



the
**GANGSTER'S
GIRL**

EVER LILAC

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CHAPTER ONE

India

A secret smile spreads over my face at the excited look in my eyes as I stand in front of the mirror in my tiny bedroom. I'm brimming with energy, goosebumps sweeping my arms and a current's sneaking down my lower back, belly and down to my thighs.

Twisting and twirling, I tilt my head to the side, admiring the way my long dress grazes my knees. I wonder if Uncle Clay will like it. I think he likes sundresses like this one and I stroke my hands down my hips, blushing when that current in my body fires twice as hard.

It has to stop doing that because it feels like being split in two. Pouting, I turn my mouth into a rosebud and apply some gloss to make them look more...kissable? Inhaling, I give myself a long look, a critical one because I'm not sure what I'm doing here.

Uncle Clay and I aren't a thing. We will probably never even be a *thing*. To him I'll never be anything else than the kid who used to run after him, pulling at his slacks and demanding his attention. To him I'll never be anything but the daughter of his oldest friend.

But deep down I can always hope. And I'm eager to see him today, since I haven't visited him in over three months. Three long, tedious months and I almost drove myself crazy with how much I missed him.

On midsummer's eve, I even went to the forest and picked seven, different wildflowers and put them under my pillow. My mom told me if I do that, then I will dream about my future husband the same night.

I didn't tell her I dreamt about Uncle Clay.

Though, I don't blame my dreams about him on my magical ritual. I blame it on my usual infatuation with him and I'm alone in being head over heels for him. Everyone is infatuated with Clayton Augustine Xavier. The man with the Mida's touch, ruthless in business and overprotective about the ones he cares about. Men want to be him and women want to be with him.

Biting my lip, I glance at myself in the mirror. That's right, *women*. Not nineteen year old *girls*. Uncle Clay will never see me as a woman, no matter what I wear or how much makeup I apply or how mature I try to act.

I twitch when there's a short knock on the door before my mom Ronnie barges inside, flashing me a sunny smile.

"Hey you," she twitters, fanning her face because it's hot today. "Are you ready?" She proceeds to cross the floor over to my bed, jumps up on my mattress and glares at me with her big eyes.

Ronnie and I look so much alike that people frequently mistake her for my sister. But sometimes I don't see it. She's statuesque and free spirited and sometimes whenever I'm around her, I feel pretty frumpy.

My dad Robbie and she had me when they were sixteen. That *young*. I was their surprise and Ronnie always like to squeeze my cheeks and gush about how happy she is she got such a pretty daughter.

"I mean can you imagine if I had given birth to a mousy girl?" she likes to say, then burst into laughter and shake her head in amusement. She's a little superficial at times but she's got a good heart, just like my dad.

"What do you think?" I ask her. "Do you think I can go like this?"

Screwing her face up, Ronnie says, "Looks a little plain, I think. Why don't you try out those shorts and that little, tube top we bought last week?"

I throw a hesitant look at the garments. “Not sure...”

“Oh, come on, try it,” she insists, “besides it’s just Clay.” She looks at her French manicure, absently adding, “His opinion doesn’t matter...”

I give her a heated look because his opinion does matter to me. It would be like me telling her that Robbie’s opinion doesn’t matter and then she would throw a fit. But I do as she suggests, squirming into the tight clothes and Ronnie claps her hands.

“Perfect.” She jumps down from the bed, giving me a hug and she’s never really smelled like a mom. She smells like a barfly but I’m used to it. “Let’s go. Robbie is so freaking excited tonight he’s practically frothing.”

At that I laugh and we walk out, stepping right into the living room and kitchen because the three of us live in a trailer by a bright lake. Robbie’s casually leaning against the counter and his boyish face splits up in a smile when he sees us.

“Ronnie girl,” he grins, “looking foxy foxy today.” He says the last with a growl, pinching Ronnie’s butt and she lets out a girly squeal, running out of the trailer in her slinky jumpsuit and wedges. His gaze goes to me and he ruffles my hair. “You look very pretty too, bugs.”

“Not if you keep messing up my hair,” I scowl, trying to smooth my tresses and Robbie chuckles.

“It’s just Clay we’re going to. He won’t care.”

My scowl deepens because that’s the thing. I want him to *care*. Not that my parents would understand and I feel a tinge of worry when I think about what Robbie would say if he knew how I feel about Clay.

As wild and reckless my parents are, they’ve always kept boys away from me as if anyone with testosterone has rabies. Probably because they deep down always have been afraid, that I would end up knocked up like Ronnie too young and too soon.

Outside the sun shines like a torch on the sky and there’s not a single breeze as we all squeeze into Robbie’s, red Toyota. Rolling the windows down, we turn up the music and sing along without any shame.

Pedestrians stare at us and I know what they’re thinking; That the Penrose’s are a bunch of hillbilly’s in this proper and elegant small town where everyone cares about keeping up appearances. Except my parents of course.

But I’m not mortified by them. I love them just the way they are. Leaning forward, I say in Robbie’s ear. “Are you game, set ready for tonight? Do you think you’ll win?”

“Hell yeah, I’ll win,” Robbie says with a healthy amount of confidence. “What do you say, Ronnie?”

“You bet, stud,” she laughs, the sound so loud it drowns the noises from the street. Leaning back in my seat, I smile because tonight really is special. It’s game night.

Robbie and Clay are playing. Chess.

In their youth they were both chess prodigies which is how they met. Their interests waned professionally but that didn’t stop Clay from teaching me how to play chess at the age of four, leading to me becoming one of the top 30 in this country.

It is also how I support myself and my whole family. It’s been that way since I was in my early teens, but I’ve never participated in game night, mostly because Robbie claims it’s a guy thing. They rarely play, only every six years or so because the stakes are extra high. The winner can wish for whatever they want and the loser has to grant him.

One year Robbie won and Clay had to grant him his beloved yacht. That same summer we had a ton of fun with that cruiser, but then Robbie sold it and spent the money on random presents for Ronnie and a trip to the Niagara Falls so bummer...

“You okay, by the way?” Robbie asks, throwing me a look in the rearview mirror and I raise my brows.

“Mmm, why don’t I look like it?”

Robbie shrugs, “You look like you’re about to come down with a fever to me. Ronnie check her temperature.”

I flush like crazy when she puts her palm on my forehead, squirming in my seat and Ronnie frowns.

“No, she’s fine.”

That’s because I don’t have the type of fever they’re referring to. I have another one and it has all to do with Uncle Clay. My parents turn their attention away from me and I slowly exhale, thinking I have to be more careful. I don’t need them to get their suspicions up.

If they knew how hard my hormones rage around Uncle Clay, they would never let me leave my room.

Turning my focus to the outside, I feel a thrill up my spine when the scenery changes. This is about as far from the trailer park as you can get. The

weeping willows here are lush and dreamy, the wind a little more forceful and the entire atmosphere's different.

Rich, regal and gothic. At the sight of Uncle Clay's extravagant, Victorian mansion, I sit up straight. There are about a hundred windows here and even a tower, which I used to spend my time in when I was a kid and pretend I was Rapunzel.

"His house is so damn gorgeous," Ronnie murmurs under her breath, her voice careful because sometimes Robbie gets upset he can't give her that but this time he just smiles, his eyes shimmering.

And I have to agree, the house really is gorgeous but a little secretive, towering over us three as a tyrannical overlord when we step out of the car. We pass the incredibly well take care of garden that somehow still manages to look welcoming instead of sterile, like most rich people's gardens do.

Putting my hand out, I stroke the roses with my fingertips but flinch when a thorn pierces my skin.

"Ouch," I murmur, carefully licking the blood off and I glance at my parents but they're already at the entrance by now. Following them, I feel a prickle in my neck as if somebody's watching and I look up. Uncle Clay's cutting eyes zone in on me and I hitch a breath.

