

G I L D E D D E C A D E N C E S E R I E S



I
HATE
ME

BLAKE HENSLEY

USAT BESTSELLING AUTHORS ZOE BLAKE & ALTA HENSLEY

Copyright © 2024 by Stormy Night Publications and Poison Ink Publications (Zoe Blake) and Alta Hensley

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

The author and publisher do not give permission for any part of this book to be used to create, feed, or refine artificial intelligence models, for any purpose.

Published by Stormy Night Publications and Design, LLC.

Hensley, Blake

Blake, Zoe

Hensley, Alta

Then Hate Me

Cover Design by Dark City Designs

Original Custom Illustration by the artist Yozart

This book is intended for *adults only*. Spanking and other sexual activities represented in this book are fantasies only, intended for adults.

INTRODUCING

BLAKE HENSLEY

**The sinfully decadent dream project
of best friends and USA TODAY Bestselling authors,
Zoe Blake and Alta Hensley.**

Alta Hensley, renowned for her hot, dark, and dirty romances, showcases her distinctive blend of alpha heroes, captivating love stories, and scorching eroticism.

Meanwhile, Zoe Blake brings a touch of darkness and glamour to the series, featuring her signature style of possessive billionaires, taboo scenes, and unexpected twists.

Together, as Blake Hensley, they combine their storytelling prowess to deliver “Twice the Darkness,” promising sordid scandals, hidden secrets, and forbidden desires of New York’s jaded high society in their new series,

Gilded Decadence.

THEN HATE ME
A DARK BILLIONAIRE
ENEMIES TO LOVERS
ROMANCE

GILDED DECADENCE SERIES



BLAKE HENSLEY

with

ZOE BLAKE

with

ALTA HENSLEY

THE GILDED DECADENCE SERIES

BY BLAKE HENSLEY

A seductively dark tale of privilege and passion.

Ripping off the gilded veneer of elite privilege exposes the sordid scandals, dark secrets, and taboo desires of New York's jaded high society. Where the corrupt game is a seductive power struggle of old money, social prestige, and fragile fortunes...

only the most ruthless survive.

The More I Hate

Book One

#arrangedmarriage

Then Hate Me

Book Two

#kidnapped/capture

My Only Hate

Book Three

#officeromance

Fair Love of Hate

Book Four

#bodyguard

A Hate at First

Book Five

#agegap

CONTENTS

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Chapter 21](#)

[Chapter 22](#)

[Chapter 23](#)

[Chapter 24](#)

[Chapter 25](#)

[Chapter 26](#)

[Chapter 27](#)

[Chapter 28](#)

[Chapter 29](#)

[Chapter 30](#)

[Chapter 31](#)

[Chapter 32](#)

[Chapter 33](#)

[Chapter 34](#)

[Chapter 35](#)

[Chapter 36](#)

[Chapter 37](#)

[Chapter 38](#)

[Chapter 39](#)

[Chapter 40](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[About Blake Hensley](#)

[Also By Blake Hensley](#)

[About Zoe Blake](#)

[Also By Zoe Blake](#)

[About Alta Hensley](#)

[Also By Alta Hensley](#)

[Thank you](#)

CHAPTER 1



MARKSEN

*M*y fingers flexed, itching for the moment when I would snatch Olivia from her blissful ignorance and make her family pay for their treachery.

I brushed a spiderweb aside and checked my watch, the seconds ticking down to the fateful moment I had spent months anticipating.

My heart pounded with vicious glee as I yanked on the wrists of my leather gloves, ready to seize what was mine.

After all the Manwarrings had taken from me, it was time for them to pay in blood.

Olivia.

The Manwarrings' precious jewel.

Their weakness.

She was perfect.

Young, beautiful, and completely vulnerable.

Olivia had wandered between the trees ahead, her wispy red dress clinging to her slender curves as she admired a marble statue that created an interesting backdrop to the wedding venue.

So pure, so virginal ... so utterly corrupt.

She would learn the price of her family's sins soon enough.

I crept closer through the brush, my boots scarcely stirring a leaf.

She tilted her head to study the sculpture, exposing the pale column of her neck.

How I longed to wrap my hands around that throat and squeeze the life from her pampered body.

But no, I had other plans.

Plans that would destroy her wretched family from the inside out.

The distant sounds of laughter and music from the wedding reached my ears, a cruel reminder of the joy that was denied to me. My life had become an unending nightmare, and until the Manwarrings faced the same fate, I would find no peace.

As I watched Olivia wander further into the forest, I marveled at the stark contrast between her delicate beauty and the darkness that surrounded her.

She paused before an erotic sculpture, its sensual curves casting shadows that seemed to dance around her. Her eyes, wide with wonder, traced the intricate details of the artwork, oblivious to the danger that stalked her.

With each step she took, the celebration in the distance grew fainter, its warmth and protection receding like a dying flame. It was as if the forest itself conspired with me, swallowing her up and leaving her defenseless to my vengeance.

I followed her, my footsteps silent as a predator closing in on its prey.

The wedding music was nothing more than a distant echo now, replaced by the rustling leaves and Olivia's ragged breathing.

I crept up behind her as she bent low for a closer look at the sculpture of the naked woman writhing in the final throes of ecstasy.

“Good evening, Ms. Manwarring,” I greeted her, my voice cold and unforgiving. “I do hope you’ve enjoyed your night ... for it’s about to take a rather unexpected turn.”

Olivia gasped and whirled around.

CHAPTER 2



OLIVIA

“What are you doing here?” I asked Marksens as he circled me, taking pictures with his vintage camera.

Without thinking, I angled my body, popping out my elbow with a hand on a hip, creating curves the camera lens would find more flattering.

I learned very early on to never let a camera find an unflattering angle, and the worst thing a person could do was to stand straight with their arms at their sides.

A straight line was the most unflattering shape for a woman’s body.

No matter how thin you were or how much spandex you had squeezing your organs and making your ribs ache, a straight line would make you look flat or, worse, fat.

For some reason, I didn’t want Marksens to see a bad picture of me, even if he was the one who took it.

“What do you mean?” he asked, circling me again while looking through the lens. “I’m here for the same reason you are. To celebrate your brother’s theft of what should have been mine.”

“Why do you care? He loves her. You don’t even know her, and you most certainly didn’t love her.”

Weaving a bit, I took another sip from the champagne flute I was holding. It was crisp and sweet. I may have been overindulging a little. It was a celebration, after all. If I wasn’t going to drink my fill here, then really, what was the point?

A strict diet of denial and hunger awaited me in the morning.

Tonight was about celebrating life and love, and I intended on doing just that, though maybe I should have celebrated the food before the drink.

“You can’t be that naïve,” Marksens practically spat. “I didn’t think any of the Manwarrings were capable of love.” The venom in his words made sirens go off in my head, but that couldn’t be right.

This was Marksens.

He was just upset, he would get over it.

“That isn’t true,” I argued, feeling defensive of my family name. Not that I knew firsthand, of course, but still, he didn’t need to know that.

“Sorry, princess. I should have clarified.”

His tone went back to calm and easygoing.

This was the Marksens I knew, and I relaxed again.

“Manwarring *men* love money and power. Manwarring *women* love... shoes and purses, I’m assuming.”

His easy, backhanded remark stung more than I was willing to let on.

“And you loved her? Is that it?”

“That isn’t the point. She was supposed to be my wife. I could’ve grown to love her,” he said casually, as if love were a game he might have won given enough time to practice.

I laughed at that notion. “Mr. DuBois, I think we both know you have no interest in love.” I cast a glance at him over my shoulder.

He raised one eyebrow. “Mr. DuBois?” he asked with a dark chuckle. “When did we become so formal, Olivia? We have known each other since we were children.”

“No,” I corrected. “We knew each other as children. Neither of us are children now, and as you and my brother

have had a falling out, we have not spoken socially for quite some time.”

“Maybe that’s true, Ms. Manwarring.”

He was teasing me.

Luc would be looking for me soon, I should get back to the party.

My wedding duties were finished. My speech was over, but whenever we were at a function together, Luc was sure to check in with me often, especially recently. He didn’t like me being out of his sight, particularly in such an open venue with limited security.

Still, I had to make sure Marksens wasn’t going to ruin this day for Amelia or my brother. Everything had been so perfect, and after what they had overcome to be together, they deserved the perfect wedding.

“You didn’t answer my question,” I said, trying not to look down at the statue at my feet. The image of the bronze woman lying on the ground, seeming to writhe in ecstasy, was ... distracting.

Studying her, I wanted to implore her to share her experiences, her secrets.

Was she putting on a performance as some women claimed they did to make their men think they enjoyed such acts, or was it possible for a woman to feel like the woman on the ground looked?

Sensually sated.

She looked satisfied and comfortable in her nudity, like she knew she was the object of desire and she was unashamed of reveling in it.

Amelia had once told me all great art pieces should make you feel and ask questions.

I had so many questions buzzing in my head, competing with the bubbles from the champagne. Almost like how Marksens was buzzing around me with his camera.

“What question was that?” He moved behind me.

Shivers ran down my spine at the next words he whispered next to my ear. “Did you ask me how pretty and taintable you look tonight?”

He stepped back as quickly as he had invaded my personal space, leaving behind the spicy, rich scent of his cologne.

“No, I asked why you are here. Did you say taintable? What does that even mean?”

“Ah, I did answer you. You should learn to pay more attention, princess. Maybe listen to me, instead of lusting after a cold, metal statue. I’m here because your brother took something of mine.”

“Please don’t cause problems,” I begged, choosing to ignore everything else he said.

Luc was happy, which, until Amelia came around, was not an emotion I associated with my big brother.

Before she entered his life, Luc was stoic, guarded, grumpy even, and never happy. Even after something happened that would have made most men happy, it still wasn’t the right word. I thought victorious was the closest he had ever come to happiness.

“I’m not the cause of anything. Can you look that way for me and tilt your head up?”

I followed his instructions without even thinking about it. Between being an heiress in my own right, and running an online magazine, I had been in so many professional photoshoots it didn’t even occur to me to not follow his command. Without even bothering to ask why he was taking so many pictures of me, I simply obeyed.

“Good girl,” he said, snapping another few photos.

The way he said those words, “good girl,” had me responding as if he growled them directly in my ear, as if they had another meaning which sent shivers running down my spine.

The air sparked and crackled with the sexual tension between us.

Just as quickly as that tension appeared, it faded, and I wasn't sure if it was even really there, or if I had imagined it.

“I think my brother did you a favor.”

“How's that? Look at me.”

I looked at him head-on for the first time, noticing how he wasn't wearing a tuxedo like society demanded of him for such an important formal function.

He was wearing an everyday business suit. It was a custom Hugo Boss, and it fit him perfectly. He actually looked quite handsome in it, but still, it was a wedding.

Really examining him now, I saw there were other things about his appearance that looked ... off.

His hair was a little mussed, but in a sexy way, like a lover had been running her fingers through it.

I wondered how those short, silky strands would feel between my fingers.

There was still just something else that was off.

Something that made me feel like I shouldn't be out here with him.

Something that sent red flags waving, and those sirens to go off in my head again.

Suddenly feeling self-conscious, I slid my right foot back to begin a subtle retreat, feeling as if I really shouldn't be out here with Marksens.

CHAPTER 3



OLIVIA

At least not alone.

It was fine, right?

It wasn't like I was that far from the party.

The other guests were just on the other side of that copse of trees.

"They are in love," I answered, sliding my left foot back, trying to focus on anything but him and the champagne which had gone to my head. "Don't you want a chance to find that for yourself?"

"Why would being married stop me from finding love? It would have stopped her, of course, but I would have still been free to do as I pleased. I still intended to find love with several different partners over the years. That has nothing to do with this. Your brother ruined a very lucrative business deal."

"Love is more important than money." I tossed my long auburn hair over my shoulder, glancing behind me as I took another step backward in my silent retreat.

"Princess, I don't know what fairy tales you've been reading, but you have been misinformed. Love is temporary. It fades as quickly as it appears. It's nothing but carnal desire caught on fire. It, like any other fire, can be extinguished."

I looked down at the bronze woman on her back with her arms lazily stretched over her head.

Was that what she felt?

Was she on fire still, the embers in her soul still glowing?

“Your brother had never met Amelia when he ruined my wedding. It wasn’t about loving her. It was about hurting *me*.”

Marksen’s voice pulled me out of my thoughts. I looked back up at him.

He must have seen something in my expression because the camera clicked several more times while I stared at this man and wondered if he was right.

Was love so temporary?

He had a point.

What Luc and Amelia had didn’t start as love, quite the opposite, but they were together now.

I had to defend my brother and new sister. “They are in love *now*.”

“Is that so?” He lowered the camera for a moment, then moved into my personal space again. “And why do you think that should matter?”

The heat from his body radiated through his suit. His blue eyes stared down at me like he could see all my secrets and inappropriate thoughts.

I bit my lip and cast my eyes down as he brushed a lock of my hair from my face and tucked it behind my ear.

Then his fingers curled under my chin and tilted my face up until my eyes met his. The air froze in my lungs.

His thumb brushed over my lower lip. “Tell me, Olivia,” he rasped, “why does that matter?”

“Love is the only thing that matters.” My answer was little more than a whisper.

“Do you think a man should do whatever he thinks is necessary to claim the woman he loves?”

My lungs wouldn’t expand, my ribs seeming to squeeze my insides as fear and adrenaline pounded through my veins, so I just nodded.

“Damn the rules, social expectations, rituals, reputations, and fortunes of others. Damn all of it as long as a man claims to love the woman?”

Mesmerized by his dark gaze, I nodded again.

He leaned in closer to me and, thinking for just a second he was going to kiss me, my lips opened.

“Tell me, princess. Has that ever worked out for the lovers in the end?”

My mind went blank.

The world was full of plays, poems, songs, and novels where a love story was the focal point. Forbidden love that went against societal norms was one of the most popular kinds of love stories.

I frowned.

Realizing the only ones that popped into my mind were fiction ... all of which ended in tragedy.

“Well, princess?” He leaned in so close his breath feathered across my lips. He smelled like cool mint and warm brandy.

I wanted him to lean in further and press his lips to mine, but then he was gone, standing a few feet from me, raising the camera to his eye again.

I shook my head, trying to clear the fog from my brain as I answered, “It worked out for Luc and Amelia.” They were here getting married in the wedding of her dreams.

Had he been about to kiss me?

There was no way Marks DuBois was actually making a pass at me just outside my brother’s wedding reception.

It just wasn’t done in my world.

The rules of decorum must be observed at all times.

“It’s not over yet, princess.” His lip curled beneath the camera as he kept pressing the shutter release.

“It is over,” I answered, a little confused. “They are married now. They get to live happily ever after.”

“Do you know why they end fairy tales at the wedding?”

“Because that is the end of the story?” I responded, not sure what he meant.

He shifted until he was blocking my escape, standing between me and the party. I tried to tell myself he was trying to catch the ambient light from the tents. I swallowed, my hands anxiously twisting the fabric of my dress. Too bad I didn't believe it.

He took a few steps forward, and I shifted backward.

“No, it's because that is when the hero thinks he has won. It's when he lets his guard down, and the villain rises and snatches back what is his.”

“Is that why you are here, Marksens? Are you trying to steal Amelia back?”

“Back to being so familiar, Ms. Manwarring? Shouldn't you be running back to catch the bouquet, princess?”

He came up to me again and plucked the champagne flute from my hand, holding it by its delicate stem and setting it in the grass to the side before kneeling to take more shots of me from a different angle. “Tell me. Now that Luc is married, does that mean soon your father will start taking offers for your hand?”

“Answer my question. And don't call me that,” I demanded.

He was hardly the first man to call me “princess,” but from his lips, it sounded like an insult.

“Answer mine first. Do you think there are things more important than love?”

Hadn't we been over this?

“No.” I crossed my arms in front of me and stared down my nose into the camera.

“That seems rather entitled and selfish. What about the effect love has on other people? People who are hurt by others falling in love.” He pressed forward, and I stumbled back a few more steps.

“How does this hurt you? You didn’t love her. Luc loves her!” I stomped my foot, then swayed a little, freeing my heel where it sank into the ground.

Marksen continued to snap pictures.

Having my photo taken felt different when he was behind the camera. It wasn’t like professional photoshoots I’d been at where the photographer remained cold and detached.

No, this was something else, something more sinister.

Was I a fly, being lured into a spider’s web?

I brushed off the thought. It was ridiculous. I could still hear the party going on behind me, so I was perfectly safe.

“How I feel about Amelia is completely irrelevant.” He circled me again, still relentlessly capturing multiple images of me.

“What?” I didn’t understand what he was saying.

I was a little dizzy, my thoughts coming slow and fuzzy from the drinks. I had clearly overindulged. That had to be why I was finding it so hard to follow his words.

“I’m not some schoolboy with a crush who had his heart broken.” He kept snapping pictures, and suddenly, I didn’t feel flattered by the lens.

I felt exposed.

I didn’t want him to take my picture.

I didn’t want him to have photos of me.

“Luc is probably looking for me. I should get back,” I said, a cold sweat sending shivers down my back. A nagging feeling in my gut told me this wasn’t a game anymore.

