohol-drinking days. Now, she kept to water or juice. Nothing alcoholic.

Not that she had a drink of her own. That would require the waiter to come close to her, and no one ever did that.

Her husband, Roman Greco, stood near a bunch of men, talking, probably business, or perhaps they were discussing who they were going to kill. He paid no attention to her, not that she minded.

They were like chalk and cheese.

Keeping her arms folded, she tried not to feel so self-conscious. In a room full of strangers, it was impossible.

This marriage was supposed to unite the Greco mafia with her father, who was the biggest crime boss in the country. His businesses had expanded

and crossed the boundaries of illegal into legal.

Her father had never kept his life secret from her. She wasn't a fool and knew he wasn't a good man. He'd tried to do right by her, but her husband couldn't stand her. Their wedding night had been a huge sham. According to tradition, he had to marry a virgin. She had refused to take the doctor examination.

Her father had kept her shielded, but he'd also been sure to allow her to have her own mind. So her virginity had been questioned. It had nearly caused a war on the streets because Liam refused to subject his daughter to the test. Lucas Greco had insisted. Her father had told him if he wanted to make this about blood, and not trust, then so be it.

The test hadn't gone ahead, but the wedding had.

On their wedding night, Roman had refused to touch her. She didn't know if it was because she didn't look like any of his other women or because he didn't think she was a virgin.

Anyway, she got a shitty night's sleep. He cut himself and gave the whole bloodied sheets a real feel to them so he could present them the following morning. To the world, they were married, but she knew she could get it annulled.

She was a virgin. Alex refused to put herself through such an archaic examination. How dare they ask that of her? Her wedding night was three months ago. Since then, she had rarely seen her husband, and when she had, he had nothing kind to say about her. Always critical. Then, of course, she was dragged to these kinds of functions where she stood out because she didn't quite fit in. Unlike all the women present, she didn't possess terrified gazes, nor did she fear being around men.

"You are all alone once again," her father said, surprising her.

She turned to see him, hands in his pockets, looking as stern as ever. "Dad." She went to him, wrapping her arms around him and breathing him in.

Her mother died many years ago when Alex was just a toddler. She had no memories of her. It was a drive-by shooting, and Alex, well, she hadn't gotten away unscathed either. A bullet had done a through-and-through on her leg. One rival war gang had taken his wife and injured his child. Liam had gone to war within hours, and Alex didn't want to think of the damage he'd done.

"What are you doing here?" Alex asked, smiling.

He was the first friendly face she'd seen all evening, and she'd been standing here for two hours, in the same spot. She could barely walk in the heels Roman made her wear. The dress she wore was also uncomfortable, as it went around her neck and fell to the floor. It was completely unflattering, and Alex hated it. Years ago, Liam once told her to choose her battles wisely, and she used that advice in her marriage.

If she didn't fight Roman on the simple things like her clothing, then there was a chance for her to fight for something she did want, like freedom, or ... something. She didn't know exactly what she wanted, but being stuck in his country home or his apartment all day sucked. He'd given her a credit card to go shopping with, but she wasn't one to shop.

"Business," Liam said.

"Of course. It's always business." She had nothing to say.

"You're upset."

"I'm not." The lie was easy to say, but he didn't believe it.

Liam took a deep breath. "Excuse me."

"Dad, don't," she said.

They had already started to gain some attention. Public displays of affection were frowned upon. After she'd hugged her father, a lot of people frowned, clearly talking about her.

She was the stupid wife of Roman Greco. The outsider. The weirdo with the strange name. She happened to love her name. Admittedly, it was because her dad wanted a boy, but Alex was a nice name. She liked it.

"I am going to deal with him."

"And what, force him to come and stand with me? Why? We have nothing to talk about. I ... I don't fit in here." She hated how pitiful she sounded.

"Sweetheart, you fit anywhere you want to be."

"No, I don't. You didn't raise me to be..." She looked toward the women who were in their own private circle. She'd never been part of the in crowd, never cared to be. This was no different. "This."

"Alex," he said, and she held her hand up, stopping him.

"Please, don't. I don't need my dad trying to deal with my husband." Even saying the word *husband* was difficult. She had never intended to get married. Never wanted to be married. Her parents had never married. According to her father, her mother hadn't wanted to tie the knot, didn't feel it was necessary.