He's so different from us. Powerful and a little mysterious. There are rumors about him being in a Nordic mob but I think those rumors are humbug. Uncle Clay's far too sophisticated to be a gangster and I can't imagine him with blood splatters on his expensive clothes. He's gazing down at me from the third floor and I want to pinch myself when my whole body heats up. Wearing a dark suit and a light blue shirt, his sepia colored hair is carefully tousled, his body language strict.

Uncle Clay is controlled. But his jarring, grey eyes are not. They burn with fervor and they set fire to a part of me that's meant to be only his.

CHAPTER TWO

Clay

Tonight will be different, it won't be like the past times we've played. Tonight everything's hanging on by a thin thread and it's making me agitated. I've already had two glasses of scotch and I pace back and forth in the library, rubbing a hand down my neck.

“What the fuck are you doing?” I mutter under my breath, taking another sip and I grimace at the strong flavor. Putting the glass down, I grip the edges of the table, trying to control the tremors running through my body.

There's a risk that tonight, I won't only lose my friendship with Robbie but I could lose India as well if she finds my intense emotions off-putting. She's so very different from me. There's something abandoned about her and it overpowers me, sometimes making it difficult to breathe whenever I'm in her presence.

On top of it, she's seventeen years younger than me, carefree and jovial and she always calls me Uncle Clay. But I want to be more than that. I don't want her to just see me as her uncle, as her dad's oldest friend and the guy who taught her that the queen always protects the king.

Straightening, I fix my tie, catching my own gaze in the window and I wonder whether she will ever be able to think of me, the way I think of her. There are some lines on my face and I have the kind of stubble that boys her age are unable to grow.

I wonder if it will make India recoil. Will she deny me herself when I expose my never ending appetite and the feelings I harbor for her? They aren't sweet and boyish; they're raw and masculine, coming from a deep part in me and they need to be reciprocated.

It's unfair of me to expect India to step up to the task but every day without her, I unravel just a little bit more. I need her to keep staying in control, to stay sane. I need her to keep my world from crumbling.

I have built up a good life, one that would be worthy of her but if I don't get to have India, it'll be like living in ruins. Bleak, desolate and dark. It is not something I wish for myself. Question is, will India care?

She has her own life, she's got her parents, she's got her chess career and I

couldn't be more proud but she might not want me to interfere with it. She could turn me away and my fists clench at the thought, a sneer twisting my features and I take a deep breath.

Stretching my neck from side to side, I feel it crack when I hear a car drive up to my courtyard. They're here. Moving over to the window, I watch Ronnie and Robbie stumble out of the car, high on love as usual but my gaze doesn't stay on them for long.

Instead it goes to India and I openly stare, my eyes licking every part of her, from the messy, ash blonde hair to the cornflower eyes and that insanely arousing body of hers. It makes me want to lap her up, like wolf laps a fresh stream of water when thirsty.

Her sixth sense must tell her I'm ogling her because she stops in her tracks, her mouth opening and she licks it, making me let out a curse under my breath. Why the hell does she have to be so tempting? And why does she have to be my best friend's daughter?

A smile pulls around her lips and it makes my heart twist because every single one of her smiles is fresh. It's never the same, never like the one before it as if she custom makes them for me. She lifts her hand and waves. I smile at her and my adrenaline pumps at the thought of what's going to happen tonight.

“Clayman, are you gonna let us stand here until New Year’s or what?” I hear Robbie screech. Ronnie sniggers and I’m forced to break my contact with India. Brushing potential dust off my suit and straightening my collar, I walk down to the foyer and open the door.

My vision goes blurry when Robbie throws his arm around my neck, hugging me while Ronnie squeezes my arm and gives me a kiss on the cheek.

“Long time no see, stranger,” she purrs and Robbie hums in agreement, looking around my house even though he’s been here a ton of times before. But I get it, compared to their trailer, this house must look like a castle to them and Robbie lets out a low whistle, before grabbing his crotch.

“Fuck, this place gives me a hard on,” he declares to nobody special and I’m tempted to say,

And your daughter gives me one.

The afternoon sun shines behind her, making her look like the sweetest scoops of vanilla ice cream and she crosses the shiny, checked floor over to me, her hips softly swaying from side to side.

“Hi, Uncle Clay,” she says in her throaty voice, wrapping herself around me and I tense at the feel of her. Her breasts brush my chest, her hand cupping my neck and the only thing not touching are our hips. “I’ve missed

you.”

Allowing myself to put my arms around her waist, I inhale that honeysuckle scent that’s characteristic to her. A couple of months ago, I even ordered the gardener to plant those flowers everywhere just to remind myself of her. She loves them, once telling me that honeysuckle blooms even in winter.

But she’s too close like this, her body pressed too tightly against mine and if she doesn’t move soon, she’ll feel...

I freeze when she lets out a whispery gasp, right in my ear and I know she felt me. Felt my desire for her and it must confuse her, because she goes soft in my arms. Taking a step back, I hold her at an arm’s length, watching her carefully and expecting panic to flare in her eyes.

Instead she just seems confused, but her eyes are hooded when she places a kiss on my cheek, just like her mom did. “It’s good to see you,” she murmurs, leaving behind traces of her sticky gloss.

“Good to see you too,” I answer, reluctantly letting her go and my eyes lower, watching her clothing with disapproval. Denim shorts about as big as a post stamp and a red tube top. Inwardly I shake my head, knowing that when I make her mine, she won’t be walking around dressed like that anymore.

In my house there are proper rules.

Robbie and Ronnie have never given her boundaries, other than no boys but besides that they let her do whatever she wanted. When she was younger, she'd frequently show up at my place with twigs in her hair and chocolate stains on her clothes.

It's a miracle India didn't turn into a full on savage with those parents and I rub my jaw, gesturing toward the living room.

"Shall we?" I ask and all three of them nod. "What are you having?"

"Beer," Ronnie and Robbie answer in chorus, popping down on my couch and entangling their limbs.

"I'll have some whiskey with a drop of water, please," India says and her parents don't even bat an eye. Throwing her a scolding look I reply,

"You're nineteen."

In response, she shrugs, angering me. "I'm old enough to drive, I should be old enough to drink." My eyes go to her body. She's old enough for other things as well. Still...too young for alcohol.

“Not in my house,” I say and her eyes shine a little in defiance but she doesn’t protest. Robbie and Ronnie on the other hand do.

“Come on, Clay. Don’t be a bore,” Robbie says and Ronnie nods, sipping on her beer. “Let the girl live a little.”

“Yeah, why can’t you be the fun uncle?”

Flexing my jaw, I try not to let my agitation over their irresponsibility get to me. “Not in my house,” I reply firmly and I pour India some fizzy water instead and hand it to her. The tips of her fingers brush against my hand and she looks up at me as if she wants things from me.

Or maybe she wants nothing. Or maybe she just wants money like so many other women. Twirl her Uncle Clay around her finger then grab his money. Glancing at India, I want to punch myself for even thinking it. She’s not like that and I’m fully aware that she’s one of a kind.

With my hand around my own glass, I sit down on one of the couches, easing into the cushions when I feel a thigh brush against my leg. My eyes flare to India’s but she pretends to not notice, putting her arm around my neck and curling into my lap.

Tensing, I don’t know what to do at first. It’s been a while since she sat in my lap like this and my heart starts hammering. What is she doing? What am

I doing? I look at her parents who seem oblivious to it all.

They couldn't care less, acting like it's all normal and they're preoccupied with each other as usual. They think I'm harmless, think it's fine to let their daughter sit in a grown man's lap. Well, it's not fine and I put my hand on India's thigh, pushing her higher up towards my chest and she lets out a trembling breath.