I was in trouble.

“I’m a man who had his reputation tarnished. Do you know what reputation is to a man like me? My family has spent generations building it so that people will trust us with their investments.” His words were spoken in a low growl. “My good name is everything, and your brother took that from me.”

“It will blow over.” I inched a few steps to the side, trying to get around him. I needed to return to the party, but he was blocking me. “I’m sure no one will remember what happened at that church in a few years. Besides, he said you started this feud. You struck first. He and you are alike, so you knew that if you drew blood, he would have to retaliate and sever a limb.”

“It doesn’t matter.”

He advanced a few more steps and I countered them, stepping back, further away from the party guests. “I say your brother started this. He took something that was mine, something I cared about, something that is hurting my business. My reputation. So I intend to settle the score by taking something from him, something he cares about.”

Every instinct in my body screamed that I was in danger, but I couldn’t get my feet to cooperate beyond the few steps I’d already taken.

“So you are going to take away his reputation?”

“No. He doesn’t care what other people think of him. It’s not his reputation I am going to ruin, princess.”

His smile, the same one I used to find charming, turned sinister.

“Amelia’s?” I asked, forcing myself to back up further. “Please don’t, she just started that nonprofit, and a lot of people are counting on her.”

His smile widened as he took a few long steps toward me.

My heartbeat pounded in my ears as he whispered, “Guess again, princess.”

I turned and ran with everything I had.

CHAPTER 4



OLIVIA

*M*y stilettos sank into the grass with each step and stumble, making escape from Marksen impossible.

I hadn't even taken three steps before his hand wrapped around my arm and yanked me back into him.

I tried to scream, but his other hand was around my lips in an instant.

His camera's bulky lens dug painfully into my back.

"Shhh, princess. We don't want to cause a scene and ruin your brother's big day," he taunted in my ear. "What would people say?"

His words were tinged with cruel humor.

I didn't understand what was happening or why he was doing this to me.

"Please," I whimpered behind his hand.

Either he didn't hear me or didn't care.

"We are going on a little trip, and you are going to be my good girl."

I fought him with everything I had, kicking, scratching, clawing.

The first thing they taught you when you were at a higher risk for kidnapping or being targeted was to do whatever you could to avoid being taken to a second location.

Once they got you to a second location, the chances of survival plummeted.

So I fought with every bit of strength I could muster.

Unfortunately, given the champagne coursing through my blood, my efforts weren't very effective.

I kicked at his legs with my new Jimmy Choo shoes, trying to stab him with their pointy heels, sending the clumps of grass and dirt they were covered in flying. I even tried clawing his arms.

His suit coat was thick enough I didn't think he even really felt my short gel French manicure's attempt at gouging into his flesh. Even my kicks weren't really slowing him down or dissuading him in the slightest.

Marksen was so much bigger than me.

Even with my added height from my stilettos, he was a good four inches taller than me. His shoulders were wider, and he seemed to have put on a lot more muscle since the last time I saw him. He had a good fifty to sixty pounds on me, easily.

"Keep struggling, little girl. I like it." His whispered words, laced with a promise of violence and need, sent fear running through my veins, along with something else.

Something darker.

I pushed the unfamiliar feeling of want aside. That was for later when I was in the safety of my therapist's office.

"No, please." I tried again.

My words were still muffled by his hand pressed over my mouth. Frustrated tears blurred my vision as I tried to fight him off, but his hands were strong, and his grip was almost painful.

I knew in the morning I would have a kaleidoscope of bruises wherever he touched me.

The further we got from the lights and sounds of the party the more the realization set in.

I was in danger.

Real danger.

Whatever Marksens wanted from me, he was going to take, and there wasn't a single thing I could do about it.

For the first time in my entire life, I was truly powerless.

What I wanted, or in this case, didn't want, was of no consequence, and no amount of threats, promises of money, or name-dropping would change that.

I tried to remember what else I had learned from the consultants my father made my sister and me sit down with. We had spent hours with them learning self-defense and how to avoid panic. I wasn't sure what he'd told us to do, mostly because I was panicking.

I kicked out again and dug my heel into the toe of his shoe.

He bit out a curse, and I managed to break from his grasp, knocking him to the ground before trying to run by him, back toward the safety of the party.

Marksens's hand wrapped around my ankle and pulled back hard.

Tossing me to the cold, unforgiving ground.

It knocked the wind out of me.

Coughing, I tried to regain my breath as I crawled to my hands and knees.

He threw himself on top of me, stopping me, crushing me with his weight.

"That was a very bad thing to do. I was going to be a gentleman about this. I wasn't going to hurt you. I was just going to take what I needed, and you would've been left unharmed. But you are leaving me no choice, little girl."

Marksens didn't sound like that charming boy I knew anymore.

His voice was different. Darker, harsher, void of the lighthearted laughter and banter I adored him for as a child.

This was the voice of a man pushed too far, full of hatred and promises of violence.

He lifted his body off me but kept his knee pressed painfully hard on my back, forcing me into the hard dirt, not giving me enough room to take a breath and call for help.

He pulled the long skirt of my dress up.

“No, please, please!” I sobbed. “Not like this.”

He wrapped his hand around my thin calf and pulled it back so he could grab my shoe. He took it off and threw it over to one of the sculptures, then did the same with its mate.

“There. Now, you have a few options, princess. Do as you are told, like a good girl, and this will all be much easier for you. Or you can be a brat and keep fighting. You will no doubt ruin your brother’s wedding with all the commotion, and it won’t change a thing, except you will be punished severely. Either way, you are coming with me.”

He stood and pulled me to my feet.

“You do look so pretty with your makeup ruined. Like a fallen angel,” he mumbled to himself before asking me, “Are you going to behave?”

The lights from the party were visible over his shoulder as the music from the band drifted to us on the evening breeze. If I screamed right now, someone might hear me. But it wouldn’t do any good. Even if anyone heard me over the music, they wouldn’t get to me in time.

“Why?” I met his blue eyes. “Why are you doing this to me?”

“Because I can,” he said before picking me up and throwing me over his shoulder.

“I’ll behave,” I said as he started walking.

“Good,” he said.

Blood rushed to my head, giving me vertigo. Pressure built, causing a headache, while the champagne made everything fuzzy.

His shoulder dug painfully into my stomach with each step he took.

Nausea made my head swim.

“Put me down,” I begged, not wanting to throw up.

He slapped my ass, sending a shot of electricity through my body. “Shut up.”

I made a mental note to add that to the things to discuss when at therapy.

It had to be the alcohol confusing my hormones.

I most certainly did not enjoy being manhandled, or spanked like a toddler.

He took me past the border of the park, through a dense forest. The leaves were just starting to turn bright oranges and reds, so the forest floor was still blanketed in soft grass. The only thing I could hear was my own whimpering and his grunts of effort as he carried me. Even the insects had gone quiet, as if they could sense a predator on the hunt.

I told myself over and over again, this was Marksen DuBois.

His family used to be so close to mine.

We played together as children.

Well, he played with my brother.

I was the annoying little girl who followed him and her big brother around.

Still, there had to be some fondness for me in him somewhere.

“Marksen, please don’t do this. It’s not too late. Just let me go, and I promise I won’t say anything to anyone,” I pleaded.

“I know you won’t say anything to anyone,” he said, still marching through the woods, jostling me with every step. “If you make this any harder than it has to be, I won’t hesitate to make sure you never tell anyone anything ever again.”

He broke through the line of trees, and pressing my hands against his muscular back, I lifted my torso up and looked around.

He had carried me to a deserted parking lot behind a massive concrete building.

I couldn't hold myself up too long, arching my back like that was awkward and painful. Plus, I was far too drunk to be able to keep my balance.

"Please," I beseeched as I tried to look around his side. I caught glimpses of a hidden SUV that was parked behind some large green dumpsters. "Don't hurt me."

"Oh, princess, I'm not going to hurt you ... probably. As long as you behave."

He came to a stop. "I'll get her in. You start the car," Marksensaid to someone. Then, to me, he warned, "Don't bother. He works for me. My driver isn't going to save you, and neither will anyone else on my payroll. My employees are compensated well for their obedience and silence."

He put me down long enough to reach for the door handle but kept his hand around my wrist.

I tried to break free and make a run for it again.

Marksen easily yanked me back, flinging me into the car door.

Pain erupted over my entire back where it connected with the metal.

He was on me in a second. Holding both of my wrists in his hands, pinning them above my head and pressing his body to mine.

"Do you know what happens to little girls who don't behave?" he said, looming over me.

I shook my head.

"They get turned over my knee and spanked."

As if to underline his point, he pressed his thigh in between mine.

“Right now your life is going to get much easier if you accept one little fact. You are mine. Mine to order about, mine to decide what will happen to. If you just turn that pretty little brain of yours off and do as you are told, then you will be fine ... physically. If you continue to fight me, bad things will happen.” He traced a line down the side of my face. “And we wouldn’t want that, now would we?”

His gaze was cold as he stared down at me.

All signs of the personable young man, the happy, carefree child, were gone.

He was a man now, and every drunken instinct I had was sluggishly telling me to get away.

“Please let me go.”

Marksen pressed both my wrists together so he could hold them in one hand.

Then trailed his fingers down my arm to my shoulder and chest.

I thought he was going to cup my breasts, try to cop a feel. Instead, his hand went around my throat and squeezed.

It wasn’t hard enough to hurt or choke me.

It was just enough pressure to send me the message he could hurt me if he really wanted to.

That was the point. To show me my life was in his hands.

He tightened his grip just enough to make my breath hitch and my lips go numb.

“Say it.”

“No,” I said, narrowing my eyes to match his glare.

“Say it.” This time he tightened his grip and pressed me back into the car.

Fine.

“I’ll be your good girl.” I expected the words to taste vile on my tongue, but they didn’t.

“That’s right, you will,” he said as his thigh pressed against my core right before his lips slammed down on mine.

I didn’t know what to do.

It was too much all at once.

His kiss was brutal and demanding and my drunken body betrayed me. My mind screamed to turn my head and break away.

This was wrong, but my body was demanding more.

He tasted of aged bourbon, sweet and complex. His lips were soft, but his tongue was unforgiving as it demanded entrance.

I didn’t think.

My lips just opened to his intrusion as the rest of my body melted against him.

It had to be the champagne and the adrenalin mixing in my bloodstream and rushing to my head.

There was no other reason for me to want to kiss him back. No reason for my body to arch into his with that damn camera between us. No reason at all for my hips to grind my core against him.

Drunken stupidity was the only thing that explained my not only letting my attacker touch me, but my participating in it, my enjoyment of the way his touch heated my blood.

His hand was still squeezing around my throat and it made me want more. It made me want to feel what else his hands could do when I was completely at their mercy.

He broke away and scowled down at me. His lips slightly parted. “You are full of surprises, Ms. Manwarring.”

How dare he!

Shame burned my cheeks and chest, but I refused to look away from him, refused to let his actions humiliate me.

Not only was he abducting me, but he’d stolen my first real kiss and then turned my body against me. I refused to bear

any of the embarrassment or guilt of his actions. He had waited for me to drink too much and then decided to take advantage.

“Get in the car, Olivia.”

My gaze shifted to the left then right.

The tree line was maybe fifty feet from me.

My muscles tensed as I prepared to move, but before I could even try, he pressed his thigh against me harder, opened the back door of the SUV, and crowded me inside.

I sat as far as I could from him.

Staring him down as I used the back of my hand to deliberately wipe away his kiss.

CHAPTER 5



MARKSEN

*P*oor little Olivia sulked against the door.

She wouldn't even look at me since wiping my kiss from her lips.

Part of me wanted to grab her by her hair and make her accept my kiss again, maybe leave a few bite marks or even a couple of extra fingerprints on her body. Something she couldn't so easily remove.

It was fine. I didn't need her happy. I didn't even really need her compliant, though that would have made this easier. Easy would have been nice, but when it came to dealing with the Manwarring stubbornness, I knew I was signing up for a challenge.

What I didn't expect was to find her inner fire so alluring.

Something about her begged to be taken...ruined.

I wanted to wipe away the perfect porcelain exterior, the expensive makeup, designer clothes, and proper education. I wanted to take away everything that made her a princess, exposing the woman hidden underneath the bullshit.

It had never occurred to me to wonder what kind of woman Olivia was under all the pomp and circumstance of our shared social circle.

What kind of woman would she become when all of that was stripped away?

Was she a shy damsel in distress, or a warrior in her own right?

Was she actually a prim and proper lady to her core, or was she a wanton harlot desperate for a man?

I hoped it was the latter.

The way she had looked at that statue and the fire behind the kiss we shared definitely pointed in that direction.

My driver rapped his knuckles against the glass, telling me we had arrived. The windows had been blacked out for this trip. The last thing I wanted was for Olivia to figure out where we were before it was time. There were far too many places between the sculpture park and the private airstrip where it would have been easy enough for her to escape.

No, keeping her in the dark about where we were was paramount.

Getting out of the car, I motioned for her to follow me.

She refused.

It seemed like stubbornness was a Manwarring trait not limited to the men.

“Olivia, get out of the vehicle before I reach in and pull you out by your fucking hair.” I kept my words even, but the threat was clear.

The wide-eyed look she gave me as she nodded and climbed out of the back of the car was enough to convince me she understood the situation she was now in.

Which was why I was stupid enough to look away to make sure the plane was ready to be boarded.

She took the opportunity to take off.

Her bare feet made a slapping sound against the pavement as she ran.

I motioned for my security to stay where they were.

This little girl was mine to handle.

Chasing after her felt exhilarating.

It awakened something deep inside me.

Something primal snapped as I caught up to her and grabbed her by the back of her neck.

We both went tumbling to the ground.

I made sure to take the brunt of the fall, then rolled over so she was lying on her stomach against the tarmac. I then pinned her down hard, knowing the rough surface was digging into her delicate skin.

“What the fuck do you think you are doing?” I growled into her ear.

She struggled underneath me.

I liked it, the feeling of her soft, lithe body beneath mine, trapped.

She smelled so good.

Her ass rubbed against my hardening cock with every move she made.

“Help!” she screamed at my security team as they approached with their weapons drawn.

They all stood around waiting for orders. Then one reached down and offered me a hand up.

I took it and stood, the other men holding their drawn weapons trained on her.

“What are you doing?” she cried out to them, sitting up. “Help me.”

“Is everything okay, sir?” one of my men asked as I brushed off my clothes.

“Just a minor disagreement. I think she understands now,” I replied, then grabbed her arm and hauled her to her feet before gripping her shoulders and spinning her to look at me. “Don’t you, princess?” I leaned in again so only she could hear me. “We aren’t in your kingdom anymore. Daddy and big brother can’t save you. Here, I am king, and you will obey. Or else. Bad things happen to bratty little girls who misbehave.”

When she didn’t say anything or start walking, I picked her up, threw her over my shoulder again, and marched to the

private plane waiting for us.

I was a little disappointed when she stopped fighting me.

I loved her fire.

It made it so much more fun when I won.

I instructed the stewardess that I'd have my usual drink and bring one for the lady, too, before I unceremoniously dropped Olivia onto one of the tanned leather seats.

She righted herself, and I took the chair opposite her.

“Where are we going?” she demanded.

It was kind of cute that she thought she got to make demands, perching there with her small hands clenched into fists on her lap. Her red dress was now dirty and torn. Even her eyeliner was smeared around her eyes.

It made her look ruined, and I loved it.

She was no longer a Manwarring princess, untouchable, unobtainable.

She was a woman, like any other, but more so.

A sense of pride built in my chest.

I did this. I ruined her.

“Wherever I want.” I smiled at her, loving the way her jaw clenched in outrage.

“Tell me now.” She stomped her bare foot on the floor, and I had to hold back a laugh.

The stewardess brought me an old-fashioned as well as one for Olivia.

Olivia curled her lip at it and refused to take it, so I did and set it on the table at my side.

“That will be all for now, Anna,” I said to the stewardess.

“Yes, sir. The captain is on board. We will be taking off in the next five minutes.” She turned to leave when Olivia told her to stop.

“I want off this plane immediately!” she said, her hands pressed to the armrests, ready to stand up.

“I’m afraid that won’t be possible. The exterior doors have already been closed, and we are preparing for takeoff.” Anna smiled sweetly and again turned to leave, while I made a mental note to give her a raise. Though she already made a hefty salary. Normally, as soon as we reached a cruising altitude, Anna earned every penny, usually on her knees. Not today though. Today, my attention was solely on Olivia.

“Bitch,” Olivia muttered under her breath, sitting back as Anna left to make whatever preparations were needed for takeoff.

“That was rude. It isn’t her fault you are in so much trouble. Maybe if you weren’t such a spoiled brat, people wouldn’t treat you like a child.”

“Why am I here, Marksens?”

“I already told you. Because I deemed it so,” I explained, taking a sip of my drink. “Your brother fucked up. Then he kept fucking up, and my generosity only goes so far.”

“So, what now? Are you going to ransom me? Demand that he annul his marriage to Amelia, then as soon as she marries you, you let me go?”