“I didn’t want you to be put in this kind of situation.”

“You arranged this for us, Dad. How could you not have wanted it?”
Alex and Roman were two people who’d never met before their wedding.

Liam had always kept her far away from his other business dealings. She was aware of it, and he never lied to her about what he was, but that didn’t mean he exposed her unnecessarily.

The first time she actually met Roman was when she walked down the aisle to him. There had been other opportunities for them to meet, but they had never happened. Mainly because he was busy, like, all the time. Even when she refused to have the virgin test, he hadn’t been present for any of it. His father had.

“Bringing our families together was necessary,” Liam said. “But that doesn’t mean I wanted you to be miserable. I can fix this.”

“Dad there’s nothing to fix. I think we’re just strangers, you know. Trying to get used to each other and all of that.” She forced a smile to her lips, which was again difficult.

She’d never been a good liar. Liam had told her many times that she was terrible at it. The worst person, and he’d even advised her not to attempt it when she was older either. He probably had the nicest, easiest kid to hang out with. She had never rebelled against him. They had an amazing relationship, father and daughter.

Liam’s nostrils flared as he looked toward Roman.

Her husband was looking back at her, and she couldn’t exactly read the look on his face, but she could imagine he was ... pissed. Maybe something more, she wasn’t sure. Either way, he wasn’t happy.

What more could she do?

Did he not like her talking to her father?

“You promise not to make waves?” she asked.

“I promise not to meddle, but if he does anything, or if in any way you’re scared, you come to me.”

“Promise.”

Roman didn’t scare her, not really. Okay, there were a few times he might have made her a little afraid, but at those times, he was angry with someone else, and he just told her to fuck off or to get out of his face.

They didn’t have the best communication, and what also didn’t help was that she hated confrontation. Rather than call him out on the crap he said, she left it.

Liam pulled her in for another hug, and she saw everyone's disapproval. What kind of family was this?

"Mr. Smith, I heard you'd joined us," Lucas Greco, Roman's father, said.

She pulled away from her father in an attempt to create a little space. The two men shook hands, and Roman made that his cue to join them.

Alex stayed perfectly still, not saying anything.

Lucas glanced at her, and she saw the disapproval on his face. He hadn't liked that she refused to be part of the virgin test. The man didn't believe in trust. It was completely clear to see with the way he treated her.

As far as he was concerned, she was a hussy, or whatever word he used to describe her.

"It's a nice gathering," Liam said. "How could I turn down a personal invite from you. Roman?" He nodded at her husband.

She stared at her father, who looked at the distance between them. Alex wasn't going to step closer to the man she couldn't stand.

Silence descended upon the group. It was because of her.

"I think I would like some fresh air," she said. "Lovely party."

Without waiting for a word, she turned her back on them and stepped away, finding any excuse to be as far away from them as possible. She didn't even care to step outside.

Instead, she found the stairwell in the main corridor and lowered herself, taking a deep breath.

She hated parties and functions like these. They sucked.

"Not one for the crowds?"

Alex looked up to see Antonio Testa, one of Roman's best friends. She met him on their wedding day when he was Roman's best man.

"No, I'm not." She shrugged. "You?"

He chuckled. "I just needed a breather from all those women." He winked and then nodded at where she sat. "Do you want some company?"

"Sure." She didn't see a reason why not.

Antonio was a large man, and she had no choice but to move a little closer to the banister for him to be able to fit on.

"You look nice tonight."

"Thanks."

This was Roman's best friend, not hers. She didn't trust him, even though Antonio had never given her any reason not to trust him.

“I know that Roman can be a little difficult, but you’ve just got to give the guy a chance. He’s under a lot of pressure.”

She turned to him and then smiled.

Unless it was her father, she had no intention of talking to strangers about her marriage to Roman. Especially not a best friend.

“I don’t know if you’re needed in there...”

“Trying to get rid of me?” He nudged her shoulder.

Alex frowned, but rather than try to make a big deal out of what was happening, she forced a smile. “I don’t want to be held responsible for, you know, keeping you away from business. I know how important it is for you all.” Antonio had never been overly friendly with her, and she didn’t quite like that he was being so now.