Our eyes meet and hers glitter the way rays glitter over a summer lake and her tongue flicks to moisten her lips. It would be so easy to take her mouth like this, fondle her as if we're alone and she's fully mine.

My mind blanks at the feel of her fleshy ass so close to my crotch. She better not wriggle, she better play nice and be a good girl...I let out a strained groan when she wriggles, moving her face up to my glass.

"Can I just have one sip, Uncle Clay?" she asks, her chaste eyes going to mine. "Please."

Forcing myself to not let her influence me, I answer, "No." My voice is sharp, leaving no room for protests but of course Robbie and Ronnie have to push it.

"Stop torturing my kid," Robbie says, "just give her a sip."

“Yeah Clay, give her a sip,” Ronnie smiles and then she looks at Robbie and they both grin at each other before they start chanting, “Drink, drink, drink!”

Their chanting spreads around my living room, their palms hitting the coffee table, spurring me to give India a sip. But I can’t stand being defied. I pride myself on my power and I shake my head at India who moves her lips closer to my glass.

She wants a sip so bad, she’s ready to go against my orders.

With a playful look in her eyes, she edges closer, her face moving to mine, her lips...

But she’s not defying me and I swipe the whole drink in one gulp and disappointed cheers rain over me. India is the only one smiling, the rest act as if the apocalypse just happened.

Putting her lips to my ear, she whispers, “I knew you wouldn’t let me drink.”

Frowning I say, “You think I’m predictable?” It unnerves me, that she might think of me as a bore, as a man whose clutches she’d rather escape

than run to.

“No.” Her eyes soften, softening something inside of me at the same time.
“I just trust you.”

CHAPTER THREE

India

I dared myself to do it, dared myself to sit in his lap and when he didn't push me away or stood up, I thought my heart would burst. Maybe Uncle Clay does feel something for me and maybe he sees me as something more than just his best friend's daughter.

His eyes are always concerned when they look at me but now they're something else too. They're fixed as if he's made up his stubborn mind about something. It's time for us to have dinner and I slowly get out of his lap, watching his jaw flex when his eyes go to my hips and he seems displeased.

About what, I wonder?

But Clay isn't the kind who blurts things out. He's not hotheaded, or reckless or impulsive. In other words, he's nothing like my family. Turning

my head to look at Clay, I'm disappointed to see that he's busy talking to Robbie and I hook arms with Ronnie instead as we move into the dining room.

It's too big for the three of us with a mahogany table and a fireplace in dark marble. It's not lit and Clay doesn't light it up because it's too warm anyway. Robbie's too busy sucking up to Clay that he doesn't notice that Ronnie isn't happy. It's not until she clears her throat he realizes she wants the attention to be on her.

He leaves Clay's side and gives it to her immediately. One day I'd like for someone to do the same for me. My eyes go to Clay and he watches me with a silent brooding, forcing me to break our eye contact before I start whimpering.

"This looks amazing," Ronnie muses, lifting the cloche that's kept the food warm and I want to go and sit down right next to Clay but I don't want to come across as needy, so I take my usual seat. "Doesn't it look amazing, India?" Ronnie continues and I nod.

"I love coming here," I murmur. I have ever since I was small because sometimes, dinners at Clay's was the only time I truly felt nourished. Back home we just stuck to junk food or Ronnie's specialty; fried cheese.

"Yeah, then you're going to love me even more after I win tonight," Robbie

grins, shoving an asparagus into his mouth and both my and Ronnie's eyes go to his.

"What?" I exclaim and Robbie wiggles his brows making Ronnie burst into laughter.

"Stud, are you saying if you win tonight, you're getting Clay's house?" she says.

"That's right," Robbie nods, looking as if he's already won and Ronnie raises her arms in the air, letting out a long,

"Yee-haw, fuck yes!" They kiss sloppily and passionately and my eyes go to Clay's.

"What are you going to wish for Uncle Clay?" I breathe and he shoots me a long look, putting his napkin into his lap because he's the only one with impeccable manners.

"It's a secret," he answers cryptically, riling Ronnie up who leans over the table.

"You mean he hasn't told you what he wants?" she says and Robbie shakes his head.

“The cagey bastard won’t tell me anything.” He swipes some water, pointing at Clay. “Just know not to go crazy. Remember I’m a family man.”

Clay doesn’t answer, picking up his utensils between his strong fingers and turns to me. “I hear you did well on your last chess tournament. Congratulations.”

“Thanks,” I murmur, my cheeks tinting because even though I don’t care that much about other’s people’s opinion of me (you can’t if you’re a Penrose), I still care about Clay’s. I want him to think nice about things about me.

“How were the guys?” Robbie asks, dipping his bread into the sauce. “Did they hit on you?”

Clay tenses, his eyes carefully going to mine. “N...no, although there was this one annoying guy who kept hanging around me.”

My parents turn wary, and a cool breeze emanates off of Clay’s body, as if somebody just opened a window and I shiver.

“He kept asking me if my name was Winter.” I say and my parents frown.

“Huh?” Robbie says and I shrug.

“I know, it was weird. It got even weirder when he told me I’ll be coming soon.”

Silence spreads around the table and a pin could drop in here and I shrug again. “Yeah, I didn’t get it either,” I murmur, flinching when Ronnie bursts into laughter and Robbie grunts but Clay doesn’t utter a sound. He’s gone rigid and his eyes are a snowstorm.

Brushing a tear off her cheek, Ronnie sniggers, “Next time you just stay away from that rude boy, okay?”

Was planning to. But I don’t tell her that, because sometimes everyone still treats me like I’m younger than I am. And I know I’m innocent but it would be nice if they didn’t rub it in my face all the time.

Glancing at Clay, I’m happy to see he’s eating again and Ronnie lets out a loud sigh.

“Honestly Clay, I have to say you’re kinda crazy for risking this house,” she says, looking around with round eyes, “If I were you, I don’t think I could ever give it up.” Giving him a curious glance she says, “It’s not your family home, is it?”

Clay shakes his head. “No.”

Typical answer from Clay who hates talking about his cryptic past. But once I accidentally heard from Robbie that Clay had been raised very rich and privileged. Then one day, his mother died from a mysterious fall down a staircase and three days later his father was seen running from town in the middle of the night, together with her sister.

If something like that had happened to me, I don't think I would want to talk about my past either.

“Alright, alright, let's ask the question Ronnie has been dying all night to know.” Robbie raises his brows at Clay, taking a sip of his ice water. “Are you finally settling down?”

My stomach dips and I squirm in my seat, shrinking from the answer. I don't want Clay to say yes but what if he does? Maybe the next time I show up here, Clay has a wife on his arm with a big, rounded belly. It's enough to make me feel like I'm getting smaller and smaller.

“Not just yet,” Clay answers calmly. “I'm waiting for the right woman.”

Exactly. *Woman*. Not girl.

“Ohmm, I can already see it in front of me,” Ronnie says, “some tall gazelle probably who only wears haute couture. Isn’t that your type?”

“Not quite...” Clay answers carefully but I’m not in the mood to listen at the rest of the conversation and I get up.

“Where you going?” Robbie asks.

“Be right back.” I walk away, going into the kitchen and I take a deep breath. There’s no need to get so worked up about a simple conversation. I’m overreacting and I shrug myself, walking over to the fridge to grab a soda but I don’t find one.

But I know that Clay keeps a stack in one of the cupboards and I want to pat myself on the back when I find a whole line of my favorite. Rising on my tiptoes, I reach for it, my fingers clasping in the air and I let out an annoyed sound when I can’t reach...

Another hand does it for me and I flinch when I feel Clay standing right behind me. Twirling around, I give him a sheepish smile.

“Thanks.” I look at him beneath my lashes. “Would’ve probably popped a shoulder if it weren’t for you.”