“God, no.” I downed the rest of my drink and started in on hers. “There is no ransom he could pay in money or women to get you back. *You* are the payment.”

“What are you going to do with me?” she asked.

Tears filled her eyes, and I got a sick kind of pleasure from watching her squirm.

“Whatever I want. And don’t worry, princess, I have plenty planned for you. But hey, it’s okay. Reputation isn’t really important, so why would you care?” I taunted over the whine of the engines powering up as we taxied down the runway.

I was going to dismantle her reputation and leave it in shambles like her brother did to mine.

There wasn't any real way to hit Luc himself, given his "whirlwind" romance with Amelia that had started with him stealing my fiancée at the altar.

Everyone suddenly saw him as Prince Charming, which I guess made Amelia, Cinderella, which was laughable.

That bitch had never touched a mop, mouse, or pumpkin in her life.

Going after his reputation would be too difficult, and it would do minimal damage.

He wasn't the head of his father's company yet, and everyone knew his father was into some shady dealings with the mob.

Nothing I could do to him would accomplish anything more than cause him mild irritation.

I didn't want him irritated.

I wanted him to suffer.

His sister Olivia, however, was very touchable.

CHAPTER 6



MARKSEN

Despite his daughters being born and bred to be housewives, the Manwarring patriarch didn't keep a close eye on them. Instead of preparing to make an advantageous match and run a house for a powerful husband, Olivia had been off creating her own empire.

A cute little online magazine that my digging showed had quite the following. It was running in the black within the first quarter, partly due to low overhead and having name recognition to help secure advertising revenue. Still, the speed with which she had grown it, raising her profile as well as that of the company's, was impressive. She was known to be a hardworking woman who did a lot of the day-to-day herself, preferring to have a skeleton staff that was well paid and motivated rather than an inflated crew that ate up the profits.

All of this was riding on her name, and she was still dumb enough to think that something like love was more important than reputation.

I wondered if she would still believe that when I was done with her.

"My brother will come after me." Olivia pulled me from my thoughts.

"I'm counting on it."

"What does that mean?" she asked, her brows scrunching down in confusion.

She really was quite beautiful, even more so now that she was a little disheveled.

“It’s not important.”

The plane was leveling off, and the captain came on over the speaker system to let us know it was safe to move around the cabin.

“How is that not important?”

“You’re right.” I threw back the rest of her drink and set the empty glass on the table across the aisle. “I misspoke. It’s not important *right now*. Right now, it’s more important that you know what your place is, and that you are punished for trying to run from me.”

“What?” The color drained from her face.

I unhooked my seat belt and leaned forward. “I believe I told you that if you ran from me, I would turn you over my knee and spank you like the spoiled little bitch you are.”

I put the armrests up, giving myself plenty of room to lay her across my lap.

“You can’t be serious.”

Her hands shook, her head swiveling in search of an escape.

There, of course, was none.

We were thirty thousand feet in the air. I had no idea where she thought she was going. What was she going to do? Jump out and use her skirt as a parachute? It would actually be pretty entertaining to watch her try to open the door.

“Don’t make this worse for yourself, little girl. If you are good and come sit on my lap, I might let you off with another warning. Why don’t you get over here and show me what a good girl you can be.”

“When my brother finds me, he is going to make you suffer,” she hissed out between clenched teeth. “What’s wrong, Marksens? Not man enough to face him yourself? You have to abduct me?”

When I had first talked about punishing her like a child, no, I wasn’t serious, but the more I thought about it, the more I

realized I liked the idea. The more she taunted me, the more I wanted to feel the sting of my hand slapping her ass.

I wanted to hear her cry out and make her apologize.

She was made to be under the control of a man like me.

And I'd be damned before I let some spoiled little bitch talk to me like that.

I stood and leaned over her, my hands on the headrest of her seat, my thighs on either side of her knees so she was caged in by my body.

Her big brown eyes looked up at me, tears collecting in the corners. She slouched deeper down into the chair, her cute, stubborn chin jutting out.

She was trying not to look scared, and failing miserably.

“Princess, you better consider your predicament here. There is no escape. Your brother isn't coming to rescue you. He's too absorbed in his little bitch wife to even notice you're gone.”

Tears spilled down her face.

She was terrified.

Good.

She should be.

“I hate you,” she said, and I laughed.

“Then hate me. You think I care?” I asked. “I don't give a fuck what you feel about me. Like all the rest of your feelings, it's irrelevant. You are just a pawn in a much larger game.”

“Fuck you!” she said, crossing her arms over her chest and giving me the side of her face.

“This is disappointing. Perhaps if your father paid more attention to you, you would be better behaved. Why don't you just call me Daddy from now on,” I teased as I pulled on one of her long, silky curls.

She yanked the hair out of my grasp, her narrowed gaze shooting daggers at me. “Go to hell!”

She had some fire in her, I'd give her that.

Even as a precocious teen, she was always going after something.

What I didn't expect was how fucking sexy that fight was now that she was a grown woman.

Every time I saw even a spark of that fire, it made my cock twitch with interest.

This time, I grabbed her arm and wrenched her out of her seat.

Pulling her unwilling body onto my lap, I laid one of my hands across the top of her thighs, reaching around her shoulder from behind to wrap the other around her throat.

"Such vile words for a lady," I teased. "Does big brother know his sweet baby sister has the mouth of a whore?"

"Let me go." She tried to pull from my grasp, so I tightened my fingers around her throat, her rapid pulse beating against my fingertips where they pressed into her soft flesh.

Not enough to really hurt her, but enough to prove that I could hurt her if I wanted.

I leaned in closer, inhaling the lingering scent of the crisp autumn air that still clung to her auburn hair. Letting my breath tickle the tiny wisps of curls near her ear, I rasped, "Never. You are mine now, mine to play with, mine to discipline. Mine. It is within my power to ruin you, little girl. So I suggest you behave."

Her back stiffened and she swallowed, her throat muscles contracting under my grasp.

My palm glided up and down her thigh in slow, soothing circles. She hissed an indrawn breath through her clenched jaw the closer my fingers came to the tight seam between her thighs. "I'm going to give you a choice, princess. You can get on your knees right now and show me what a good girl you are going to be for me ..."

I slid my hand along the top of her thigh to her hip, then back to hover the tips of my fingers over her silk-obscured

pussy.

With how her father ignored her, I doubted she was untouched.

Even in our circles, where a daughter's virginity was a commodity to be hoarded and bartered as if it were a valuable asset, most women were overvalued, having secretly lost their worth to the family's horse trainer or ski instructor or private tutor years earlier.

"Or you can continue to be a spoiled little bitch, and I will punish you." I caressed the silk of her dress over her pussy. "I confess, I'm hoping you'll choose being a spoiled bitch. Nothing would give me more pleasure than flipping this dress over your head, tearing off your panties and whipping your lily-white, pampered ass bright red."

With an outraged cry, she fought me with everything she had, striking me with her tiny, ineffective, balled-up fists. "Fuck you."

Snatching her wrists, I laughed. "Excellent choice, princess."

Wrapping my arm around her waist, I easily lifted her off my lap, then laid her on her stomach over my thighs.

She was still struggling against my restraining hand when I released her wrists and placed my hand on her lower back.

As I slowly inched the fabric of her dress up along her legs, I taunted, "Doth the lady protest too much? Methinks I may have stumbled upon a secret fantasy. Could it be milady likes to be spanked?"

Although I said it in jest, I was jarred to feel a stab of jealousy at the thought.

The only way she would have learned to crave a taste for the lash was if she had experienced it before. Experienced it with another man.

The idea there was another man walking the earth who got to treasure the sound of her first gasp the moment his hand connected with her vulnerable flesh, or the sight of her pale

skin blooming to a deep blush from the punishing warmth of his palm, made me want to commit murder.

My hand twisted in the delicate fabric of her dress as I wrenched it over her hips and bunched it at her lower back. As if to confirm the dark direction of my thoughts, my pretty princess was not wearing a pair of innocent white or pale pink panties as I would have expected, but rather an erotic black lace thong.

The dark thong enhanced the creamy hue of her pale skin, while leaving nothing to the imagination. The yoga-toned curves of her ass were on full display.

The irrational anger that I was not the first man, probably not even the second, to enjoy this delectable view grew. My hand swept over her left butt cheek before digging my fingers painfully into her flesh.

Her torso rose as she arched her back. “Marksen, please,” she whimpered.

I couldn’t take my eyes off her exposed, silky smooth, unblemished skin.

The urge to brand her, to mark her as mine, to erase the touch of all the men who came before me, unfurled inside my chest like a glowing ember turning to flame.

She stopped wiggling, no doubt feeling the hard length of my cock pressed against her belly.

Her skin was incredibly soft, and delicate ... vulnerable.

I wanted to slap her ass, to make the milky complexion pinken with each strike of my hand.

I barely even registered the mewling sounds she was making or how she had stopped fighting to pull her wrists free from my grasp.

At that moment, it didn’t matter if she was into this or had just given up.

I was beyond rational thought.

A primal, possessive rage clawed to the surface.

With a tilt of my hips, I pressed my engorged cock against her stomach. After being rewarded by a soft gasp from her lips as her body jerked in response, I slipped my fingers inside the tiny elastic thong strip.

I pulled on the band, knowing the fabric would tighten and press against her pussy, the more tension I applied.

She shifted her hips, rubbing her body against my cock. “Marksen, please.”

Her whimper snapped my control.

Twisting my hand in her hair to anchor her on my lap, I raised my arm and brought my other hand down hard on her right cheek.

She cried out in shock and pain.

I spanked her again, ruthlessly, on the same exact spot, wanting to see the imprint of my hand in red on her skin.

“Stop! Stop!” she pleaded as her legs kicked out.

I lifted my arm a third time, striking her left cheek, then both of her upper thighs.

Her fingernails dug into my thigh. “Marksen! Stop! Please! Don’t do this!”

Ignoring her pleas, I slapped her ass until it turned a beautiful, bright cherry red.

I paused a moment to sweep my hand over her curves, wanting to feel the heat radiating off her skin, knowing it was my hand that caused it ... that marked her.

Olivia was sobbing so hard she hiccupped as she choked out, “I hate you. I’ll never forgive you for this.”

To never forgive is to never forget.

A sick, twisted pleasure poisoned any hint of guilt I may have felt at my actions.

There may have been other men ... but I would make sure I burned away the memory of all of them until only I remained.

I gripped her around the waist, making sure her dress's skirt remained crumpled high above her thighs as I lifted her off my lap. After wrapping my hand around her left knee, I wrenched her bent leg forward, tucking it next to my hip. Tilting her body off balance, until she was forced to straddle me.

The moment she did, both of my hands gripped her punished ass and I lifted my hips to grind my restrained cock against her barely covered pussy.

She struggled in my embrace, shoving against my shoulders. "No. Don't. That hurts."

Wrapping my hand around her neck, I yanked her head down as I slammed my lips over hers.

Claiming her mouth for my own.

Thrusting my tongue between her lips like I ached to do to her core.

Tasting her, exploring her, devouring her cries.

CHAPTER 7



OLIVIA

*H*is kiss was hard, bruising my lips as he claimed my mouth.

I didn't know what to do.

My body wanted to sink into his touch, bask in his warmth, and let him dominate me.

Part of me, a surprisingly large part of me, craved submitting to him, admitting that every time he touched me, shivers ran up and down my spine.

When he touched my behind, an unfamiliar pressure built in my core.

When his fingers grazed my pussy, I almost cried out in pleasure.

It couldn't be because of who he was; surely it was because no man had ever touched me.

This had to be the champagne lowering my inhibitions.

I wasn't attracted to Marksens, not anymore, not since we were teenagers.

This was just what happened when a man touched a woman who was tipsy.

But there was another part of me, a voice screaming in my head that this was not how this was supposed to happen.

I had waited my whole life for a Prince Charming, someone who would be worthy of earning my submission.

Marksen was not that man.

He didn't want me to give my submission freely.

He didn't want to earn it, to prove he was the best man for me.

No, he wanted to take it, to force it from me.

There was something dark and twisted about what he was doing.

Every touch, every kiss, every caress was made out of anger and revenge.

This wasn't about me ... or us.

This was about his retribution against my brother.

As he said, I was nothing more than a pawn.

His lips were on mine, and his hand was still on my punished ass as he crushed me to him.

I couldn't move, couldn't breathe.

My very existence depended on Marksen.

Deprived of oxygen, my head swam as he deepened the kiss. His tongue pushing deeper into my mouth as his hand moved under my thigh to slip inside the thin barrier of my thong panties.

Unable to fight back against my own downfall, I tumbled further into the dark abyss of his embrace.

My fingers slid into the softness of his short brown hair. He moaned into my mouth as his hands gripped my ass harder, pressing me into him tighter and sending a shock of pleasurable pain up my spine.

I shamelessly ground my hips against him.

He moaned my name.

Dammit, that moan made my mind go hazy, my body burn hotter.

False bravado and taunts aside, he couldn't hide that he was just as affected by my kiss as I was by his. I savored the

taste of the small victory mingled with the bittersweet taste of orange and bourbon from the old-fashioned he had just drunk, which still lingered on his lips.

I wanted him, but I hated him.

I didn't need oxygen to live, I needed him.

Still, I reminded myself, he didn't love me ... and I didn't love him.

He was using me to get back at Luc.

This wasn't about loving or even wanting me.

It was about revenge.

That realization alone was enough to snap me out of whatever leftover champagne rose-colored haze was obviously still clouding my mind and leading me to act on my baser instincts.

As if dunked in cold water, I suddenly remembered where I was and how I got here.

Marksen had abducted me.

Marksen had humiliated me.

Marksen was using me.

He touched me where no other man had ever dared to touch me and made me feel hot, overwhelmed, and powerless, but only as a manipulative game against my family.

There may not have been anything I could do about the hot or the overwhelmed, but I refused to be powerless.

I was Olivia Eireann Manwarring.

I was the daughter of Lucian Manwarring, Sr., one of the country's most powerful businessmen, and the sister of Luc Manwarring, who was more of a ruthless bastard than my father could ever be.

Not to mention my family had Irish mob ties, and I was a successful boss bitch in my own right.

My privilege may have meant that I had lived a sheltered life and that I didn't have a lot of experience with men, but I

wasn't stupid, and I sure as hell wasn't powerless.

If Marksens wanted a toy to entertain him for the flight, he could play with the seemingly more than willing stewardess.

She, at least, was on his payroll.

With more strength than I knew I possessed, I knocked Marksens's hand from my throat and broke the kiss, getting to my feet.

Without a single thought, I reared back and slapped his face with everything I had.

His head snapped to the side on impact, fire erupting over my palm.

I hit him. I had never hit anyone in my life.

Marksens got to his feet and towered over me.

His eyes shot daggers at me, made brighter by the vivid red handprint on his cheek.

I took a small step back.

He had already proven he was not above violence, and there was no escaping him.

Clearly, my being a woman of gentle birth had done nothing to stop him from manhandling me so far.

The man spanked me.

Spanked me!

A cold sweat broke out over my brow as I realized there was nowhere to run to, nowhere to hide.

The stewardess had already made it very clear she was there to do whatever Marksens bid.

There was no reason to believe the pilot would be any different.

Trying to stop the shaking in my hands, I stumbled backward when he stepped toward me. He grabbed my arm to steady me and then lifted his other.

For the first time in my life, I was afraid someone was going to physically strike me in the face.

I was a wealthy heiress and businesswoman.

We didn't fight with our fists.

We used lawyers for that kind of thing.

If we had to get our hands dirty, we slung mud of the metaphorical kind. A catty word here, a salacious rumor there, never striking each other physically. It was barbaric and best left to the women fighting over toothless men on daytime television.

I shrank from his grasp, bracing myself for a backhanded slap or worse ... when he picked me up and deposited me on another chair. I swallowed a hiss of pain when my sore bottom connected with the firm seat, not wanting to give him the satisfaction of knowing how much his punishment affected me.

He then grabbed the seat belt and buckled me in, tightening it as much as possible.

Before standing up straight, he snatched my chin and forced me to meet his eyes.

“Keep your ass in this seat and behave. I won't warn you again.” He lingered, his face only inches from mine.

His breath was warm on my lips as he talked, and I wondered if he was going to kiss me again.

I shouldn't have wanted him to.

He was deplorable.

The only thing I should have wanted from him was an apology after he returned me to my family.

Still, I was staring at his lips, pinker than they were before, wondering what they would feel like in a gentler kiss or ghosting over my skin.

If he had kissed me in a different circumstance, would it have been so explosive?

Would I have still enjoyed it?

How long did it take for Stockholm syndrome to kick in?

Was that what this was? It was the only explanation I could think of.

He abducted me, and now I was picturing his mouth against my skin.

Heat rose to my cheeks, and I turned my head, pulling it from his grip.

He didn't get to see my blush or know the thoughts that ran through my head.

I had been embarrassed enough for a single night.

He let me go and stormed off to somewhere toward the back of the plane.

I didn't know if he sat behind me or if there was a bedroom in the back.

I refused to look.