Roman Greco hated these small little party get-togethers. His father arranged it as a way of inviting him and his new wife, as well as Liam. He’d seen the older man give her a hug, and he just knew it was a dig at him, or in some way telling him he wasn’t good enough.

Liam had told him plenty of times that he was merely the best of the worst. He didn’t understand what the big deal was. He married his daughter, and business was going great between them. All the boxes for this union to work had been ticked, and still, Liam looked at him like he wanted to slit his throat.

It just so happened the feeling was mutual. He didn’t like Liam Smith.

The man wasn’t mafia, he wasn’t family, and in no way was he blood. There was no denying Liam had worked himself from the ground up, building a reputation for himself and becoming the feared crime boss that he was. His name rivaled the Greco name for fear. Men were loyal to him, and they never, even under threat of torture or being tortured, turned on him.

Lucas Greco, Roman’s father, had been impressed and wanted to finally meet the man that no one would break from. Not even to save their own skin.

Who instilled that kind of loyalty?

The man in front of him was deadly. Roman saw it in the man’s eyes. There was nothing living there, and he heard the rumors that the only person who was ever safe from this man was his daughter, Alex.

So much rumor and gossip followed this man. Roman didn’t believe it all.

He sipped at his whiskey and stared at the man over the rim of the glass. He didn't fear Liam.

Roman was the only man in the history of the mafia to have killed a man at the ripe old age of ten. Serving his father and the Greco name was in his blood, as was becoming the boss, when his father would hand the reins over to him. Until that time, he still had to do what his father instructed.

"How is married life treating you?" Liam asked.

"Fine." He clenched his teeth, wanting to beat the crap out of the man in front of him. There wasn't much difference between them in age, just twenty years. Liam was fifty-five years old while he was thirty-five years old.

Unlike the women in their world, he didn't have to marry at a young age. Most of their daughters were often betrothed by the age of twelve and married at either eighteen or twenty-one.

Alex was twenty-one, and she was nothing like the women of his world. She didn't bow her head or try to be hidden. She held herself tall and proud. There was also defiance within her gaze. His father had told him of her denial to take the virginity test and how Liam refused to enforce it.

Liam stated that his daughter was a virgin and he believed her.

Roman didn't. He also hadn't fucked her either, hadn't consummated their marriage. He expected Alex to tell her father they hadn't had sex, but she still kept quiet.

He didn't know what her game was, but he intended to find out.

No one took him for a fool. When it came to Alex, he already had people in place to find out her weaknesses. So far, she showed none. She had also not proven to be a liar either, which ... baffled him.

Liam chuckled. "Just fine."

"I think we should talk business," Lucas said, interrupting. "I've gotten word—"

"Business is for the morning where booze hasn't been so freely offered," Liam said. "Do you think I got to where I am by taking the words of drunken men?" His gaze turned back to Roman. "I have it on good authority that you've been with Denise."

Roman tensed up. He didn't know how Liam knew of his ex-lover, or her name, and to be honest, he wasn't happy with it either.

He kept his personal life very private, and his lovers were always protected.

Since his marriage, he hadn't enjoyed another woman, not even his

wife. He'd been so focused on dealing with the fallout from taking an outsider as a wife. Alex was ... so different.

She didn't know their customs and often just stood by herself, ignoring everyone, or being ignored, he wasn't quite sure.

What was with her? He couldn't read her.

Women like Denise, his ex-lover, were interested in power and money. They only wanted what was best for themselves. When it came to Alex, he wasn't sure what it was. He also couldn't find out the relevant information he needed to know more about her. Her father kept it all under wraps.

No one knew anything, and that pissed him off.

Whenever he had a computer guy onto something, there was always some glitch or problem that stopped him from finding out everything there was about his wife.

"My son wouldn't ruin his marriage vows," Lucas said.

That wasn't entirely correct. His father had pulled him to one side and said that if he ever needed to, there were always mistresses who would help deal with his needs. Lucas, besides having a wife, had three mistresses.

Roman hadn't been interested in going to another woman. Being married wasn't what he expected. First of all, he had to make sure Liam didn't find out he hadn't actually consummated the marriage.

The only piece of information he could truly get was that Liam Smith loved his daughter. Adored her. She was treasured by him, and that made her an interesting pawn in this game.