“Why did you leave the table like that?” he asks and I stare into his eyes. He’s got a black rim around all that grey which makes him look so attractive it’s sometimes hard to look at him without turning red. No wonder everyone loves him.

“I was thirsty,” I murmur, clutching the soda but he reply. He just looks at me as if he’s dissecting me and as if games I don’t know how to play, swirl in his mind. Clearing my throat, I blurt, “I’ve been thinking about getting a tattoo.”

“Tattoo?” he says between his firm lips and I nod, turning around, leaning slightly against the counter and Clay lets out a strange hiss.

“Right h..here,” I stutter. “Like maybe a butterfly or something.”

“Here?” Clay asks brushing my sensitive skin and I shudder, my lashes wavering and I bite my lip at his strong touch.

My answer sounds more like a moan and I freeze when he pulls his hand back. “No tattoo,” he says and I look at him in surprise.

“Why not?”

“Your skin is too clean for one. Besides I don’t want to see you walking around with a tramp stamp. Someone could get the wrong idea.”

My brows furrow. “What’s a tramp stamp?”

His eyes turn slightly more gentle and he shakes his head. “Never mind. And next time, India...”

“Yes?” I breathe.

“Don’t wear those shorts. Your butt cheeks are hanging out.”

Squirming when my face flashes hot, I say, “Didn’t really think about that.”

“I did,” he rasps and I inhale, wondering what’s going on with his voice, his eyes...he seems consumed. “Been thinking about it since you walked inside.”

“Uncle C...Clay...” I say as emotions storm in me and he gives me a stern look.

“Do you want your father to win tonight? Do you want to live in this house?”

“I don’t know...I do love the house...” I say and his features relax, “but between you and me, I don’t really think Robbie will win.”

He seems satisfied with his answer, his shoulders straightening but his next question throws me a little bit off.

“Do you still sleepwalk?”

Lowering my head, I nod. “Sometimes.” I was taken to a therapist once when I young, who claimed I walked in my sleep because I subconsciously was trying to escape. Funnily, I’ve never slept walk while spending the night in Clay’s house. Glancing at him I add, “Uncle Clay, why don’t you call me darlin anymore?”

His eyes narrow with so much warmth that it feels like I just got stung by nettles and I gasp. Opening his mouth to answer me, I curse inwardly when we get interrupted...

“What’s taking you so long?” Robbie yells from the dining room and Clay swiftly turns and walks back. We finish dinner and then Clay declares it’s time for the game to start. We all rise somberly and there’s anxiousness in the air that’s usually not there.

Usually the games are a lot of fun, but something about tonight is different.

“What do you say, bugs?” Ronnie asks, “How about you and I go take a walk in the garden while the boys play?”

At that I nod, turning in the doorway to look at Robbie and Clay as they walk up the staircase and my stomach twists.

“May the best man win,” Ronnie calls and I flinch when the library door closes.

CHAPTER FOUR

Clay

First thing Robbie does when we're alone in the library is to grab my scotch, two glasses and pour some drinks. Not having him clear minded is only going to serve me but he's still going to have to drive Ronnie home.

If everything goes as planned, he won't be driving India. She'll be staying with me.

Raising my brows, I ask, "Haven't you had enough? You're driving."

He brushes me off. "You know I can handle my liquor. Besides you're a month younger than me so stop fucking acting like you're my big brother." Grinning, he hands me the glass and I take it.

“To friendship,” he cheers and our glasses meet in a clink.

“To friendship,” I reply, walking over to the window and I watch India admiring the flowers together with her mother. The thought of having her all to myself excites me but for it to happen she’s going to have to want me back.

Her parents are attached to her and leaving them might be hard. For much of her life she has supported them, taken care of them when they should have taken care of her. Now, she will have me to care for her. And I will make sure to give her a satisfying life, the kind she deserves.

“What are you looking at?” Robbie asks, sitting down at the small table where the chessboard’s placed.

“India,” I reply. “Have you seen the way she dresses? And you let her walk around like that?”

Robbie shrugs. “Don’t really think about it. She shops wherever Ronnie shops and it’s none of my business how she dresses.” He exhales, adding, “Now are we going to play or are you just going to keep critiquing my parenting skills?”

Walking over to the table, I unbutton my suit jacket before sitting down. Robbie is white, I’m black. Robbie’s is the first one to start.

“I feel sorry for you, Clayman,” he says, moving his pawn. “You’re going to lose this house, you know that?”

Not answering I move my own pawn. Robbie’s a worthy opponent but he’s also naively optimistic. Truth is that I feel sorry for him too. He’s going to lose his daughter to me. And he’s going to lose her fair and square. No cheating, no manipulation, just due to the rules of the game.

“And are you ever going to tell me what it is that you want, if you by some miracle happen to win?”

Giving him a sharp look, I say, “I’ll tell you after the game’s over.”

He doesn’t seem happy with the answer. “Look, if you want me to kill someone for you, just spit it out and quit beating around the bush.”

“I don’t want you to kill someone for me.” I want your daughter to be mine.

“That’s a relief at least,” Robbie sighs before his brows furrow. “I got enough problems as it is.”

“Problems?” I don’t like the sound of that, I don’t want any problems around India. And if I can remove any obstacles for the Penrose’s, I’ll be

happy to do so.

“It’s about my kid,” he says and I tense, my eyes turning dry when I stop blinking. “She’s getting...older. And as much as Ronnie and I have tried to shelter her, we can’t do it forever.”

Straightening, I nod in agreement and Robbie continues,

“I know a couple of boys by the lake area have had their eyes on her. They seem alright, they’re around her age and I’m thinking I won’t keep them away from her if they ask her out. What do you think?”

Grinding my jaw, I reply, “I think that’s one of the worst ideas you’ve ever had.” Scowling, I grit, “Lake boys? Are you out of your fucking mind?” I’ve heard some questionable stuff coming out of Robbie’s mouth but this takes the cake.

Looking at me in surprise, Robbie shrugs, “I don’t see a problem with it...”

“I do.”

Robbie frowns. “Good thing you’re just her fake uncle then, not her real one and you’re not her father.”

No, but if everything goes as planned, I will be her husband. She will be my wife and fill this house with my children.

“India needs a real man,” I tell him, “not a stream of fuckboys who end up messing with her head and body.”

“A real man?” Robbie guffaws quietly. “You’re making it sound as if you think I should let India be the arm candy of some rich, old guy.”

That’s not that far from the truth. “Not an old guy,” I correct. “Just older.”

“Forget it,” Robbie scoffs, “no way, am I letting India be the plaything of someone twice her age.”

His words make my heart feel abrasive in my chest and I stretch my fingers, clutching my fist and opening it to reduce some tension.

I haven’t done murder in a long time but suddenly I’m tempted to do just that when looking at Robbie’s arrogant face. His daughter is *mine*. I wince. Fuck, I need to calm down.

“Your turn,” I say in a cold voice, but Robbie doesn’t notice and happily moves his pawn. We play in silence and I listen to the girls talking outside. India’s laughing, her voice surprisingly sensual for a girl her age and she

takes her time responding to Ronnie's questions.

She's attentive like that, responsible and truth to be told she blossomed into a young woman I never thought she'd be. The changes were subtle and I barely noticed until about a year ago. Her body had morphed into nothing short of a nymph, her eyes becoming less innocent and gaining a heated glimmer, her conversation skills becoming less shallow.

It made me look at her differently. She used to jump up and down in my bed and now she's going to lie with me in it. Rubbing my lips, I carefully calculate my next move and we play for about fifteen minutes more, until darkness falls and we have to switch on the light.

Leaning forward in my chair, I wrap my fingers around my pawn, moving it and declaring, "Check mate."