A moment after he stormed off, the stewardess went running after him, shooting me a triumphant look. God only knew what she was gloating about or what she was going to do for him.

It was none of my business.

There was absolutely no way the unsettled feeling in my stomach was jealousy.

That was impossible. She could suck his cock like she was auditioning to be his future wife for all I cared. He meant nothing to me. Less than nothing.

The fact that he was twisting his fingers in another woman's hair as he took control and pressed the back of her head closer to his hips, that he was pushing his shaft down her throat until her eyes filled with tears and her lungs were on fire from lack of oxygen while the deep, strangely arousing satisfaction that came from submitting to a powerful man caused a powerful surge of electricity between her legs, didn't bother me the least tiniest bit. Nope. Not at all.

I adjusted my position in my seat, crushing my thighs together, tormented by lingering flashes of arousal.

Curling my fingers in the fabric of my dress, I forced myself to focus.

He said the flight was only an hour. That meant we weren't leaving the United States. I knew a jet like this had the fuel capacity to take us almost anywhere in the world. My family had a similar one, and I often used it to go on summer weekend trips to Ibiza, and to Paris in the spring.

This jet was about the same size as ours and the layout was similar, with a few sofas for lounging mid-flight and overstuffed leather bucket seats equipped with seat belts for takeoff and landing.

Ours had a bedroom and a full bath in the very back. It was great for those long flights. I could catch a full night's sleep and a shower so when I landed, I was refreshed and able to start my morning right in a different time zone.

I wondered if that was where Marksen was now, in the bedroom with the stewardess.

Was he touching her the way he touched me?

Did he take it further with her?

She probably didn't fight him like I had.

I knew he was turned on. I'd felt his cock pressed against me.

Was she helping him deal with that?

My jaw ached from clenching my teeth as the burning sensation increased in my stomach, thinking of him with her.

Touching her, kissing her with the lips he had just kissed me with.

Though I bet she wouldn't have slapped him for it.

I sat in my seat with my arms crossed over my chest, trying not to think about what they were doing back there or if he liked her more than me.

It shouldn't matter.

I shouldn't care.

He wasn't mine, and I didn't want him.

It didn't matter how many times I said that over and over in my head.

Marksen DuBois is not mine.

I do not want Marksen DuBois.

The jealousy still burned in my veins, and I wanted to go back there and rip her off of him by her perfect, sleek blonde ponytail.

I had to stop myself from laughing when she marched back up the aisle.

She had only been gone for maybe two minutes.

Clearly, whatever services she was offering, Marksen had refused.

That gave me a weird sort of prideful glee, knowing that he had turned down another woman after kissing me.

I pushed that feeling down and tried to ignore it.

I had no right to feel territorial over Marksen.

Not when we were teenagers and I'd had a schoolgirl crush, and certainly not now after he'd abducted me.

This wasn't the time to think about old crushes or petty jealousy. I needed to be smart. I had to think. He could take me anywhere in the world. I didn't have my passport with me, but there were ways around that when you had a private jet.

But the timeline didn't add up. We had to be staying in the US. He'd told me the flight was only an hour. The Bahamas were a little over three hours by plane, and Toronto was close to a two-hour flight.

No, we were staying local.

I doubted we were leaving the tri-state area.

That had to be a good thing, right? That had to mean that I would be easier to find. The closer I was, the easier it would be to track me. But it didn't make sense.

None of this made any sense.

This was Marksens DuBois.

The boy who had spent a good portion of our childhood summers at our house, hanging out with Luc when they were home from boarding school.

He was my brother's best friend growing up.

I knew men weren't like women, that childhood friendships between them often didn't last into adulthood. Or at least were never as close.

Still, this was Marksens!

I used to have daydreams about marrying him and living in a house next to my brother's so our children could play together. In my childhood fantasies, our lives were so intertwined that our nannies were best friends.

I knew he must have been mad about Amelia, but kidnapping me seemed a bit extreme.

This could be a prank.

It could have been something so simple.

A stupid prank and I didn't realize it because I had been drinking.

I thought about it for a while.

It seemed dumb, but Marksens and Luc used to play stupid pranks on each other all the time.

What if Marksens wasn't that mad about Amelia and Luc, and this was some sort of hazing ritual?

I had heard of brides being abducted before their wedding as a joke. I had even heard of grooms being kidnapped. Maybe he couldn't get to Luc before the wedding or didn't want to take Amelia from the planning since she was doing it all herself.

And the ... I shifted in my seat again ... the spanking? The kiss?

He seemed angry about both, almost as if I had pushed him over the line.

As if they weren't part of the plan!

Maybe he had been drinking before, too, and he got as carried away as I did.

I did taste bourbon on his lips.

That had to be it. This had to all be a bad joke.

He left because he didn't want it to get too out of hand.

He always did have a flare for the dramatic.

All I needed to do was to sit back and relax. Enjoy the ride and not cause more problems. If this was a joke, there was no reason to fight him.

What if I fought too much, and he decided I was too much trouble, and I ruined the fun?

What if he called Luc to come pick me up, and he had to leave his wedding to get me?

Tonight wasn't about me.

It was about Luc and Amelia.

If I ruined this, would it ruin his whole wedding?

Would he remember it as the day his little sister ruined a simple, friendly prank and blew it all out of proportion?

I couldn't do that to him or Amelia.

It would be fine.

It was a prank in poor taste, but it was just a prank.

Something we would all laugh about at Christmas dinners. "That one time Olivia thought Marksen had actually kidnapped her."

We will leave out the spanking and kissing parts when we retell the story, obviously.

Because it is not like they mean anything.

We are both drunk.

Everyone knows drunk hookups mean nothing.

It was all a joke.

It had to be.

It just had to be a joke.

CHAPTER 8



MARKSEN

“Behave,” I warned Olivia as I took the seat next to her and buckled myself in for the landing.

She seemed better, calmer, and a little more herself.

I wondered for a moment if she wasn’t afraid of me anymore.

That was a mistake.

But who knew what was going on in that pretty little head of hers?

I hoped she knew better than to run again, but I doubted it.

“When we disembark, every person on that tarmac works for me. You’re just going to get hurt if you try to escape again.”

“I won’t try to run again. I promise.” Her eyes were cast down when she spoke, like she was embarrassed or a natural submissive.

I ignored the need growing in my stomach at the thought. That wasn’t why I took her. Though, she was tempting. A man could only take so much temptation before he snapped and took something he knew he should leave alone.

“Good girl,” I said, just to rile her up.

Every time I called her a good girl the tops of her cheeks colored in the most endearing way.

This had been the longest flight of my life.

It didn't help that when I went to go lie down and try to get my rage and lust under control, Anna came in.

Normally, I would have taken full advantage, but something about her just wasn't appealing.

My cock was still rock hard from having Olivia on my lap, seeing her perfect ass, then feeling how wet her pussy was. It took all of my restraint not to tear off that fucking thong, toss her over the chair and pound into her from behind until she screamed my name.

The way she straddled me as we kissed, and the way her hips ground down onto mine, was nothing short of exquisite. Fuck, I wanted her bouncing on my cock hard and fast while I drank every beautiful moan and cry that came from her lips.

Christ, this was not the plan.

I had every intention of ruining her, but this wasn't how.

This wasn't how I had planned this.

I wasn't supposed to want her.

I was supposed to hurt her.

To destroy her reputation beyond any hopes of salvation, to make her take her family down with her.

I was supposed to see her as the sister of my enemy and the tool I would use to destroy the Manwarring legacy.

Not the tempting but sweet and strictly off-limits, teenaged little sister of my best friend, who used to follow me and her brother around on summer breaks.

I had to get away from her for a bit so I could remember what the plan was. I had to separate the Olivia I knew from the one I was going to take down.

I flipped through the digital pictures I had taken in the garden.

She was so beautiful, almost ethereal.

She looked like a Grecian goddess in her long, flowy dress.

The red color reminded me of fire, and the look of determination in her eyes mimicked that.

Then there were the pictures I took before she saw me, when she was looking down at the erotic statue. The innocent curiosity on her face made me yearn to be the man who educated her.

I reached for the zipper of my trousers.

And that was the moment Anna entered.

She smirked. “Looks like I’m just in time.” She leaned a knee on the bed and unbuttoned her uniform. “Want me to take care of that for you, Mr. Dubois?” she asked in an exaggerated Marilyn Monroe impression as she pursed her over-filled lips.

I set the camera aside and let her cool fingers pull out my cock.

As she knelt between my outstretched legs, I stared impassively at her bowed head, wishing her blonde hair was a deep, rich auburn with golden highlights.

Before her open mouth touched the head of my cock, I shifted my hips back. Without giving an explanation, I tucked my cock back into my trousers and zipped up. “Return to your duties.”

Her overly tweezed brow furrowed. “I thought this was part of my duties.”

My gaze narrowed. “Remember your place. Or you’ll find yourself working the domestic flight from Miami to Phoenix where I found you.”

With a huff, she climbed off the bed and stormed out.

I picked up the camera and continued to skim through the photos.

The pictures were good.

Nothing damning. Olivia was a beautiful woman.

There were several photos where she wore a lustful expression that could be photoshopped to look like she was

doing something less innocent, but they weren't right.

Nothing really useable for my plans.

I would, however, be saving them for my personal collection.

The lighting was all wrong. The ambient light from the party cast a beautiful warm glow, but it was too diluted and would be impossible to match without the help of a professional.

I could trust the people on my security team to keep their mouths shut.

Anna needed this job too badly to risk opening her mouth.

But any more people finding out about this little game was risky.

I could pay someone millions, I had practically unlimited resources. But so did Luc.

All it would take was one disloyal person and my game would end too quickly. So the taking of any photos and all editing had to be done by me.

Anyone would be able to tell if I were to photoshop these photos.

For my plan, I needed the evidence to be as damning, and convincing, as possible.

Not an obvious hack job that would be sensationalized for a week and blow over.

Olivia didn't deserve what was going to happen to her, but neither had I.

I hadn't deserved to have my reputation, my livelihood, and my future wife taken from me.

Especially not in such a public, humiliating way.

I didn't deserve the mocking and the laughter that came my way from my peers or the stern lecture from my father. As if I could have anticipated any of this.

What was I supposed to do? Hit Luc in the middle of the church then force the priest to finish the wedding? It would have been null and void. The second someone objected at a wedding, that was it. It was over. The priest could not continue the ceremony. Which I didn't give a rat's ass about, but it also meant he wouldn't sign the license.

So really what was I supposed to have done?

It didn't matter anymore. What happened, happened. It was finished. What mattered now was how I chose to respond.

Manwarring stole a bride from me, so I stole a sister from him.

He tarnished my good name, and I planned to decimate hers.

We weren't children in boarding school anymore.

The games were over.

This is war.

The plane touched down and Olivia and I disembarked.

My body tensed, ready to chase after her, but to my surprise, and admittedly a little disappointment, she didn't run.

Instead, she behaved.

She got into the black SUV without so much as a protest.

It was late and the windows were tinted so she couldn't see where we were going.

Not that I thought she would have recognized it.

Her family summered in the Hamptons, as did mine, so there was no reason for her to recognize the quaint little city of Newport, Rhode Island.

I actually had always preferred it to the Hamptons. Quieter and less touristy but with the same small-town charm, Newport had cooler temperatures, a choice of sandy or rocky beaches, and just a stillness that you could never find in New York City. Not to mention some of the best docks for my yacht.

It also had some of the most amazing estates I had ever seen. As soon as I saw the grandeur of some of the family homes, I knew that I would buy one when I had a family. I had planned to take Amelia here after our honeymoon and let her assist me in choosing our summer home.

I was sure when all this was over, I would marry, and this time I would have armed guards standing at the end of the aisle in case anyone got any bright ideas.

For now, I'd bought a little two-bedroom cabin as my personal escape. I bought it well after Luc and I stopped hanging out and it was owned under one of my many shell companies. All of my shell companies had real estate holdings.

Most were commercial, but I did own quite a few residential projects and individual homes that generated rental income.

Finding this place would be the equivalent of searching for a needle in a massive pile of needles.

Assuming Luc didn't call the police.

Let's be honest. There was no way he was going to call the police and make this public knowledge. Maybe his new brother-in-law Harrison Astrid, the district attorney in Manhattan, would step in and help with resources.

Even with Harrison's help, I had time.

"I smell the ocean," Olivia said, pulling me from my thoughts.

"Yes."

"Will you tell me where we are?" she asked.

"No."

"Is this some game, a prank on Luc?" The hopefulness in her voice was almost enough to make me feel bad. Almost.

"No, Olivia, this is not a prank. I took you, and I will make you pay for your brother's sins."

"Are you going to kill me?"

That took me off guard.

I looked down at her.

Her head was lowered, her face obscured by her tangled hair as she stared at her dirty bare feet. Her arms were wrapped around her chest as she leaned against the passenger door, trying to stay as far from me as possible within the tight confines of the SUV.

I let out a frustrated sigh. "I hadn't planned on it."

It was the truth. I wasn't going to lie and say yes since that would signal to her that she had nothing to lose, making her reckless. On the other hand, I still needed her to think it was a possibility. Making her just scared enough to be easier to handle. Currently, the thought of killing her hadn't even entered my mind. I also hadn't planned on kissing her either, but I supposed "accidents happen."

She didn't say anything else.

I could barely make out her face in the dim light.

Her lips trembled as a tear slid down her face.

If I had a heart, it would've broken for her.

She was silent the rest of the trip.

As we got closer to my cabin, I focused on my revenge plan.

That was what I had to do, ignore the whimpering girl at my side and think of the plan.

She was nothing, only a means to an end.

I repeated that over and over in my head. I had to be cold, cruel, and heartless or she would try to walk all over me just like her brother.

Except unlike Luc, she would try to appeal to my softer side.

I couldn't let her in, I couldn't allow her to have that power.

She was nothing, only a means to an end.

CHAPTER 9



MARKSEN

“*J*ust do as you are told, and you will be fine,” I said as we pulled up to the house.

I got out and offered her a hand to help her to her feet, a force of habit.

Her fingers trembling, she took my hand.

I watched her face as she observed her surroundings.

I didn't know why, but I wanted her to be impressed by this house.

She took it all in, the single-story cottage-style home, the white trim on cedar shingles, the small porch. It wasn't a lot, but it was mine and it was meticulously designed and maintained.

I picked her up again, to save her feet from having to walk on the sharp, crushed-shell gravel.

This time, I chose not to throw her over my shoulder, but to hold her close in my arms. The symbolism of a husband carrying his wife over the threshold of their new home was lost on me until the very last second. I set her down with more force than I intended on the hardwood floor inside the living room.

The place was a work of art with beautiful Art Nouveau detailing carved into the wood mantel. There was also a large window that let in plenty of natural light during the day, the beautiful stained glass details of tall grass blowing in the wind

over a sandy bluff at the top transforming daylight into sparkling beams of tans, blues, and greens on sunny days.

I really was proud of this place.

When I bought it, it was in shambles. I supposed it would have been fine for some small, middle-class family. Maybe a struggling author would have used it to escape the world and write their next book. But I needed something up to my standards. So I set about personally refurbishing it, room by room.

The living room was first, repairing the hardwood, refinishing the fireplace, and painting the walls.

Some things I hired people for, like the fireplace, and others I did myself, like the painting. I had read somewhere that having a hands-on project was good for stress, so this was what I did. The bathroom was completed not too long ago. I had completely torn it out and re-done it, removing the closet from one of the bedrooms to expand it, making it big enough for a massive shower stall with a waterfall showerhead.

It was while I painted that I'd gotten the idea for how I would take Olivia and make her pay.

The mindless monotony of that particular chore allowed my mind to wander and come up with some exceptionally *creative* plans.

“Where am I staying?” she asked.

I hadn't even thought of that when I brought her here. There was only one bed. Only one bedroom, the second having been turned into my office.

I should do the gentlemanly thing and sleep on the sofa.

Fuck that, I wasn't here to be a gentleman.

I suddenly wanted her in my arms.

I wanted her next to me while she slept.

I wanted to feel her breath against my chest and the pulse of her heartbeat.

And I didn't want to analyze why.

I didn't know if that was what I was going to do yet.

Could I lie next to her and not touch her?

Before tonight, I would have said yes.

Now, after seeing her fire, feeling her response to my punishing hand, and tasting her lips, I doubted any man was that strong.

“The bedroom is down that hallway.” I pointed toward the hall on the left. “As is my office and the bathroom. Kitchen is over there. The dining room is the built-in table there.”

“What, no cage?” she muttered under her breath.

“Excuse me?”

“I said, *what, no cage?* I thought you would have me chained in a basement or—”

I stepped close, deliberately intimidating her with my superior height and strength as I grabbed her chin and pulled her face up to look at me. “I am allowing you some freedom because frankly, you don't know where you are, and you promised to behave. Do not mistake my kindness for weakness. Mouth off to me again, and I will tie you to the bed.”

Her brown eyes were rimmed with smudged eyeliner and smeared mascara.

Still, the red from where she had been crying made her eyes seem bigger, almost Bambi-like. Her soft lips were pink and a bit puffy where I had kissed her roughly.