Liam Smith was an ally, and his father had told him to treat Alex with respect. He had no interest in hurting a woman.

"I had dinner with Denise at her request, two weeks ago. She had a problem and needed me to fix it."

Her boss was getting handsy, and with his and Alex's marriage announced in the press, people assumed the women in his life were now easy targets.

He hadn't seen Denise for a long time, and they had ended things rather amicably.

Roman finished off his whiskey as Liam glared at him. "My daughter has not returned. Go and find her."

In his father's home, he didn't expect to take orders from anyone but Lucas. He had a quick glance at his father and saw the nod. It annoyed him to

even be seen doing as that bastard asked.

Still, he turned on his heel and made his way out of the main party, going along the corridor and coming to a pause when he caught sight of Antonio, one of his best friends, with his wife.

Antonio attempted to put his arm around Alex, but she immediately stood up. She hadn't seen Roman yet. "You know what, I think it's time I headed back to the party. It was nice meeting you, Antonio." She stepped away, and the moment she caught sight of him, she stopped. "Roman."

"Alex."

He stared at her from the tip of her head. She had luscious brown hair. It was thick and fell around her in waves. From the short time he had spent with her, he knew she often wore it up, most of the time in a clip, rarely falling down around her shoulders.

Staring down the length of her body, he saw her black dress that was more fitting for a funeral than a party, and it wasn't a flattering fit either. The dress fell to her tits and then seemed to hang off her body. None of her gorgeous curves were on display. He knew she hadn't picked this outfit herself.

The maid who came to clean his home three times a week had picked it out for her. He made a note never to ask her to help his wife again. No wonder the women were making snarky comments behind their hands about her. She looked like ... death.

Neither of them spoke, and Alex's gaze moved from his, to the wall, and then to the floor before returning to his.

"I better go and join them," she said.

"I'll be there in a moment."

She didn't stop, just nodded as she kept on walking.

"I think you're wrong about her," Antonio said, getting to his feet.

He stared at his friend and tilted his head to the side. "How?"

"She does not like me being anywhere near her. Did you see?" Antonio asked.

"I saw her move the moment you put your hands around her."

"Yeah, and she kindly removed my hand from her thigh as well," Antonio said.

"What?"

"You told me to get close, to push her. You said there were no limits, that if needed, to take it all the way. I merely put my hand on her knee."

Antonio's gaze swept over him. "But tell me, Roman, if you don't care about your wife, and you want everyone to know that she is a manipulative, cheating bitch, why are your hands clenched, and you look like you want to kill me?"

"I do not want to kill you. Good job." Roman didn't like the fact that he felt this way. Alex meant nothing to him. She was a job. A woman who had been forced on him.

She played her part of innocent daughter well, but he knew the truth. She was a slut and Liam's greatest weakness. He would find the truth one way or another.

It wasn't lost on him that Liam had given them the key to making his life miserable. They could kill her and start a war. It would be so easy. His father had told him that he respected and valued Liam Smith. No war was ever going to wage with that man. Roman felt that as soon as he discovered the truth about Alex, he'd get what he wanted.

Antonio approached him and slapped him on the shoulder. "You keep on believing that, buddy. I know the truth. I've known you for years, and you want to slit my throat. It's fine, but maybe you need to know what it is you want first, before you ask people to do this."

"Alex is a slut."

"I don't think she is. If so, then I'm not the kind of man she goes for. We all know the ladies drop their panties for me."

Roman couldn't help but look at Antonio's neck and think how good it would look oozing with blood.

"You know that murderous rage you're feeling right now? That's not what a guy who wants to have other men sleep with his wife should feel like." Antonio winked at him and left to rejoin the party.

Running a hand down his face, he attempted to clear his mind. Tonight was not going well.

He was running on only a couple of hours of sleep, and to be frank, he was exhausted. For the last three days, he'd been chasing a goddamn rat, one who wanted to trade their secrets for money and a safe life. It was one of their science nerds, and so far, the son of a bitch hadn't made it out of the city. The fucker had been able to make it another day. If it wasn't for his father telling him he had to be here tonight, he would've still been hunting him.

Maybe what he needed to do was stay close to home and make sure his wife fell into the traps he'd set.

So far, she had proven him wrong, and he didn't like that.

End of sample chapter

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