"Fuuuck," Robbie exhales, kicking the table and his frustration's palpable. "Fuck, Ronnie is going to be so disappointed. Ugh..." he wails, rubbing his eyes and then he shakes his head. He reaches for my scotch again, exclaiming,

"Go on then, hotshot. Tell me what you want."

Giving him a firm look I say, "I want your daughter."

The clock's ticking on the wall as Robbie stares at me. His mouth falls open and he drops the bottle he was holding, letting it roll over the oriental carpet. With narrowed eyes, he says,

“What the fuck did you just say?”

Rubbing my jaw I reply because I'm not backing down, “I want your daughter. I want India to be mine.”

Robbie's eyes glaze over and he does a move as if he's thinking about attacking me and I raise my hands. “Hear me out. I'll be good to her, I'll give her whatever she desires, marry her...”

“Marry her?” Robbie lets out an amazed laugh. “You marrying my daughter,” he points at his chest, “not a chance in hell. Fuck no, am I giving her to you.”

“Robbie...” I begin in a calming voice, trying to keep my agitation under wraps.

“Don't Robbie me.” His eyes fire. “This was your plan all along, take my

daughter and you thought I'd agree?" Shaking his head, he adds, "You're sicker than I thought."

"I have feelings for her," I reply in a hard tone, "real ones, deep ones..."

"She's a kid!" Robbie yells, standing up. "A virgin and you think I'll throw her to a man like you? You think I'll let you ruin her?"

Standing up, I button my suit replying, "I won't ruin her. I will treat her better than anyone ever has."

"The fuck is that supposed to mean," Robbie says, his eyes narrowing, "You think you're better than me because you sit on gold, because you live alone in this cold, mausoleum like house?" He points at me, "Guess what, you're not better than me. I don't think that and neither does Ronnie or India."

"Listen to me..." I start patiently even though I'm beginning to lose my temper but Robbie refuses.

"No, I'm not listening. I don't care if you die alone in this house, Clay. Don't care what you do or how you choose to live your life but you're not getting my daughter."

He walks over to the door but I close it, looking him straight in the eyes.

“Those aren’t the rules of the game,” I say between my teeth.

“Fuck the game! And get the fuck out of my way.”

“Robbie,” I say in a strained voice, following him as he walks down the curving staircase. “Robbie!”

He doesn’t stop, his body shaking and his clenched hands tremble at his sides. Moving out to my porch, he marches into the garden where the girls are. It’s a beautiful, tranquil night and had things gone as they were supposed to, India would have enjoyed it with me. Anger rages in me when I realize how confused she will be now.

Her father’s acting like a maniac and as much as I want to throttle him for behaving this way, I can’t.

“India,” Robbie shouts, “Ronnie!”

Letting out a squeak, Ronnie races toward him, jumping up and wrapping her legs around his waist. “Did you win? You won, didn’t you?”

My eyes go to India and as she walks to me, I notice a pulse flutter in her

throat and she strokes a hand down her neck. “I think you’re the one who won,” she whispers, “I’m right, aren’t I?”

Her eyes turn curious and she tilts her head to the side, like a kitten that’s just seen a yarn. “What did you wish for?”

You. Only always you.

“Nothing!” Robbie snarls, putting Ronnie down and not that gently and she gives him a sour look. “He doesn’t want anything.”

“You have to want something,” India breathes, frowning and she lets out a yelp when Robbie pulls at her so hard that she stumbles backward.

“Careful!” I snap and Robbie gives me a look full of hate, one he’s never given me in all the years we’ve known each other.

“Don’t tell me how to treat my daughter!” He pulls at her arm, “India, move it. You too, Ronnie.”

“Why are you acting like a caveman?” Ronnie asks, running after her daughter and husband on her wedges. “What the heck happened up in the library?”

“You don’t want to know,” Robbie barks, cursing when India wriggles free from him.

“I’m not going until you tell us what’s going on.” She looks at Robbie who firmly shuts his mouth and then she pleadingly turns to me.

“You’re going whether you want to or not.”

“What’s gotten into you?” Ronnie hisses but Robbie doesn’t answer and Ronnie reluctantly gets into the car.

India shakes her head at Robbie. “I’m nineteen you can’t make me.”

“Indiana Rochelle Penrose,” Robbie yells at the top of his lungs, “get in the fucking car now.”

Backing away from her dad, India looks at me and to my surprise she runs over to me, slamming into my body in a frantic hug. Burying her face against my neck, she clutches me with her hands, grasping as if she doesn’t want to let go.

I don’t either. But I have to. I don’t want to cause a rift between her and her family. I will leave things to calm down a little and once they have I’ll remind Robbie that the rules of the game can’t be broken.

And if he is uncooperative one more time, I won't hesitate to take more drastic measures.

Stroking my hand over India's hair, I rasp, "Uncle Clay loves you. Always know that." Kissing her temple, I add, "Go. Go to your family..."

I don't get to finish my sentence before India is yanked out of my arms and I get a fist on my mouth, cracking my upper lip.

Ronnie screams and so does India, putting her hand up to close her eyes and Robbie sneers,

"That's what you got for sniffing around my daughter." He pulls at India's arm. "Move it!"

He drags her over to the vehicle and she reluctantly gets inside, immediately turning around to look outside the window at me and I brush off the blood on my lip with my knuckles, nodding at her.

I want her to know everything will be all right. That she can always count on me.

Standing on my courtyard, I watch them drive off. She's gone. For now.

But she will be back. Those are the rules of the game. And they can't be broken.

He shouldn't have hit me. He shouldn't have insulted me that way in front of his daughter. I'll need to retaliate and I shudder when thinking I had buried that past but then again...once a mobster, always a mobster.

CHAPTER FIVE

India

Robbie's hands shake around the steering wheel and I wince in the backseat. Ronnie's quiet, looking out the window and I feel like crying. What just happened at Clay's? I've never seen my dad act that way toward his best friend.

What happened during the game that it suddenly made Robbie snap so hard and turn on Clay like that? Did it have anything to do with Clay's wish? What did he wish for?

My belly recoils, my throat burning from how badly I need to ask Robbie about what happened. I can't believe he hit Clay and I dig my nails into the seat. "R...Robbie...", I try but he just snaps.

"Not now!"

Ronnie's head whips around, her eyes turning pleading. "Stud...?"

But not even Ronnie can get through to him and he shakes his head, pinching his lips. As soon as the car stops, I bolt and run into the trailer. The door slams behind me, playing tug of war with the wind and I run to the comfort of my bed. Throwing myself down, I bury my head into the pillows.

Uncle Clay, Clay, Clay...

Chanting his name in my head over and over helps a little, but not nearly enough. Squeezing my eyes, I tense up my whole body before relaxing in an attempt to calm down but nothing helps, not until Ronnie comes into my room and sits on the edge of my bed.

"Momma...," I choke, blinking away the tears and I never call her momma but right now it feels appropriate. I need a mother's care to soothe the heartbreak and she rubs my back, humming in a low voice.

"I know, bugs...," she whispers, "I know."

"I love him," I breathe, my skin tuning flaming hot and her hand stops on my back before she lets out a long sigh.

“Don’t be silly. You’re young. You don’t know anything about love.”

Turning around, I peer up at her. “Yes, I do. I’ve watched you and Robbie my whole life. I want a love like yours.”

And I want it with Clay. For once in my life I want to feel *wanted*.

Ronnie pinches her lip before giving me a soft smile. “And you will have that. Just not with Uncle Clay.” Bending down, she gives me a kiss on the forehead before walking out and the door closes. Alone in the dark, I listen to what’s happening outside. The walls are so thin nothing goes unnoticed.

I hear Robbie slamming the cupboards, looking for something to drink. He’s cursing and Ronnie’s trying to talk some sense into him but he’s too worked up. Their voices rise then fall and they argue before they begin murmuring frantic words I can’t quite make out. My cheeks heat at the sudden sounds of moaning and then there’s the creaking of their bed.