Would they feel soft around my cock?

“Am I supposed to be grateful?” she asked. “Should I be showing gratitude that you aren't putting me in some kind of dog kennel?”

Her fire was starting to make a reappearance, and I couldn't help but smile. I tilted my head like I was going to kiss her again, watching the way her eyes dilated and her lips parted just slightly for me.

There was something gratifying about knowing she wanted me as much as I wanted her.

Even if she wouldn't admit it.

"A dog kennel?" I laughed. "You know, I hadn't even considered that. Maybe I'll collar you too. You would look so pretty on your knees, begging for my cock."

Her eyes lit up with hatred and the very tops of her cheeks turned a bright red.

"I hate you."

"You keep saying that like it should mean something to me."

I moved a little closer to her. The vein in her neck was pulsing rapidly and her chest stilled as she held her breath.

"Doesn't it?"

"Not even a little bit, princess." I leaned in so my lips were almost touching her.

Her body arched into mine.

She didn't hate me, she wanted me.

There was a very real possibility she wanted to hate me, but that wasn't quite the same thing.

"Why do you keep lying to yourself?"

She shoved at my shoulders. "I'm not. You are the worst kind of man, and my brother will kill you for touching me. What happened to you, Marksens? Can't get a woman to love you like Amelia loves Luc, so you have to kidnap one?"

"Keep up the attitude and I really will tie you to the fucking bed," I growled before pushing her back.

I should thank her for reminding me why we were here.

She made a little frustrated grunting sound as she sat on the sofa and crossed her arms over her chest. "I still don't understand why I am here."

"You are here to do whatever the fuck I tell you. Don't worry about the big picture and how you play into this little

game of chess between Luc and me. Remember, you are nothing but a pawn.”

She pushed off the sofa, planting her hands on her waist. “I’m tired of you saying that. I am not a pawn in some twisted little game you two are playing.”

“That’s the part you have a problem with? You really are nothing more than a silly little girl. A toy that I will play with and discard when I am done.”

“How dare you!” she yelled. Her face turned an adorable shade of pink in her agitation, almost matching the shade of her punished ass cheeks.

Storming across the room, I grabbed her by the back of the neck and tugged her toward me.

Staring down into those beautiful brown eyes, I held her, squeezing just enough to remind her who the fuck was in charge.

The very air crackled with tension.

Neither of us breathed.

I leaned in close, drawing back my lips, baring my teeth as if I were an animal in heat, testing a mate.

Her fingertips lightly moved over my chest in hesitant, featherlight touches as she slightly raised up on her toes, then lowered again.

Giving myself a mental shake, I ruthlessly reminded myself of my purpose.

Pulling back, breaking the spell, I sneered, “Am I wrong? Fine. Prove me wrong. Why don’t you get in the kitchen and show me just how useful you are? Or does the little princess pawn not even know how to feed herself? After all, Mommy did die before she could show you how a woman should behave.”

“Fuck you!” she spat, clearly having forgotten her promise to behave. “Mine died, but yours walked out and left. Or is that what this is really about? Your mommy issues. Do you

have to kidnap women because Mommy didn't love you so why should anyone else?"

"Keep talking like that and this time I will spank you until you can't sit down for a week. Then I will tie you to the bed and leave you there. Do you think your brother will find you before you starve?"

She was pushing buttons I didn't know I had.

My fist tightened at my side as I tried to get a grip on my anger.

"He'll find me." Her voice quavered, as if she wasn't sure anymore.

"Oh, I'm sure he will eventually. But will it be in time? What bad things can happen to you before he does? Will there be anything left of you to find?"

When she broke eye contact, I knew I had won.

Why didn't that make me feel better?

"Now get in the kitchen and make dinner. I have cameras all over this house, and the doors and windows all have alarms. I will know the second you try to escape, and will drag you back by your hair, then chain you naked to the bed. Do you understand?"

She didn't say anything.

She didn't even look at me until I grabbed her face by her jaw and made her.

"Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"Yes, what?"

"Yes, *sir*."

"Do you know how to cook?"

At her age she should, but clearly, without a mother in the house, Lucian Manwarring, Sr. had failed to teach his daughters anything of use.

“Of course I can cook.” She kept her gaze trained on the floor.

“I expect dinner properly plated and on the table in an hour.”

CHAPTER 10



OLIVIA

Marksen left me standing in the living room in a huff. For a second, I thought I'd gone too far when I mentioned his mother leaving him, but he'd gone the mother route first.

A line from an old Disney movie came to mind.

A lady never starts fights, but she can finish them.

Even if she did finish the fight, a lady would have never said what I did.

Should I have said that? It was harsh, and I may have hurt his feelings. But why should I care about his feelings when he clearly had no regard for mine.

If he wanted a lady, he should have treated me like one. A gentleman wouldn't talk to me the way he had. They would never have insinuated the things he did. And they never would have flipped a lady onto their lap, lifted her skirt, and spanked her.

Not to mention, a gentleman would have never kidnapped me in the first place.

I was a lady, and I would demand to be treated as such.

Then again, in our world, a lady would have never started her own business. A lady would not have been turned on by his manhandling, and a lady would have admitted she had no idea how to cook, let alone properly plate things.

That last part wasn't true. A lady would know how to cook. Maybe not a five-course, Michelin-star meal, but she would at least know the basics so she could direct her hired cook in menu planning. It would be an expected part of her duties in running a large household. I assumed they would also know what having a meal properly plated meant. I was clearly not a lady. No matter how hard my teachers at my all-girls' academy worked to turn me into a well-behaved societal bride, it just didn't take.

I didn't get my mother's grace or good manners.

I got the Manwarring fire.

I got the need to control my own empire and an attitude that told me there was nothing in this or any world that I couldn't do. That, apparently, included cooking a meal for my kidnapper.

It couldn't be that hard though, right?

Even children could cook for themselves. I had never before wished I had taken my home economics class more seriously. Maybe my journalism degree wasn't as smart as I had originally thought. Of course, at the time, I hadn't factored getting kidnapped into my future career's skillset plans.

I considered going to find Marksens and admitting I had no idea how to cook.

Maybe he could order something...unless he'd taken me so far from civilization that ordering something wasn't an option.

What would he do to me when he found out I really was useless?

Or worse, what would happen if I fed him something and he got food poisoning and died?

Would a judge still consider it self-defense? Probably not.

Though I was sure the family lawyer could spin it in some way where I only got probation. The headlines would do more harm than anything else. I may have been a wealthy,

privileged woman, but I was still a woman, and the double standards would end me.

My brother could kill someone on purpose, in self-defense. He would be a hero and the headlines would say that. If I accidentally killed Marksens with E. coli or salmonella, the headlines would be salacious.

Evil Manwarring whore murders man after she seduces him.

DuBois Prince attempts to woo a drunken heiress and she murders him.

Manwarring slut drinks too much at a party and kills a man willing to give her the attention she was clearly asking for.

As a woman in journalism I was working tirelessly with my magazine to even the playing field, but I hadn't made enough changes in the never-ending boys club for this not to take me down.

No, no, I could do this.

How hard could it possibly be to figure out? All of mankind had been cooking their food since the Stone Age.

I was a smart, capable woman.

I ran an online magazine that people scoffed at until I blew their expectations out of the water.

If I could do that, I could handle chopping a couple vegetables and making some meat.

Pulling my hair up into a messy bun, I walked into the kitchen with my chin held high and my shoulders back, ignoring how stupid it was for me to be power posing to an empty room.

It was smaller than I expected.

The only kitchens I had ever been in were massive, meant for a staff to cook large dinners for twenty or more people. Even my home had an event kitchen. The Manwarrings would

never have a small kitchen meant to just make an intimate meal for one or two.

Did people really cook for only one or two people? It seemed like such a waste.

The first thing I had to do, I assumed, was to boil water. That was a thing I had heard people say when talking about other people who couldn't cook. "They don't even know how to boil water."

It only made sense that would be the first step in cooking anything.

I grabbed a large copper pot that was hanging above the counter, put it on the stovetop and turned the dial about halfway, but nothing happened.

No, that wasn't right.

I could hear something, like a slight hissing, and definitely smelled something noxious.

Maybe it was a flameless stove? Like the electric ones? That had to be it.

I filled the pot to the brim with water, then went to the refrigerator and looked for food.

There were so many things. Vegetables, meat, and I didn't have the slightest idea what to do with any of it. I pulled some mushrooms from the fridge and thought maybe I could do something with them. I looked all over the package for some instructions, but there was nothing.

I put them on the counter and grabbed something that looked vaguely like chicken. It was perfect. Chicken was really popular, so it made sense that it had to be easy to make and hard to mess up. I looked, and still no directions, which was annoying.

I grabbed another pan that was hanging above the counter and put it on the stovetop. The water still wasn't boiling. It didn't even look warm. I touched it, and it was the same temperature as it was when I got it from the faucet. Then again, I wasn't exactly sure how long it took for water to boil.

Maybe it took a while, and that was why they had that old saying about watching a pot boil?

That weird smell was getting stronger.

So I backed away from the stove and looked at the chicken and mushrooms I had grabbed.

Did I have to cut it? Or was that something you did after cooking?

Ugh, why didn't I watch those cooking shows in college like the other girls did?

I mentally kicked myself while staring at the raw chicken. If more people saw it uncooked, I was certain they would *never* eat chicken. It was all purple and pale with strange, goose-bumped flesh. Gross.

Should I season it? What did that even mean? Did I add salt or sugar, or some type of spice?

I looked out the back window, into the darkened backyard.

It appeared like a section of it was roped off for a garden. The entire yard had a high fence around it, which meant making a run for it and hoping to get help wasn't an option.

I leaned against the counter, mindlessly staring at the mushrooms while I considered my options. There was nothing I could do right now. Looking around, I took note of the cameras positioned around the room, and of the sensors on every window and door. I would bet they all reported back to his cell phone.

A plan formed in my head. It was simple, but sometimes simple was best.

I would wait until Marksens was asleep, then I would steal his phone. It didn't matter if I couldn't open it. I would take it so he couldn't see how or when I left. I would sneak out of the house and try to find someone, anyone who could help me. Or a pay phone if those were still a thing.

I would call Luc, and he would come get me.

If I could convince him I was fine, maybe he'd send someone else to collect me, so I didn't ruin what was left of his wedding.

But if all else failed, I could make an emergency 911 call from Marksen's phone.

It didn't need to be unlocked to do that.

That had to be my last resort.

If a 911 call was made, there would be a report and it would be impossible to handle this or any fallout from it discreetly.

That was my plan. It was a good plan. I just needed to not rile Marksen up anymore. Just go with the flow and do as he said until he fell asleep.

Which meant first, I needed to feed him.

I removed the plastic from the chicken and immediately pressed the back of my hand over my mouth, smothering a gag.

Oh God, it got worse. So. Much. Worse.

I didn't expect it to be so slimy ... and bloody. Lifting the Styrofoam with two fingers, I flopped the chicken into the pan. I was uncertain about what to do with the white pad that stuck to the bottom of the meat. Maybe that was a seasoning packet? I would just leave it there for now, just in case.

I put the pan on the stove next to the still-tepid water and tried to turn the burner on high.

The stovetop clicked, and then a ball of fire rose from the stove all the way to the ceiling.

I screamed as a wave of hot air burned against my skin, and my dress caught fire.

CHAPTER 11



MARKSEN

That little girl was going to push me too far.

When I left her in the kitchen, forcing her into her place by making her cook for me, I went to my office with her phone and wallet tucked in my pocket.

She had no idea who the fuck she was dealing with.

There were moments when she bent to my will, flashes of perfect subservience when her eyes were cast down and precious tears trailed down her cheeks. In those moments, she showed me the good girl she could be for me.

My fallen angel, my broken princess.

Then, a moment later, her blood would boil, no doubt having been tainted by that Manwarring fire, and she'd have the audacity to talk back, make demands, and hurl insults like I was some waiter who didn't bring her dinner fast enough.

She and her brother were both going to find out what kind of man I was when pushed. They would find out why I was not a man to be fucked with.

Unlike Luc, I had never needed the mob to do my dirty work.

Like a real man, I handled that shit myself.

I paced around the room for several minutes, trying to get my rage under control.

She pushed too damn far.

Logically, I knew Olivia was lashing out because she was scared, but I didn't give a fuck. No one talked to me like that and got away with it. I didn't care how pretty she was when she cried, or how hard my cock got when she was angry and tried to fight me. It didn't matter how soft her skin was or how bright her eyes were.

I poured myself a drink from the crystal decanter sitting on the side table before I took a seat at my desk. Leaning back in the leather chair, I let the fine liquor warm my belly and soothe my anger.

It only took a few moments for my heart rate to settle and my breathing to calm. Then, with Olivia's phone in my hand, I checked to see if anyone had noticed she was gone.

So far, nothing.

It was almost sad that it had been well over a couple of hours and no one ... no one ... had missed her. No one had raised the alarm. If she were my girl, I would never have let her out of my sight long enough to be missed.

Feeling my anger rise at the direction of my thoughts, I pushed them aside and focused on the task at hand.

She had received a handful of text messages and e-mails, but only one was personal.

Some pretty boy model's number was saved under "Too Desperate."

He had asked her to dinner.

I scrolled through their messages, and it looked like he had asked her out several times, and each time she had politely declined. In the past three weeks, she had given him several gentle refusals. Everything from "working late" to "prior commitment with my family."

This guy was never going to take the hint. In a moment of what I chose to believe was chivalrous pity and not jealous rage, I made sure this pissant would never send her a message again. It was hard to mimic her texting style, but I think I nailed it.

Olivia: I have tried to be professional to no avail, so allow me to be blunt. No. I'm not interested. Please stop asking.

Just a few seconds later, her phone pinged.

Too Desperate: Excuse me bitch, you should be grateful I even gave you the time of day. You should be on your knees sucking my cock for the opportunity to be seen on my arm.

Who the fuck did this little micro-dicked bitch think he was, talking to her like that?

I made a note of his number to look into him later.

Right now, I had shit to do, but he wasn't going to get away with talking to *my* girl like that.

She may just be my captive, but that still made her mine.

While she was in my home, she was mine.

I scrolled through some of her other messages until I found the longest thread, with a girl who looked to be her assistant.

I typed out a quick message saying Olivia was going off the grid for a bit and to handle things until she reached out.

With another sip of my bourbon, I kicked my feet up onto the wooden rolltop desk and started snooping through her photos and her calendar.

It was almost all business. This woman had less of a social life than I did. Her entire life was work, a trait to be commended in a man but pitied in a woman.

For a moment, I wondered if I should have set up a date with the desperate pissant, then warmth from the bourbon turned sour as anger ran through me. No, he wouldn't be talking to anyone, let alone Olivia, like that again.

My thoughts were interrupted by Olivia's shrieks.

Hearing the panic and terror in her voice, I vaulted out of my chair and ran down the narrow hallway toward the kitchen, fearing the worst.

As I crossed the threshold, there was an unholy glow which lit up the small interior.

Bright flames encircled her tiny frame, clinging to every curve in a death-like grip.

My heart pounded in my ears, almost drowning out the sound of her horrified screams.

Launching across the room, I grabbed her arms and stretched them out to her sides, to prevent her from patting out the flames herself and burning her hands. In the same motion, I pushed my fingers deep inside the bodice of her gown and ripped it straight down the middle, exposing her bare breasts and the world's tiniest thong.

I didn't say a word or even acknowledge her shriek of outrage as I tossed her dress into the sink and opened the faucet. I then shut off the stove and grabbed her shoulders, turning her so she was facing me. I checked her over; her skin appeared a little pink, but otherwise she looked unharmed.

I ran my hands down her slim arms and clasped her wrists, turned her hands over palms up, examining her for signs of burns or blistering. Like the skin on her chest and arms it was pink but didn't seem badly burned.

The fear which still raced through my veins intensified to fury.

Jesus fucking Christ.

She could have been killed.

All over her stupid, stubborn Manwarring pride.

She wriggled to get out of my grasp. The moment I released her wrists, she covered her breasts.

I snatched her by the shoulders and gave her a shake. "Are you insane? You should have just told me you didn't know how to cook," I yelled.

Her mouth opened and closed several times as her eyes teared up.

Filled with an untamable mixture of fear and rage, I grabbed her arm and pulled her down the hallway to the bathroom.

She tried to complain, but I wasn't listening.

The last thing I needed was for her skin to blister, and have it look like I tortured the poor girl.

At least that was what I was telling myself.

Luc wouldn't involve the authorities over a simple kidnapping, but torture was another story. If he thought for a second I was burning her, he would bring hellfire down on my home and not stop until he had my head served on a silver platter.

Throwing the shower curtain aside, I flipped the shower on, making sure the water was cool but not too cool. She would probably go into shock soon and I didn't want to hasten that with a blast of cold water, but I also didn't want to worsen her possibly injured skin with hot water.

After checking the temperature one last time, I turned to her.

She shook her head. "I'm not ..."

I didn't let her finish her sentence.

I swept her into my arms and lifted her over the tub edge to deposit her into the shower.

Her shriek of outrage was cut short, transformed into a gurgle as water poured into her open mouth.