It slams against the wall and Ronnie’s moan turn short and snappy, mingling with Robbie’s grunts. I put my hands over my ears, curling into a ball. If Uncle Clay knew this is what I have to listen to, he’d dissolve into thin air from pure rage. Twenty minutes later, the animalistic sounds stop and I hear Ronnie murmur,

“Stud, I think it’s time you tell me what went down. What the hell did he

ask for?”

My ears perk, my heart pounding like a drum when Robbie replies, “India. He asked for our daughter.”

Panting, I stare at my door and I’m prepared to race all the way to Uncle Clay’s house. *Me*. Of all the things in the world he wanted me. A smile spreads across my face, butterflies dance in me and it feels as if the world’s rose tinted again. Slamming a hand over my mouth, I let out a laugh and I feel reborn

Uncle Clay wants me just as much as I want him.

“He’ll never have her,” Robbie sneers and I freeze. “Fuck Ronnie, you don’t even know some of the things he’s done....a man like that touching my daughter? I’d rather have my nails torn off with a tweezer.”

“Just don’t get yourself all worked up again,” Ronnie soothes. “Everything will be fine. We’ll just break off all contact with Clay and lay low, okay?”

Robbie agrees and I roll my eyes when they’re at it again. From the way, they act I’m surprised I don’t have one thousand siblings. Rain begins smattering against my window and I drift off but my sleep is light and restless, which is why it’s no surprise that a sound from the outside, wakes me up in the middle of the night.

Blinking, I look around. Was that the sound of a car door slamming? Soon after, I hear boots stomp over the gravel and unease fills me. It sounds as if there's a whole army out there and I take a peek out the window. A lump forms in my throat when I see a lineup of black clothed, broad shouldered figures and I twitch when they knock on our door.

"Who the fuck is it?" Robbie growls and all three of us leave our beds. Robbie's in his boxers, Ronnie's in his t-shirt and I'm in one of old Ronnie's old nightgowns when the door is kicked down and we scream in shock.

Ronnie and I reach for each other, hugging and cowering in the corner while Robbie throws himself in front of us, protecting us with his body. "Take whatever you want," he shouts, "just don't hurt my family."

The men remain emotionless, rumbling, "We're not here to hurt you." They point at me and I begin shaking. "We're here for the girl."

My eyes flare and I shake my head, my thoughts frantically racing in my mind. They can't just take me, they can't...but they can. Somehow they restrain both Robbie and Ronnie and hands clasp my upper arms. I feel ready to faint when they exclaim,

"Rules are rules. Clay sends his wishes."

Knees weakening, I let out a pant. It's Clay who sent them. Locking eyes with Ronnie and Robbie, I squirm when they charge for me again, whispering, "Don't. Let me go."

They stop in their tracks. They know. They know what's in my heart and they know Clay won't budge. He never backs down when he wants something. Fighting him to begin with was useless.

"Stay safe," Ronnie whispers and Robbie squeezes his fists but he doesn't do anything.

"Bugs..." he croaks and tears prickle my eyes as I'm dragged off. I wish things had been different and that he had accepted Clay's formal request. He refused and these are the consequences

"Bye dad," I whisper and it's the first time I've ever called him that. A lump forms in my throat as I'm pulled into a car and looking back, I watch the trailer park become smaller and smaller.

"Look straight ahead," the men sitting beside me orders and I take a deep breath. "Your old life is behind you. You're Clay's now."

Wrong. I was *always* Clay's.

Stumbling up to Clay's mansion, I blink at the foyer lights when I'm pushed inside. My jaw drops when Clay comes down the staircase, looking ready to do murder. "Watch how the fuck you handle her," he growls, shoving at the man who brought me to him.

"Orders were to deliver her and that's what I did. Besides, this was just a favor and not something we owe you."

Clay's jaw clenches and he takes a step closer to the man. "You could've at least let her put her shoes on." His mouth snaps. "Get out."

The man leaves, along with two others and my eyes dart to Clay. He's not looking at me, his brow furrowed and a couple of buttons in his shirt are open. My heart sinks when I realize how troublesome he looks, because he's the kind who wants things to go smoothly.

Rubbing the back of his neck, he murmurs, "I'm sorry about that. Didn't mean for things to go this way."

Swallowing, I murmur, "Who are they?"

"Old friends of mine."

Oh sure. “They don’t look very friendly,” I say and Clay flexes his jaw.

“They are, trust me. Don’t worry about them.”

He doesn’t want to talk to about it, doesn’t think it’s appropriate for my ears. Yeah...there’s that overprotectiveness again. I wrap my arms around me. “You always tell me what to do and I always listen, don’t I?”

Finally his eyes go to mine and they’re deep and stirring with emotions I’ve never seen in a face before. I don’t even think I could name them all. They’re too grownup, too unfamiliar and a slow burning fire sizzles in me at the thought of seeing what he feels for me in his eyes again and again until it becomes familiar.

“You should. I’ll always have your best interest at heart.” He hisses and cups my cheek. “Forgive me if they were too rough for you or if it made you skittish.”

“At first it did,” I whisper, licking my lips and Clay winces, “when I didn’t know why they were there but then they said they would bring me to you.”

Clay’s eyes darken. “How did you feel then?”

I drag a breath. “Wanted.”

And I still feel wanted. Giddy when Clay clasps my hand and I inertly follow him into the living room. Everything goes fine until he drops my hand and I realize I’m actually alone with him. I’ve never been alone with him and I’m dressed in close to nothing. Clay seems very methodical about the whole thing, keeping his eyes to himself before sitting down on the chaise.

“Come sit in my lap,” he orders gently and I flush. I feel like tugging at my nightgown but if I do I’ll probably flash him my underwear and I bite my lip. Something dark covers his eyes and he frowns. “You’re not wary of your uncle Clay are you?”

I shake my head. I don’t care what business he’s involved in. To me he’s just a man I’ll always accept no matter what. Crossing the floor, I sit down in his lap and I can barely breathe. It gets even worse when he strokes my hair from my face and watches me as if he never before noticed how many colors there are in one sunset. He takes in every little detail of mine and his eyes say it doesn’t matter how many colors one sunset has.

They still pale in comparison to me.

“I shouldn’t have ripped you out of bed like that.” He swiftly glances at my nightgown. “I should’ve waited until morning but I couldn’t last the night with you.”

My lips curve. “You’re a poor loser.”

He slowly shakes his head, not wanting any lightheartedness right now as if this is the most important moment of his life. “I’m a man who wants what I’m owed. You do understand that things have changed now, India?”

“I know.” I say, readily agreeing to this.

Clay frowns as if in deep thoughts. “I’m going to want everything from you...,” he pauses, “since you lack experience some of it may shock you

“Please, Uncle Clay,” I say with a furiously red face. “Do we have to talk about that?”

“I’m not just referring to the physical stuff,” he hurries to say, “I’ll need more than that.” He curses again. “I’m not the easiest of men, India but you’re going to have to keep up with me.” His gaze flickers to my lips. “Do you think you can do that?”

“You always tell me I can do whatever I set my mind to,” I smile and he smiles back.

“That’s my girl.” He gives me a pat on the back. “Now go to bed. You can

take the guestroom you always take.”

Staring at him in shock, I try not to show that it just felt as if I got a bucket of ice water dropped over my head. “B...but I thought I’d be sleeping with you.”

A growl erupts from his chest, exciting me so much I’m about to fly off the handle but then he pushes it down. “India, I would get you pregnant in a heartbeat and I don’t think you want that deep down.”

Worry goes to my head because he’s right about that. Ronnie and Robbie, they would freak out...it would break them knowing I’d gone in their footsteps when they’ve always wanted me to have my first child at the age of forty.

I frantically lick my lips. “There’s p...protection.”

Clay’s eyes narrow. “What do you know about protection?” he snaps and I squirm.

“Nothing...I just thought...”

“Hush,” he says gently, “we’ll talk about this in the morning.”

But I need to talk about this now! Pushing down the aggravation, I rise and mutter, “Fine then. Keep your hands to yourself. We’ll see how long you’ll be able to last before you explode.”

“India,” he growls in warning and I whirl around, boring my eyes into his.

“Why do you keep calling me that? Why can’t you just call me darlin like you used to?”

Silence spreads in the room, causing the electricity between us to reach heights I didn’t think it could reach and I breathlessly wait for his reaction. His eyes lower before he reluctantly purrs, “Darlin...”

The vibration of his voice drums through me until I feel electrified and I pant, about to lose my balance when he bolts out of the chaise and pulls me to him. Groaning dangerously, he slants his mouth over mine. I panic a little, feeling a danger in him I’ve never felt before.

He keeps it so safely tucked inside of him. But it’s there...it lingers beneath his expensive clothes and I don’t know what to do with it. I’m too inexperienced, too naïve and I gasp in surprise. He uses my amazement against me, deepening the kiss until it feels as if I’m levitating.

“Clay...,” I pant, “please...”

“Go to bed.” He drops me abruptly and I stare at him. He lets out a hiss and turns his back to me. “India, go to bed before this gets out of hand.”

I hesitate, wanting him so much I don’t know what to do but then he snaps.

“Suit yourself,” he growls, reaching for me but the seriousness of the situation dawns on me and I back off. He gets a wild look in his eyes. “Darlin, for fucks sake, don’t play with me when I’m like this.” He stabs his fingers through his hair, his frustration palpable and my heart sinks.

Breathing an excuse, I run upstairs. If we give in, I’ll end up like another version of Ronnie. Clay thinks I don’t want that and he’s right. My mind doesn’t want that.

But my body and heart does.

CHAPTER SIX

India

I wake up before Clay, just two hours after sunrise. Yesterday my emotions were in a whirlwind and the pounding of my heart kept me awake almost the whole night. I feel different. Mature and as if I've absorbed some secret knowledge just by kissing Clay.

It's as if his kiss changed me and I don't feel like a girl anymore, but a woman.

And not just any woman. Clay's woman.

Getting out of bed, I walk over to the closet and it's already filled with things I'll need. However it's not my usual style. No tube tops or shorts, just demure dresses, pants and blouses. A smile crosses my lips. Is this Clay's way of making sure my butt cheeks don't hand out anymore?

Sniggering, I put on a flowy dress that strokes the carpet as if it's a pet as I cross the hallway. Outside Clay's bedroom, I can't help myself and I take a peek even though I know I shouldn't be spying on a sleeping man. To my relief, the door doesn't creak and Clay doesn't wake up.

He's on his stomach, face down and with his arms spread to the sides as if he's hugging the whole bed. I feel a stirring at the sight of him. His back is amazingly muscular and I flush when I remember how many times I used to piggyback on him and dig my legs into his side to get him to go faster.

Clay would always oblige of course, never saying no to me. He can't say no to me, that's the thing. Once Ronnie told me a man's inability to say no to you means he loves you so much he can't do anything that could potentially jeopardize the relationship.

And I bet that if I wanted to, I could walk straight out of here, walk back home and he wouldn't stop me. Rules are rules but I don't think they apply to me. Biting my lip, I close the door and leave him sleeping in peace.

Down in the kitchen, I pick out all the ingredients I'll need to make waffles. I want to surprise Clay when he comes down even though I'm about as good at cooking as, well...Clay.

Whipping the batter, I taste some on my finger but nearly choke on it when the door silently opens. I just stand there, probably looking like a deer in the

headlights when a guy wearing a baseball cap steps inside. I open my mouth to scream when I realize he probably knows Clay since he had a key.

He seems just as perplexed to find me here and his forehead furrows. “I didn’t know Clay had a daughter.”

Gulping, I shake my head. “I’m not his daughter.”

“Then who the hell are you?” He grins. “You’re too young to be his girlfriend.”

My face heats. “But I am. I am...*his*.”

The expression on the guy’s face goes from amused to terrified and he twitches when Clay out of nowhere marches into the kitchen, dressed in only a pair of sweatpants and it’s the most casual I’ve ever seen him.

The most furious too and I gulp.

“Uncle Clay who’s this man?” I ask as Clay’s eyes rage and the guy seems confused.

“Uncle?” he blurts before holding up his hands in defense. “Look I meant no harm. I was just dropping off your groceries as usual.” He puts the bag

down, a little too roughly and an apple falls out, rolling across the floor.
“Sorry.”

“Get out before I put you in a fucking coma,” Clay sneers and I gasp, my hand flying to my throat and I let out a whimper. Clay doesn’t hear it, stalking over to the guy and he takes a knife into his hands. The guy throws an anxious glance at me but he shouldn’t have because it only pisses Clay off. “Don’t look at her. You’re lucky the girl’s here or you would’ve been dead.”

A haze covers my eyes. I can’t believe he’s talking like that. That’s *gangster* talk.

And my uncle is no gangster. Or is he...? Maybe those rumors were true.

Noticing my discomfort, Clay puts the knife away, jerking his head and the guy bolts out the door, definitely not looking as tough as he did when he walked inside. The door slams and my eyes hesitantly go to Clay.

He’s squeezing his fists so hard, his knuckles whiten and he takes a couple of deep breaths. I’m waiting for him to apologize. Say something along the lines of *I’m sorry you had to witness that* because that’s what he usually does. He always apologizes when he’s done something wrong.

Not this time though and when he looks at me his gaze pierces right through me and makes me run hot and cold. “Did you speak to him?” Clay

asks in a low tone and I squirm.

“I answered his questions.”

Clay nods stiffly. “You had a conversation then?”

“Wouldn’t call it t...that.”

“But you allowed him to enjoy your presence?”

My jaw drops. “What would you have me do? Just leave the room as soon as another man enters?”

Clay’s eyes turn emotionless because apparently that’s exactly what he wants. “India, things are different now. You’re mine which means that as soon as someone of the opposite gender approaches you, I need you to scream for your Uncle Clay. Understood?”

In my mind that sounds so unrealistic. “I can’t do that,” I breathe and Clay tenses, his eyes hardening and I pant, “I mean yes...I’ll do whatever you want.”

He eases, the change in him instant and the edginess is gone.

“Perfect words form a perfect mouth said by a perfect girl,” he purrs, making me blush and I squirm from the intense look in his eyes. I try to turn around to continue with the waffles but he grabs me around the waist and puts me down on the kitchen island.

“I’m trying to get breakfast ready,” I stutter but Clay doesn’t seem to care about what I have in mind right now. He seems more interested in what he has in mind.

“I don’t want breakfast.” His eyes flash. “I want you.” He slides his hands up my thighs, squeezing the flesh until I go numb with lust. “I want these,” he groans, before licking his lips. “And I want what’s between them even more.”

“B...but you said we couldn’t...”

“That was before I saw another male around you.” Dark need colors his eyes. “I hunger for you beyond a normal appetite, darlin.”

I gasp when he pushes my legs apart, ripping my undies and I cry out when his mouth’s suddenly on me. He’s relentless, kissing me with a fervor that causes me to come with a force I didn’t think I had in me.

“You make me happier than someone like me has the capacity for,” he groans, the sound rumbling low in his chest and I feel as if I’ve just given birth to the world for this man. Tears push behind my eyes. Not because I’m sad but because I never knew someone could want me this much. Clay’s lids flutter. “I can tell there’s more to life by just looking at you face.”