Before she could object, I turned her to face the tiled wall and slipped my finger into the back of her thong. I snapped it where the sides met the back and let the useless fabric flutter to the shower floor.

She threw an outraged glance over her shoulder. "You can't just—"

"I can't just ... what?"

Her widened eyes skirting to a corner of the shower, she wrapped her arms tightly over her breasts and crossed her legs. "What are you doing?"

"What does it look like?" I asked as I stripped off my shirt and then my pants, before climbing into the shower with her.

“Get out! Get out now!” she ordered, trying to gesture with one arm while still keeping her other arm over her chest and raising one toned thigh to cover what I just learned was her waxed pussy.

Naughty girl.

Yet, just as quickly as the illicit thought crossed my mind, I gnashed my teeth as a stab of jealousy knifed my gut.

There was only one reason why a woman suffered through the pain of waxing her pussy.

For a man.

God fucking dammit.

Curling my fingers into a fist, I slammed them against the tiled wall over her head, caging her in. “No. What the fuck were you thinking, starting a fire like that?”

She averted her gaze. “I was thinking that you demanded dinner, and I didn’t want to know what was going to happen if I didn’t make it.”

“You should have told me you didn’t know how to cook,” I seethed.

She pushed out her chin. “I’m an intelligent, capable woman. I was figuring it out!”

“How the fuck don’t you have any basic life skills?”

I was trying to focus on my anger, but it wasn’t working. My blood was still running hot through my veins from the sight of her scared and in danger in that kitchen. From the idea that I could have easily lost her.

And now, having her so close, naked and vulnerable, she was completely at my mercy.

Despite the cool water, my cock was hard and standing straight up.

I watched Olivia’s gaze flitter downward and then hasten away just as the tip of her cute pink tongue nervously flicked over her lower lip.

My little princess was trying not to stare at my cock.

The idea sent a bolt of pure need straight down my shaft.

“I have all the skills I need to excel in my life,” she argued as she ducked under my arm and skittered to the other side of the shower. Like that would somehow protect her from me.

The move gave me another look at her ass.

From this angle, I could see the distinct handprint on her left cheek from my earlier spanking.

My handprint.

My mark.

Mine.

I wrapped an arm around her waist and pulled her into my chest, turning her around so she was facing the water, getting hit directly by the spray.

“No, don’t. It’s so cold.”

“You should have thought about that before you set yourself on fire.”

I secured her wrists and pulled them away from her body so the cold water soaked all of her.

She screamed again and pulled against my grip, but I refused to let her go.

CHAPTER 12



MARKSEN

Her naked ass was pressed against my groin, and the more she wiggled, the more I wanted to bend her over and slide into her wet heat, but I needed to make sure she wasn't seriously injured.

"I'm sorry, okay? Is that what you want to hear? I'm sorry. I don't know how to cook, I can't clean, and I don't know anything about a properly presented plate!" she sputtered as the water spray hit her in the face.

I threw my head back and laughed.

She really was adorably clueless.

Why did I think it was so cute?

I had never thought anything was cute before.

She ripped her arms from my grasp and turned to face me. This time, she didn't bother hiding her body, and I didn't pretend not to look.

Casting a heated gaze over her face and breasts, I asked, "Does it hurt anywhere?"

I didn't see any burnt skin. Nothing was even red or pink anymore.

It was all the perfect ivory of her natural skin, except the tight pink nipples that were hard and begging for my mouth and her bare pink lips between her legs.

"No, the fire barely touched me. It was gone as fast as it was there," she mumbled.

“Good.”

I reached behind her and turned the dial of the shower to give us warmer water. I then stepped back and just watched her body relax under the warmer temperature.

Her gaze stayed warily on mine while she ran her hands over her hair and down her body. I reached behind her again, brushing against her as I picked up the bodywash.

“Clean yourself,” I demanded as I lifted her hand and squirted some of the soap into her open palm.

“I’m not injured so you don’t have to stay in the shower.”

“I’m not leaving.”

“Fine. Then I’ll leave.”

“The hell you will, and if you don’t use that soap, I will.” I used a finger under her chin to tilt her head back as I promised, “And I’ll be *very* thorough if I do.”

Without moving, I watched her lather the soap between her fingers and rub it all over her body, starting with her shoulders and arms. I gazed at her expression, looking for any signs of pain or distress as her hands moved over her skin, until I was confident she wasn’t lying about not being hurt just to save face.

She kept her head lowered when her hands moved to her full breasts. They were perfect teardrops. Full and round, her pink nipples practically begged to be sucked on.

I couldn’t take it anymore.

“Come here,” I commanded.

She didn’t move.

As if she were only bold enough to tease me by touching her breasts but lost her nerve in seeing the result through.

Taking the bodywash, I captured her gaze as I slowly lathered my hands in a thick layer of creamy suds.

I could tell from the way her mouth opened on a sharp intake of breath that she knew precisely what was coming

next.

As I stepped forward, she slid back, until she bumped against the tiled wall, under the shower stream. With the warm water pounding down my back, I locked eyes with hers as I placed my hands on her ribcage, spreading my fingers. I slowly shifted them upward until the edges of my fingers touched the undersides of her breasts.

She reached up to grasp my wrists.

My gaze narrowed in warning. “Don’t.”

“Please, I don’t want—”

Before she could finish the lie, I swooped down and captured her mouth.

Despite the heat of the flames, she tasted cool and refreshing.

My tongue pushed past her resistance to sweep inside her sweet mouth as my hands cupped her breasts. When I pinched one of her nipples, she gasped, and I took that opportunity to deepen our kiss even further, claiming her mouth for my own. I massaged her breasts, flicking my thumbs over her nipples, letting her enjoy the attention until she was moaning against my lips.

With my lips still on hers, kissing her and devouring her, my hands slid down her body to her toned abdomen then separated, one gliding over her rounded hips to her ass, the other sliding between her legs, my fingers instantly finding her clit.

She was already wet for me. I pushed one digit inside her slick warmth, surprised at how tight and almost virginal she felt as her body clasped my finger.

“Marksen.” She gasped my name as she thrust her head to the side. “Stop. We can’t do this.”

I shifted my hand from her ass to wrap it around the back of her neck, shoving a thigh between her legs, securing her in my embrace. “I’m not asking for your permission, princess.”

I growled as I pushed a second finger inside of her impossibly tight sheath.

Her eyes widened. “You wouldn’t!”

I leaned down and sucked her lower lip into my mouth, sinking my teeth into the soft flesh, biting her before releasing it. “Watch me as I take you apart. I want you to know that I am the one in control of your body. I’m the one bringing you pleasure, even against your will.”

As I twisted my wrist and thrust my fingers harder and faster into her pussy, her thighs trembled. I knew she was close.

My lips slid along her jaw to her earlobe, licking it with the tip of my tongue before tormenting her further. “Admit it princess, you like submitting to my touch.”

She wanted to agree. I could see it in her face, but she couldn’t bring herself to do it. I bent down and took one of her nipples in my mouth and sucked.

Her hands tangled in my hair and at first, she pushed me away before pulling me tighter against her.

She wanted me.

She just didn’t want to want me.

I could work with that.

Clearly, Olivia had very sensitive nipples, and I had every intention of taking full advantage of that.

I bit down just enough to hear her whimper as I pushed a third finger into her pussy.

She was so impossibly tight. “Have you ever used a showerhead to come, princess?” I asked as I stood to my full height and turned her so her back was to my chest.

She lolled her head to the side against my shoulder.

“Words, Olivia.”

“No,” she breathed.

“Let me teach you how.” I picked up the handheld showerhead from the wall and gently nudged her feet apart. “Hold on to me.”

Her arms came up and wrapped around my neck, stretching her delectable breasts, making them perkier, and I groaned at the sight.

Pinching one of her nipples with one hand, I hit the button on the side of the showerhead so the water came out in a single, pressurized stream, and aimed it between her legs.

I watched as her body tightened at the first contact of the stream. Then as I found the perfect angle, her back arched, pressing her breast into my palm.

A sexy, deep-throated moan escaped from her lips.

It was the sexiest thing I had ever heard.

My cock pressed against her ass, and it took every bit of self-control I had, and then some, to restrain myself from bending her in half and pounding into her from behind.

Her fingers laced into my hair at the back of my head and pulled. The sharp sting of pain added to my pleasure. I felt every slight tremble in her legs and arms along my body as the pleasure in her built.

“You look so perfect like this,” I rasped in her ear. “My perfect little captive.”

I touched a nerve, evident in the way the color rose on her chest and moved up to her face. In the way her eyes slid closed, and her lips were open as she arched. The way the muscles in her abdomen flexed as she tried to hold on and her fingers dug into the back of my neck.

“Do you like this, little girl?”

She tightened her lips into a straight line, pulling them between her teeth.

I wouldn't let her shut me out now.

With my free hand, I ruthlessly pinched her sensitive clit.

Crying out, she rose up on her toes.

“I asked you a question,” I ground out through clenched teeth as I pressed my cock against her lower back...a threat and a promise.

“Please. I’m sorry!” she whimpered.

“Then answer me like a good girl and tell me how much you like it. Tell me how much you like being my little whore.”

I was convinced every woman had a praise and degradation kink when on the verge of orgasm and my little Olivia was no exception.

Her brows scrunched low as her eyelids shut tight.

“I like it,” she whispered.

I twisted her clit. “Louder.”

She cried out. “I like being your little whore.”

Her shoulders shook in submission as the pleasure, pain, and conflicting emotions of anger, pride, and degradation took their toll on her already overwhelmed psyche.

Her knees buckled.

I wrapped my arm tightly around her waist, supporting her weight.

As I once more directed the shower stream at a perfect angle over her clit, I demanded, “Beg me to let you come.”

She gasped.

I tilted my head and bit her neck.

She arched into me, sucking in a breath between clenched teeth. “Don’t make me say it.”

Licking the faint bite mark, I murmured against her skin, “You have a choice, princess. Either you beg me to come, or I push you down onto your knees and shove my cock down your throat until you choke.”

Her fingers tightened their hold in my hair. “Please ... please ... let me come.”

“Good girl. Why should I let you come?”

She sobbed. “Marksen, don’t ...”

“Say it.”

Her hips rocked against mine as her body screamed for release. “Please ... let me come ... because ... I’m your good little whore.”

I arched my back, lifting her off her feet, supporting her full weight as I opened my thighs, forcing her legs open. From this position, I held the showerhead even closer to her pussy, knowing she would feel both weightless and lightheaded which would only add to her orgasm.

“I’m...oh God! I’m almost...oh God! I’m...oh God! Oh God!”

Her body stiffened. I could feel the air seizing in her lungs beneath my arm as she climaxed.

Wanting to feel the tremors deep inside her pussy as the climax ebbed, I tightened my arm and flipped her forward, until she bent in half.

After slamming my fist against the button that controlled the shower stream to return it to the overhead rainfall, I braced one hand against the wall, grasped my cock and pressed it between her legs from behind.

Olivia’s torso snapped up as she turned her head to stare at me over her shoulder. “Wait, what are you doing?”

Lowering my arm to fist her wet, tangled locks, I pulled her hair, forcing her to arch her back and push her pert ass out. “I’m about to fuck you so hard you forget your own name, not to mention the name of any man who came before me.”

The head of my cock pushed against the resistance of her tight entrance.

Despite my opening her up with three fingers, she was still impossibly tight.

Must be some kind of yoga-Pilates-Kegel shit. Well, I fucking approved.

She braced her open palms against the wall and cried out.
“Marksen, stop. You can’t!”

Indignant rage burned within my chest.

For a moment, I had forgotten my hatred for her and her fucking family.

I had forgotten about my revenge plans.

I had forgotten about ruining her.

Fortunately, I remembered just in time.

I yanked her hair. “What’s the matter, princess? I’m good enough to get you off, but my cock’s not good enough for your pretty, pretentious pussy?”

“No, you don’t understand. I’m—”

Digging my fingers into her hip to hold her in place, I sneered, “I understand perfectly, princess.”

Right before I viciously thrust my thick cock into her tight pussy ... straight to the hilt.

And straight through her maidenhead.

Fuck.

CHAPTER 13



OLIVIA

*M*y fingernails scraped against the wet tiles as my knees buckled.

He wrapped his body around mine and cupped my breast.

“No.” I tried pushing away from him. “No, you can’t, I ...” Tears flowed freely down my face. “Not like this.”

“Shhh.” Marksens shushed me, while still inside me.

He didn’t move, didn’t pull out or thrust.

My voice cracked as my body shook. “This can’t be my first time. Not with you, not like this.”

He pulled out and turned me around, pressing me against the tiled wall with his body. He braced his forearm over my head as his other hand brushed the wet tendrils away from my cheek. “It’s too late, Olivia. It’s done. Let me make it good for you, princess.”

He leaned in and kissed me.

I wanted to rip my lips from his, but he shifted his hand to my jaw and applied gentle pressure until I opened my mouth.

The moment his tongue thrust inside, he lifted my knee over his hip, throwing me off balance as he lowered his knees and pressed his hips forward.

His heavy cock pushed against my sore entrance.

Digging my nails into his upper arms, I whimpered while trying to twist my head away.

Showing no mercy, he thrust in deep, impaling me against the tiled wall as he kissed me.

The first couple of thrusts hurt, like being stabbed in the stomach, but then the pain eased and was slowly replaced with a warm, growing pleasure. After another moment, the pain had faded, completely overtaken by a dark, primal pleasure and a hunger I had never felt before.

I wanted more.

I slowly relaxed my jaw and kissed him back.

When I broke the kiss, needing to breathe, he kissed down my neck and sucked on my delicate skin, sending waves of electric shocks tingling over my body.

I hated it and loved it at the same time.

“That’s right, be my good princess and let go. Let me make this good for you.”

He pulled out just a little more, then slammed back in.

It hurt a little but in a way that made the pleasure feel sharper and more intense. Then I felt something else, like pressure starting to build. The pressure and friction became a little stronger. He did it again, and I moaned out his name without even realizing it.

He leaned back to give me a possessive smirk that made me want to both scratch his eyes out and pull him in closer for another kiss.

He lifted my other leg up by the knee until both my legs were wrapped around his hips.

“Marksen, please,” I rasped, crossing my ankles behind his back, holding on to him for dear life, not wanting this assault on my senses and body to ever end.

“Please, what, princess?”

“Make me feel good.”

“Do you want to come for me again, princess?” he asked.

“Yes.”

He pulled out again, and this time when he pushed in, he wasn't gentle.

The sting was gone.

I had never felt anything like this before.

I was so full and overwhelmed; it felt like he was controlling my body from the inside.

Marksen's hands cupped my ass and he pulled me up higher on the wall to push into me at a more punishing, frenetic pace.

He hit some magical spot inside of me that made my vision white out and electricity bolt up my spine and tingle down to my fingers and toes.

He did it again and again, thrusting harder and faster, building my pleasure higher and higher until it was as tense as a rubber band about to snap.

Over and over again.

"Fuck, princess, you are so tight, and you are taking my cock like such a good girl."

His words pushed me even higher. My core tightened. My head was swimming, and all I could do was hold on to him as he fucked me.

"Tell me you like it. Tell me it feels good for you now." His breath was harsh against my cheek, coming out in short pants, as his hands held on to me tighter.

My fingers threaded through his hair. On instinct, I pressed my heels into the small of his back to urge him deeper.

I tightened my lips, unwilling to give him the satisfaction.

He bit my lower lip. "Say it, or I'll pull out before your pretty cunt comes, force you to your knees and shove my cock down your throat until I come."

"Marksen, please," I begged.

"Say it," he growled.

I didn't know what I wanted. Just that I needed it and Marksens was the only person that could give it to me. "Fine," I moaned. "I love it."

"Good girl. Come for me, princess, let it all go," he demanded, and something deep inside me heard his order and obeyed.

Every muscle in my body tightened and then released in the most euphoric feeling I had ever felt. I cried out my release as Marksens swore, slammed into me a few more times, and then stilled, pressing his head to mine, holding me perfectly still while I could feel his cock pump his hot come inside me.

He stayed like that for a moment. His forehead pressed to mine, his eyes closed while we both tried to regain our composure.

Slowly, I unlocked my ankles from behind his back and put my feet on the wet tiles of the shower floor. The second my feet hit the floor his cock slid from my now sore pussy.

He backed up from me a moment and went to adjust the water.

I turned, intending to sneak out.

"Don't you dare move," he barked, grabbing my hair and pulling me back against his hard chest.

He held us both under the now pleasantly warm water.

With his bodywash that smelled like peppermint and bergamot, he washed every inch of me, starting at my feet and working up my thighs, being surprisingly gentle.

Before tonight, no one without a medical license had ever touched me where he did, or anywhere really.

I had never had a boyfriend, or a lover.

Before Marksens DuBois, I had never even had my first real kiss, unless you counted Cynthia Delecourt during a midnight game of truth or dare in the eighth grade, which I did.

He paid extra attention to my breasts, and when his tongue darted out of his mouth to lick my nipple, I couldn't help the

gasp that escaped my lips.

He grinned up at me and winked.

I could feel the heat of a blush rise to my cheeks. It felt a little silly to blush about a gasp after everything we had just done.

When I was clean, he picked me up and set me on the bathroom counter.

“Stay,” he ordered with a warning glare, stepping over to the linen closet to grab two big white fluffy towels.

He ran the first one over his body then quickly secured it around his waist.

I ignored the pang of disappointment that part of him was now covered.

Then he came back to me with the other towel, and with the same attention to detail and gentleness as he had used when washing me, he dried me off.

“I can dry myself,” I huffed, suddenly feeling vulnerable and churlish. I tried to grab for a corner of the towel.

He yanked it out of my hand. “I couldn’t care less what you *can* do, princess. I only care about what I *want* to do.”

I jerked my chin to the side and blinked away the tears, forcing myself not to think about how this was the man who stole my first time.

Instead, I took the time to really look at the bathroom. The entire house had a slightly older-home vibe. It was warm and inviting. Even the kitchen. Not this room. The bathroom still smelled of fresh paint, and it was all cold metal and modern lines, without colors and details to match the feel of the rest of the house. It was functional and fashionable but didn’t seem to mesh with the house.

I wondered if that was on purpose or if Marksens had just been in the middle of remodeling and modernizing the home with more luxurious hardware when all of this happened.

Without a word, he picked me up again and brought me to a large bedroom toward the back of the house. It was beautiful, with hardwood floors and a queen-sized bed in the middle of the room.

“Stay here. I will be right back.”

He left the room, and I did as he said, mostly because I didn't know what other option I had.

I was naked, on his bed.

I didn't even have a towel.

I didn't know where I was or how far it would be to find help.

Tears that started building in the corners of my eyes fell down my cheeks. I swiped angrily at them.

This wasn't how I'd wanted my first time to be. I hadn't been planning on waiting for marriage, not exactly. What I was waiting for was a man who wanted me for me, not for my father's money. There were plenty of handsome young MBAs that were as ambitious as I was.

Most of them would respect the work that I did, and by extension, they would respect me, though most would marry me just for access to my father and brother. I didn't want a man who wanted me for my money or my connections. There were several male models who would sell their souls to date me and use my connections to break into the industry. I even had one beautiful British man who asked me out at least once a week.

I had been turning him down gently. He was kind and intelligent, but too needy. He struck me as the type of man who would demand my entire world revolve around him. That just wasn't going to happen.

Maybe it was my fault this was my first time.

Maybe I had read too many fairy tales and seen too many Hallmark romances, and my standards were too high.

Or maybe I wasn't available enough.

I never made the time for men, and I liked to tell myself that if the right man came along, then I would. But I wasn't sure about that anymore.

Though if I had known sex was like that...

I might have tried a little harder to make time.

Not to mention the more "traditionally suitable suitors" from my own class and social circles. The ones my father was no doubt planning as matches for me.

In that respect, Marksens would have been perfect.

Before he and my brother had their falling out.

And especially before he freaking kidnapped me.

Even then, I hadn't wanted my first time to be with a man my father sold me to in a business deal.

All I'd wanted was for my first time to be with a man who wanted me, just me, not my last name or connections. I guessed I'd gotten half of what I was after.

Marksens had no use for my connections, and he had a fortune of his own. No, he made love to me because ... wait. He hadn't made love to me.

There was a distinction. Getting it confused in my head would be a mistake that would lead to heartbreak or worse. Making love was supposed to be sweet, loving, and gentle. It was an intimate act of devotion and an expression of love.

What Marksens and I did in the shower wasn't about love.

He had fucked me.

Worse... it hadn't even been about carnal need.

He wasn't fucking me to chase a high, or because he liked me and wanted us to feel good together. No, he fucked me because he wanted to hurt my brother. He took my virginity to hurt Luc.

He had fucked me to fuck my family.

I had never felt so alone in my life.

Yanking on a corner of the coverlet, I curled up on the top of the bed, pulled my knees to my chest, and cried.

Just for a moment.

This would all be over soon, and I would work through it with my therapist and come to terms with it.

And when that didn't work, I would drink my weight in whiskey and watch classic romantic movies, like *Casablanca*, *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, and *10 Things I Hate About You*.

I would wallow, knowing as soon as the hangover was gone, this pain in my chest would be a memory. It was what I did every time I had a setback I couldn't overcome. There was no reason for this experience to be any different.

I dried my eyes and straightened my back just in time for Marksens to walk back into the room, the white fluffy towel still around his hips showing off an impressive, lean six-pack and Adonis belt. Despite everything, I wanted to stroke those incredibly sexy lines going from his hips to his groin.

He wasn't like the men I saw every day, with perfectly even muscles that were sculpted by plastic surgeons and expensive trainers, honed by makeup artists using bronzer and highlighter to define and chisel, then perfected by airbrushing and photoshop.

No, Marksens's muscles were hard and lean, and all him.

He probably worked out with a trainer in a boxing ring. The muscles were not the goal but a benefit; his objective was power and strength. The more I watched him, the more differences I saw between him and the other men that I interacted with.

The models I saw almost daily were fashion models. They had thinner, almost delicate frames, whereas Marksens had wide shoulders that tapered down to a narrower waist and hips. His abs weren't perfectly symmetrical. Instead, the right side was a little higher than the left. He didn't carry himself with the same swan-like grace they did either.

His moves were graceful in the same way a jungle cat's were. They were confident and well-practiced. His body was

just as agile but also so much stronger. There was even a dark dusting of hair on his chest and stomach that led down below the towel.

That illicit hunger inside of me started to build again as I watched him move around the room.

The businessmen I saw weren't slim and delicate like the models, but they weren't this either.

Marksen was the man they tried to be.

If the business analysts I met were men, then the models were only boys, and Marksen was a god.

"Stop staring at me and lay back, Olivia," he said, pulling me from my gawking.

"Marksen, please, I can't. I'm too sore ... for you to ... take advantage again."

His gaze narrowed. "Don't play the martyr, Olivia. It doesn't suit you," he admonished, pricking my pride.

He grabbed my ankles, spreading them apart to make room for him to place a knee between my legs.

"Marksen, don't," I begged as I tried to push at his chest. I really couldn't take him again.

I was going to be sore enough in the morning.

He ignored my pleas. But instead of climbing on top of me, he hooked my thighs over his shoulders and leaned down, kissing a line from my knee up my inner thigh. Then he did the same to the other leg. It felt good, but it didn't prepare me for how good it was going to feel when he put his mouth on my core.

I thought men didn't like to do this or avoided it or ... my thoughts cut out when he licked between my pussy lips, and the most amazing feeling spread over my body.

My eyes rolled to the back of my head as I fisted the blanket.

It was electrifying and soothing at the same time. I wanted to both push him away and beg him to never stop. I didn't

understand how anything could feel so good and overwhelming at the same time.

When his tongue circled my clit, I saw stars. And when he sucked it into his mouth, I cried out in agonizing bliss.

He held me there right on the edge, expertly licking and sucking, not letting me come down or climax. Just holding me on the precipice of pleasure until my legs were shaking so hard, they started to cramp.

“Marksen, oh my—”

“This is what happens to good girls. Keep being my good girl, Olivia, and I will keep rewarding you like this. Be my good girl, and I will make you feel so good. But if you are bad ...” He bit my inner thigh, making me jump. “If you are bad, I will spank you and tie you to this bed and leave you here.”

“I understand,” I said. “But please. Marksen, please.” I pressed my thighs against his head.

“I got you, princess. Let me soothe the ache I caused.” He chuckled before turning his attention back to my aching core, where he licked and teased my oversensitive clit until it was almost too much to bear.

I was mentally and physically drained from the day but somehow also felt more alive. It was all too much. I couldn’t process any of it. The way he devoured me overloaded my already frayed nerves.

There were no choices, nothing I could do but submit to his touch and let it engulf me.

My back bowed off the bed as I came with a scream.

CHAPTER 14



MARKSEN

The way her pussy practically gushed for me as I made her come was enough to have me rock hard again.

She was so sweet, and the sounds she made while I teased her were like music to my ears.

I meant what I said. If she was a good girl for me, I would spend every night of her captivity with my face buried in her cunt.

I would even show her how to ride my face so she could feel like she had a little control.

She wouldn't, of course, but that wasn't the point.

I wanted to pull her off the bed, guide her to kneel at my feet as I fed her my cock. Let her taste me and feel what she did to me. I bet she would be a natural, with her soft lips around my shaft or her cute tongue lapping at my balls.

She really would look so perfect kneeling, looking up at me with her big eyes as she licked my cock. I bet she would even love it if I laced my fingers in her soft hair and showed her how I liked to be deep throated.

Then I would pick her up and bend her over the bed and fuck her until she was nothing more than a shaking, sobbing mess, until I had filled her perfect little body with my come again.

If it were any other woman lying in my bed, I would have.

Not Olivia.

She wasn't a whore, and I didn't want to treat her as one, at least not tonight.

Especially not after I realized how innocent she really had been.

There was no way I could have anticipated she was a virgin.

I meant, sure, the women in our social circle played a good game about being pure and innocent, but behind closed doors they were mostly just sluts who had paraded around in white dresses. The only reason why everyone played along was because of their money.

How was I to know Olivia was different?

My chest tightened.

I should have known.

If I were even remotely honest with myself, deep down, I had known.

Olivia was different. She'd always been different.

Sweet, kind, and intelligent, with beautiful, bright eyes that never failed to light up with delight whenever I entered a room, even when we were teenagers. I truly was a godforsaken asshole for using her as a pawn in a revenge plan.

A revenge plan that wasn't going to be pretty for her.

I had assumed she was experienced...

There were things I was going to force her to do that for a recent innocent were...*fuck*.

Pushing away the disturbing thoughts, I focused on giving her pleasure now.

I would deal with the consequences of my actions tomorrow.

My sweet, untried babygirl passed out after she came.

There was no gentle coming down, then a peaceful drifting off to sleep.

No, it was almost instant.

She came with my name on her lips, and then it was like all of a sudden, the last few hours caught up with her and she was out.

I carefully cleaned her up and pulled the silk sheets over her body.

She rolled to her side, curled up like a little chipmunk, and buried her face in my pillow.

Fuck, that did something to me, seeing her like that, sexually satisfied, asleep in my sheets wearing only a post-orgasm glow.

Knowing I had been her first was almost too much.

I picked up my phone and took a few pictures of her.

She was simply breathtaking, the silky black sheets a perfect contrast to her soft ivory skin, and the moonlight made the slight red in her hair seem as bright as a flame.

Once she was comfortable, I put on a pair of silk pajama pants and stepped out onto the porch that connected the master bedroom to the living room. I planned to go to my office and get some work done, but I couldn't stand the idea of being that far from her.

What if she woke up and became scared at her unfamiliar surroundings?

What if she called out for me and I wasn't there?

The ocean waves crashed on the shore as I lit a cigarette and just watched the black water crest and recede while I tried to figure out how this got so fucked up so fast.

My plan was simple.

I would get the girl, then keep the girl and ruin the girl publicly.

I would show her entitled douchebag of a brother what happened when someone fucked with what was mine.

Luc Manwarring may have been above the law, but that did not make him above vengeance.

Instead, I had heartlessly taken her virginity, and she was now sleeping sated in my bed while I was still riled up.

I considered going in the bathroom to rub one out while thinking of how her lips would feel around my cock. Normally, that was what I would have done...no, that wasn't true. Normally, if there was a naked woman in my bed and I was hard, I would wake her up with my cock sliding into her body. I would fuck her mercilessly until I was exhausted and fell into a dreamless sleep knowing that she would be gone by the time I woke.

Instead, I was on my patio, watching the waves with my dick hard and even more pent-up rage and energy buzzing under my skin.

It was too early to let Luc know his sister was missing or that I was the one who had her. There was no way I would be able to focus on spreadsheets, and if I wanted Olivia to behave tomorrow, I needed her to sleep now.

Besides, she earned it. She really had taken every inch like such a good girl.

Her phone buzzed in my pocket. An e-mail from her assistant saying that everything would be handled until she returned to the office and a reminder about some theater event coming up next week.

Then, another text came in from the model, who couldn't take a hint. He called her a tease and a cunt for leading him on, then said some other very incendiary remarks about her body being boyish and ugly. How her skin was as pale as a ghost and her hair ugly and flat.

I looked back in the window at Olivia, still sleeping.

This clueless boy had no idea what he was talking about. It filled me with a little pride, knowing that he was throwing a tantrum like a child because he coveted what was now mine.

It really was perfect timing. I needed someone to take my anger out on. This little prick was going to learn what happened to those who thought they could touch what was mine. Not that he would ever know why his life went to shit.

Three minutes was all I needed before I had a name, face, and address. Colin Krits. He was your typical Eurotrash pretty boy that was ninety percent cheekbones and ten percent party drugs. The fool even bragged about his drug use on his social media, along with posting pictures of himself and several celebrities at parties. Apparently, this guy was working hard to get into the inner circle of a Kardashian.

In another five minutes, I had hacked into his social media accounts and was looking over his conversations. Including the one with his boyfriend bragging about how he was going to bang the CEO's sugar mommy for them and convince her to fund their lifestyle. Saying life was going to be Balenciaga and Prada as soon as he got her to fall in love with him.

I didn't even try to hide my derisive snort.

Instead, I took screenshots of his sexist messages to Olivia and his conversation with his boyfriend, doing just enough tweaking to make it look like the messages were talking about the Kardashian he was hanging out with.

I then sent several pictures where he was dancing with a Kardashian in the background, a few of him using drugs, and even one he had shared with his lover in a DM where they were in a rather intimate embrace. Just for shits and giggles I also included a picture of an STD screening after changing the negative results to positive under herpes.

I didn't want to risk him being able to be comforted by his lover when his life fell apart.

I then sent everything to no less than six tabloids under a fake e-mail account.

On a whim, I also sent it to Olivia's assistant with a note to never hire this man again and suggested she hire one of the freelance writers to do a story about powerful women being targeted by leeches.

Watching from the sidelines as his life fell to pieces would be a nice distraction while I waited for Luc's retaliation to my plans. It would at least keep me amused.

Movement in the corner of my eye caught my attention.

It was Olivia.

Her pale skin seemed to reflect the moonlight.

She had rolled over, and the black silk sheets were now only covering half of her body, a single alabaster leg all the way to her slender hips on full display. I had expected the sight would make my cock throb, but when my heart raced too, I knew I was in trouble.

My plans never factored in Olivia as anything more than a pawn.

I thought I could use her, ruin her, and it would be fine.

Then she'd brought back memories of the sweet teenage girl who followed me around like a puppy. I never touched her because Luc and I were friends, and he threatened to kill me if he ever caught me looking at her.

Those boyish threats were why I had targeted Olivia for my revenge.

I thought it would be fine. I thought she had left all of that life behind when she went against the norm and did something most women in our class would never dream of doing. She worked, and started her own company, and built a future for herself that was not reliant on someone else. How could I have ever predicted that her flouting of tradition included shunning dating?

She was photographed with men all the time. Wall Street types, male models, and A-list celebrities. She was even rumored to have seduced a few congressmen. Despite all of that, she maintained a flawless reputation as a serious businesswoman and a powerful woman. Many even touted her as an equally qualified successor to the Manwarring empire, an assertion she publicly laughed off and refuted, saying Luc was the best option to shepherd the existing family business into the future. She was going to focus on building a new venture that would eventually be added to her family's empire.

By all counts, she was a modern twenty-five-year-old woman, who gained her independence while still under the protection of her family name.

How the fuck was I supposed to know that she was untouched?

I should have known. The way she blushed when I touched her, the way her thighs shook when I ran my fingers across her underwear. The way she moaned before melting into my kiss.

I should have fucking known something wasn't right.

Even the way she looked at the statue. I'd thought it was some thinly veiled bisexual urge, but it was so much more innocent than that.

It was sexual curiosity. Yearning.

I missed the signs. Like a real asshole, I screamed in her face, stripped her, and then fucked her against the shower wall. It was her first time, and I fucked her like a whore, not even putting her in a bed and making her comfortable first.

What did that make me?

The monster that fucked her to hurt her brother. That's what.

I had planned on ruining her, but not like this.

I wanted to get back at Luc, and I didn't even stop to consider how this would affect her.

And I thought going after some little leach meant I was protecting her?

I took another long drag from my cigarette before putting it out in a crystal ashtray, grinding the butt into nothingness.

Olivia was innocent in this war of her brother's making.

There were always casualties in war.

How I felt about Olivia was inconsequential.

The plan was already set, and I was going to see it through.

If anything, this just gave a hint of truth to the scandal that I was going to create. I may not have seen this turn of events coming, but I sure as fuck planned on using it.

For now, I'd let her sleep until the morning.

She was going to hate me with everything she had.

Good.

She would experience a fraction of what I felt for her brother and family.

Bring it on.

CHAPTER 15



LUC

“We are expected downstairs,” Amelia, my beautiful bride, said, trying to get out of our bed.

She was gloriously naked, and after our wedding night and each night leading up to it, she wasn’t bashful or ashamed of her perfect body with her slender curves.