“Clay...,” I whimper and our mouths clash, our tongues twisting and the kiss bruises and peels off any resistance between us. I’m scared of getting pregnant but right now I don’t care. I need to be close to him, feel his skin pressed against mine and when he yanks me to his chest, I cry out.

The heat between us burns. It sizzles and makes me feel heady and drunk.

I love him.

Not superficially but with trust and innocence because I know he will never hurt me. And when I tug at his sweatpants, he doesn’t stop me.

Clay

She’s so small. I’ve never fully realized how small she is until now. She’s my daintiest prize and I finally have her to myself. The thought makes my head

spin and I pull her dress down, my eyes latching on to the yellow bra she's wearing. The cups are sheer, causing her nipples to peak out like peachy little suns and I flick my thumb over them, extracting a lusty moan from her.

India tosses her head back, a distressed look on her face as if she doesn't know where this is going. And how could she. She's never done this before. "I'll be gentle," I murmur and she nods but I curse myself when I squeeze her tits in my greedy palms and India winces. "Sorry."

"Don't apologize," she whimpers, looking like a hot little mess as she sits there with her legs dangling. My eyes flare to hers.

"Why?"

"Because you're perfect. You can't do anything wrong." A look that can only be described as borderline worship flashes on her face. "Everything you do is good and right."

Isn't that a lie but that's what she's been brought up to think. *Look at your Uncle Clay, he's a good man. Find a husband like your Uncle Clay when you're older, he won't ever disappoint you.* Her family practically brainwashed her about me, coating me in icing sugar and spice and everything nice until I must've looked like a fucking fairy in India's eyes. And judging by the glitter in her eyes, I know I must be right.

She's not scared of me. Not one bit. She probably would be if she knew the whole truth.

But I would rather have her hate me than be afraid of me. Not that I'll ever do anything that would make her hate me and I wouldn't do anything that would make her fear me either, which is why I plan on being insanely careful with her.

"I'm going to need you to hold on to me," I say, boring my eyes into hers and she gets a look that's a mix of hesitation and trust. She'll follow me anywhere. To the highest mountain, the deepest waters, the darkest forests and her arms go around my neck. I push her to me, making sure her face stays buried in my neck before checking to see if she's ready.

She's soaked, liquid dripping straight from the source and I groan when she squirms.

"I like how your skin smells," she whispers, giving me a lick and I cry out, entering her in one, slow move and she squeals, her body going rigid. "Is it supposed to feel like I'm about to rupture?" she asks frantically, breathing as if she's about to hyperventilate.

Yeah," I grunt.

India clings to me, squirming when I push farther and I yank her face to

me, feasting on her and feeling her out until I'll be able to memorize her from within. Know how the walls of the inside of her mouth feel, how soft the tip of her tongue is and she moves with a heat that blows my mind.

Her hips buck when I suck on her neck and ripples move through my body and I grind against her. She moans in delirium, squeezing around me as I stretch her and I put my hand between us, flicking her clit and she bounces.

The pulse in her pussy is maddening and I grit my teeth, rolling into her the way a wave rolls over a defenseless shore and she trembles, allowing me to wet her, to change her colors, to go from light to dark and the mud created between water and sand is the glue in the middle of us.

“Push back at me,” I groan, cupping her hips and I help her, showing her how to use her body to get as much pleasure as possible out of this and her eyes flare. Inwardly I grin, loving that she's loving it. “That's it,” I grunt, nodding my head in encouragement but regret it the moment something inside of her snaps and she begins bucking as if this is the fucking wild, wild west.

“India...,” I warn, not knowing whether to just clamp my hands down on her to get her to stop or just shut up.

“What?” she pants, digging her little nails into my pecs. “You always say I can do whatever I want.”

Fuck, I do say that but if she doesn't stop I'll explode all over her. I had been planning on pulling out. Doing the decent thing to make sure no distress is caused to India but her pussy refuses to let go and my cock loves her too much to ever listen to me.

Cursing, I pick up the pace until we fall into a frantic rhythm and our eyes lock. We slap and smack against each other, stare until it feels as if we don't have our own body anymore but only the one we share together. We have one heart, one mind and above all one fucking love.

I split her open, forcefully coming inside of her and she cries out.

The shocked sound rings in my ears for minutes afterward and I pant, pushing away the hair from her face and she stares at me with a flushed face. "I had to do it," I groan. "I couldn't stop."

Her lower lips trembles. "Am I imagining or does my womb already feel different?"

I bite my lip to not laugh. "You're imagining. You can't feel anything so soon, darlin." There's no way I got her pregnant on our first try and I tell her that to calm her down but she's so dazed right now, I'm not even sure she cares.

Pulling out of her, I hold her to me and squeeze my eyes. She breathes into my ear and the buzz calms me. Her hands slide down my body and I don't have any runes anymore. I had them removed when I realized I was going to make India mine.

Nobody outside of the mob had ever seen them and I've always looked respectable on the outside but now I'm respectable on the inside. Thanks to India. She turns me into a righteous man, so righteous I left the mob.

What I did was considered a taboo, a grave offense and the hardest thing I've ever done but I did it for India. She can't even see the scars, they've healed and my dark past was washed clean the minute I understood she was more important.

None of the other mobsters had ever done what I've done and they told me it would be a mistake. But it's not a fucking mistake and I take India's face into my hands. "What would I have done if you hadn't been born, darlin?" I rasp and her eyes shimmer. "You're my beginning and my ending. I love you Indiana Penrose."

Epilogue

Clay-Two years later

There's nothing quite like waking up next to India. The slow sunrise dances over her face, rays of pink and gold coating her divine body until my breath tightens in my throat.

Not that I need oxygen anymore. Not since she became mine.

Tugging at my lower lip, to keep my groan to myself I push the sheet aside, my eyes going to the C-section scar on her belly. She was so brave when she gave birth to our daughter and the moment our child was placed on India's chest, my world was complete.

Every piece of the puzzle was exactly where it should be.

I slide my hand up India's inner thigh and she lets out a soft moan, her face turning to the side and the corners of my lips curve. She sleeps like the dead these days, hasn't sleepwalked once ever since she moved in with me. I like to think it's because she simply can't tear herself away from me or my bed.

Squeezing her flesh, I press my lips against hers right before her eyes flare. "Clay..." she whimpers, her chest heaving from her inhales and I roll on top of her.

"Call me uncle," I growl in a guttural voice, fisting her hair and she lets out an embarrassed laugh and I can't help but to grin back.

"What are you doing?" she hums, spreading her legs and sliding her hands down my shoulders. "It's too early in the morning."

"Don't care right now, darlin. I have to have you to myself before they come back."

With they, I mean Robbie and Ronnie and the baby. Things got sorted out between us eventually even though it took some time. They've been babysitting the whole weekend and it's not often India and I get some time for ourselves. The plan was to take her out of town, fly to a private island but we ended up unable to leave the house because I couldn't keep my hands off of her.

I know, I know...I'm stingy with my girl.

“Make it quick,” India pleads and her cheeks tint. “You know I need a couple of hours to calm down after we’ve done it.”

I hold down a chuckle. “Are you saying you don’t want your parents to know about all the filthy things I do to you in our bed?” I shake my head. “Think I made it pretty obvious when I knocked you up.”

“Don’t remind me,” India scowls. “It was so awkward walking around with my big belly in front of Robbie.” India bites her lip. “You won’t do it again, will you?”

Raising my brows, I purr, “What? Knock you up?” She nods and I bury my face in her throat, getting ready for some morning exercise. “I would never.”

Of course I will.

“Although,” India murmurs and my heart begins pounding from excitement, “maybe a sibling would be nice...”

“Say no more,” I growl and hit home.

The End

Thanks for reading this little story!! XOXO.

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