It had taken me weeks of constant praise and showing exactly what her body did to me to give her just a hint of confidence without SPANXS or some other ridiculous garment meant to turn her body into a stick figure.

“They can wait, or better yet, they can all go the fuck home,” I growled before I pulled my new wife back into our bed. “You are my wife now. Legally, you are mine. That means you have to do what I say.”

Amelia shot me a look that had me grinning back at her.

I loved teasing her, getting her all riled up.

With my hands on her hips, I rolled over to my back, pulling her on top of me, then thrust up, grinding my hardening cock against her tight little core.

“And what exactly is it that my husband demands I do,” she said, perched above me with her hands on her hips like she was mad at me.

“I demand that my wife let me eat my breakfast first.”

She must have guessed what I planned to do. As I grabbed her waist, ready to pull her so she was kneeling above my face

in the perfect position for me to feast, she rolled away from me and escaped into the bathroom.

I followed her immediately, my legs getting tangled in the bedding and almost throwing me to the floor. Stumbling, I finally made it to the bathroom door to find that it was locked.

“Open the door, wife.” I banged on the wooden panel.

“No, you will just want to ravish me again, and we should have been downstairs twenty minutes ago!”

“We are newlyweds. We are disgustingly in love and can’t keep our hands off each other. They should all be grateful we are keeping it to this room!”

“How about a deal,” she called. “We go downstairs, eat breakfast, socialize, do what we need to do, and then I will let you do that thing you like.”

Fuck, that is tempting.

“You were going to do that anyway,” I argued.

“True, but now I’m going to do it today and tomorrow and again on the plane to the resort for our honeymoon.”

“Are you negotiating, Mrs. Manwarring?”

She opened the door a crack so she could see me.

“As a matter of fact, I am, Mr. Manwarring. And so you know, this is all I will be wearing underneath my dress.” She swung the door wider to show the green satin bra and the matching garter belt that held up the silk stockings on her legs. And nothing else.

My mouth went dry as I looked her up and down. She was so fucking perfect.

“And, if we get down there in the next ten minutes, I promise that I will accidentally forget to pack any underwear for the trip.”

“You fight dirty,” I ground out, not able to take my eyes off of her.

“I negotiate the way my husband taught me.”

The way she said “husband” was almost enough to snap what little control I had that was preventing me from just bending her over the vanity right there and taking her anyway until she was screaming my name. There was some merit to that idea. I could fuck her hard from behind and get to see the ecstasy in her eyes as I made her come over and over, then fill her with my seed and let it drip down her thighs on our way downstairs.

“Then allow me to counter your offer. We go downstairs and eat breakfast with our friends and family. But not only do you not wear underwear anytime you are at the table, your legs will be open, and my fingers will be deep inside you. And then we forget to pack any clothes for the honeymoon. I want you completely bare the entire trip, ready to take my cock until we are both sore, exhausted, and we have no other choice but to come back to the city.”

My hands were on the doorframe, and I hovered over her while she considered my offer.

“It is tempting.”

“And one more thing, I want to discuss throwing out your birth control. I want to know that every time I come in your tight heat, there is a chance I’ll get to see your belly swell with my child.”

Part of me expected her to say okay, we will discuss it.

Another part of me expected her to say no, then tell me she wasn’t ready.

I held my breath, waiting for her response. Either way, I would be happy.

On the one hand, I would get to watch my wife swell with my child and start our family.

On the other, we would have more time to spend together just for her and me to get to know each other better and build our dream life.

It really was a win-win situation. Still, I waited with bated breath.

What I wasn't prepared for was the wolfish grin she gave me before saying, "I threw out my birth control last night. So if you want the best chance of it taking, then I need to be strong, which means I need to be fed. And you are also going to need to fuel up. I expect every single drop of your energy and attention the next few days focused on starting our family."

"Get dressed. No panties, and you will be naked our entire honeymoon and anytime we are alone in our home. Is that understood?"

"Yes, sir." She leaned over and placed a sweet kiss on my cheek before slamming the door in my face again. God, I was so in love with her it hurt.

I got dressed as quickly as I could in a freshly pressed suit. Not as formal as last night, but still sharp enough to show my respect for the occasion. When I was ready, so was she. Radiant in a simple, light-blue dress and natural makeup, she'd chosen brightly colored jewelry that showcased her artistic flair.

I raised my brow at her while I took her in and she rolled her eyes in return, then lifted her skirt, showing me her bare pussy.

"Satisfied?" she asked.

"Not yet, but I will be soon, so let's get this over with." I helped smooth down her skirt while I kissed her, then took her arm and led her downstairs to the hotel's private hall for our breakfast banquet.

Even I had to admit they had done a good job with a room that had looked like any other typical hotel banquet room when we first toured it. Now, the large windows were open, letting sunlight hit the massive crystal chandelier and sending sparkling light throughout the room, making it seem large and airy. Beautifully carved ice sculptures of cherubs added to the overall effect, but it was the carved ice reproduction of *First Love* in the center of the room, the statue we were married under yesterday, that really made this brunch unique to us.

The tables were set with fine china, the light-blue flowers painted around the edges of the plates, bowls and cups a pattern that Amelia loved, so I'd ordered settings for forty. Fresh fruit was piled high on crystal serving dishes next to matching decanters for the coffee and pitchers for juice. There were even several sterling silver wine chillers on long stands placed throughout the room, already chilling Amelia's preferred champagne that would be used for a mimosa toast.

For the first time in my life, I understood the pomp and circumstance.

This wasn't a display of wealth for the sake of the display itself.

I'd paid a ridiculous amount of money to hear the excited little gasp that left my wife's lips when she saw everything. That was what all this was for, making her happy, and I would spend every penny I had to ensure that she was.

It took less than five minutes for me to regret coming downstairs.

Instead of being in my hotel room, balls deep in my wife, I was shaking hands with Amelia's parents. Her mother, though not invited, had shown up with a few of the old bats she called friends.

Normally, I would have no problem sharing my thoughts very loudly, making sure everyone overheard.

But not today. Today, I couldn't be bothered with Amelia's mother and her parade of never-ending bullshit.

"This breakfast is quite lovely for Jersey," she said with pinched lips.

Amelia stiffened on my arm, and I couldn't have that.

"Yes, well, I am so sorry we couldn't accommodate your entire family." I kept a pleasant smile on my face while speaking just loudly enough for Amelia's mother to hear. "I just wasn't able to locate your baby daddy's address."

She paled and clenched her teeth together. "You said you would never tell that secret if Amelia married you. Now my

daughter is on your brutish arm and you're wed."

"No, I said that I would tell if you didn't support the union. Nothing about keeping the secret was ever discussed. Just remember that, the next time you think to do anything that would even inconvenience my wife, let alone drop a barbed compliment meant to hurt her."

My threat was clear.

If she even tried to hurt Amelia, everyone would know that her son, Harrison, was a bastard. Not that I would ever go through with that threat.

Honestly, Harrison didn't care.

He said he would sooner just tell the world than have that secret held over his head. Even then, I would never do anything to intentionally hurt anyone Amelia loved, and that included her brother.

However, for the moment he and I both agreed that the threat was as good a tool as any to keep his mother in line.

With Amelia on my arm, we made it to the head table and took our seats.

On my right was my wife, but Olivia should have been on my left.

She was nowhere to be seen.

CHAPTER 16



LUC

My youngest sister, Charlotte, was sitting in the next seat down, and Amelia's sister, Rose, was next to Amelia. Rose and Charlotte had become thick as thieves, and I understood that they, along with Olivia, had planned a slumber party of sorts in their shared hotel suite last night.

"Charlotte, how hungover is Olivia?" I asked.

"Oh, the poor girl. I saw her drink a few glasses last night, but I assumed she would have switched to water at some point. Do we need to send a doctor to her room? I'm sure we can get some of those vitamin infused IV bags to rehydrate her and help her feel better." Amelia's concern for my sister just made me love her more.

I hoped that Amelia would take Olivia under her wing a little, be an older sister and teach her the things that our mother hadn't before she passed.

The more I thought about it, though, the more the idea seemed ridiculous. Amelia was two years younger than my sister, and Olivia had chosen to set aside the traditions Amelia was raised in, preferring to be her own woman and make her own plans. Charlotte, however, would probably benefit greatly from Amelia's influence, since she chose an education in the arts. A beneficial marriage was definitely in her future.

"Actually," Rose said, color rising in her cheeks.

"Rose," Charlotte chastised. She looked at me, then just as quickly her eyes were back on her plate, staring down at the

poached egg.

“What’s going on?” Amelia asked.

“We have to tell them,” Rose said, looking at Charlotte.

Charlotte didn’t say anything, just pressed her lips together. She was keeping something from me. I didn’t like it.

“Someone better say something soon,” I said, my fist tightening around my butter knife. Amelia’s hand moved to my thigh, and I instantly relaxed.

Just having her there was enough to soothe me.

Down the table, my father was laughing with someone else, and Charlotte’s eyes went to him.

I instantly understood.

She was covering for Olivia and didn’t want our father to know.

“It’s okay.” I leaned in so only the people directly around us could hear.

“She left the wedding before we did. We figured the champagne had gone to her head, and she snuck out to lay down.”

Charlotte’s hand went to her shoulder, the spot where her cello rested as she played. It was something she always did when she was nervous. Something had happened.

“Okay ... is she still sleeping it off?” I asked, praying that was it. A heavy feeling in my gut told me there was a lot more to this story.

“No, she wasn’t there when we got back,” Rose said. “Her bed hadn’t been slept in, and we called down to ask the guy at the front desk. He hadn’t seen her.”

“Are you saying she went home with someone she met at the wedding?” Amelia asked.

It was possible, I supposed. She was twenty-five.

“Have you tried calling her?” I asked. I didn’t like this, but the anger, the judgment and the death of whatever man had

dared to touch my sister could all wait until after I knew she was safe.

“There was no answer.” Charlotte stabbed her egg with her fork and refused to meet my eye.

“Okay, fine.” I stood from the table and kissed Amelia on the temple. “I’m going to try calling her and make sure she is okay. I’ll be right back.”

“Of course.”

I stepped away from the table and out into the main hall.

With my phone to my ear, I paced around, waiting for the call to connect. It rang over and over without going to voicemail.

Her phone wasn’t dead, she just wasn’t answering it.

I tried again.

Still, it just rang and rang.

“Is she okay?” Amelia asked, stepping over to me and wrapping her arms around my waist.

“No answer yet.” I kissed her forehead, when my phone pinged with a text message.

It wasn’t from Olivia.

It was from Marksen DuBois.

Marksen DuBois: *It’s ten o’clock in the morning. Do you know where your sister is?*

Then, an image came through.

It was of Olivia naked, and asleep, or maybe drugged.

I couldn’t be sure.

What I did know was that Marksen had her, and she was in danger.

I turned to Amelia. “As quietly as possible, can you get Harrison and bring him out here?”

Amelia nodded and went to get her brother.

I called Marksens.

The call went straight to voicemail.

He had turned off his phone.

I tried Olivia again. This time it didn't ring.

Mary Quinn Astrid, Amelia's heinous mother, was the first out the door with Harrison and then my father quickly followed.

Amelia was right behind them, looking annoyed with her mother.

"Where is she?" My father's voice boomed, no doubt alerting every single person within the building that something was going on. My father had many strengths, but subtlety and tact were not among them.

I stared at him for a moment and decided he needed to be informed of everything, but the rest of the world did not.

"Follow me," I commanded and led the group to the hotel's business suite. It had a few conference rooms I had used before when acquiring smaller businesses in the area. Since it was Sunday, I was counting on them being empty, and they were.

Everyone filed into the room, and I closed the glass door, hoping it would help this conversation remain discreet.

"Olivia did not come back to the hotel with Charlotte and Rose last night."

"Well, is anyone surprised? The way that girl runs around pretending to work, it's unseemly," Mrs. Astrid said, her nose in the air. "She should be ashamed of herself. No doubt this scandal will be all anyone can talk about. She has ruined this entire wedding."

"Keep your comments to yourself or leave," Amelia snapped, and I couldn't help the pride I felt in my wife as she stood up to that shrew.

"The way you speak to your mother is shameful, you ungrateful, spoiled little brat," Mrs. Astrid hissed back. She

needed to be dealt with, but at the moment, I had more important things to consider.

“Where is she?” my father asked.

“With Marksen DuBois, as of right now. It’s unclear if she went willingly or was taken.”

“How do you know it was Marksen, and why do you suspect foul play?” Harrison asked. This was why I asked for him.

He was a district attorney, he knew what questions to ask, and after everything with Amelia, he and I had come to an understanding.

I unlocked my phone and slid it face down over to him with the text and the picture pulled up.

Harrison’s eyes widened with shock. The bedsheet, though covering most of her, did show one of her inner thighs with a smear of blood. The implication was obvious even if I refused to think it, let alone say it out loud.

Harrison laid my phone screen-down on the smooth tabletop and slid it back to me. My father snatched it from the table, and I couldn’t get it back before he saw it.

The blood drained from his face, leaving him white as a ghost, and then just as quickly, his face turned a bright red.

He got to his feet and threw my phone against a wall, shattering the screen.

“I want the FBI, CIA, every single able-bodied man we know hunting this monster down like a dog,” he yelled.

I understood his anger, I really did. Still, there were better ways to approach this.

“No, if we make this public, it will ruin Olivia. Marksen has her. We need to find out why. What does he want?”

“I don’t give a fuck what he wants. Dead men don’t want anything.” My father was still pacing around the room.

Amelia pressed into my side, clearly intimidated by my father’s rage.

“It’s not just about him,” I tried to reason. “Olivia has built her magazine to be a global publication. She won’t want the media’s attention on this at all. Not until we know more. If she went willingly, then we can address it when she is back home and safe—”

“If she went willingly, I will send her to a convent.” My father was still raging. He needed to calm down before he lost it and did something stupid, like call the mob and put out a hit on Marksens.

“She is twenty-five, she is a grown woman and can make her...” I tried, but when I saw the way his face turned a deeper shade of red, I knew I was going in the wrong direction with this. “If she was taken, then making this public could drive him underground, and put her at risk.” I backtracked.

“What do you mean?” My father stopped pacing to look at me. His fists were still clenched, his face a dark red, but he was listening to me. That was a start.

“The DuBois’s have almost unlimited resources, not to mention familial ties in most of Europe. If we turn this into a massive manhunt, he will run and might take Olivia with him. Or he might see her as unwanted baggage and get rid of her. I want to proceed with caution. Let him think he has the upper hand.”

“Oh, you boys don’t need to worry about a thing,” Mrs. Astrid interrupted again. I had honestly forgotten she was there.

“Excuse me?” I said, looking down my nose at her.

My father boomed, “This is my daughter you are talking about. Are you insinuating that she—”

“I’m not insinuating anything.” She interrupted my father with a dismissive wave of her hand, and I thought for a moment he was going to lunge across the table and strangle her.

It would be a tragedy if he did that. Sort of. It would also solve the issues of Amelia’s mother trying to run our lives and constantly harassing my wife. It would get my father out of the

way as he spent the next twenty or so years in prison. It may not be the rest of his life, but it would be long enough.

“Then what are you saying?” he raged.

I tried to hide my disappointment in his lack of violence.

“I’m saying my son, Harrison, will find her.” She put her perfectly polished claws on Harrison’s shoulders, and I could almost see him shudder.

No doubt Mrs. Astrid’s touch was as icy as death itself.

“Mother, I think—”

“Hush. Harrison is the Manhattan district attorney. He can find your daughter as discreetly as possible and bring her home. Then you can deal with her as you see fit.” Mrs. Astrid stood and smoothed down the cream dress she was wearing. Seriously, this woman needed to be dealt with.

Did she really not see how transparent her attempts at social climbing were? It was apparent she was only here to be seen, not to support her daughter.

Or was there more?

“Let’s all get back to the lovely breakfast. We can let everyone know that my son, Harrison, the district attorney, is on the case. He will locate Olivia so there is nothing to be concerned about. All will be well.” She walked out of the room like she didn’t have a care in the world.

“See that it is done, and that she isn’t harmed,” my father ordered before storming out of the room after Mrs. Astrid.

“Fuck, those two are going to make this an even bigger mess,” Amelia said under her breath. “I’m so sorry. I tried to get just Harrison, but Mother was right there, and she heard and started making a scene which got your father’s attention and...I didn’t know what to do.”

“It’s okay, sweetheart.” I gripped her hand with both of mine, before turning my attention back to Harrison. “What do you think the right move is here?”

“It looks bad,” Harrison said, shaking his head. “But as far as we know, no crime has been committed. Get a new phone. Now. In case she tries to reach out to you, or he does. Maybe this was all consensual and he saw an opportunity to get back at you. If that is the case, then she should be calling you back soon. If not, he will be calling with demands. In the meantime, I am going to reach out to a few contacts and see what I can find.” Without another word, Harrison left the room with his phone pressed to his ear.

That wasn’t what I wanted to hear.

I may not have proof of foul play, not yet anyway, but I knew Olivia, and I knew Marksens. He took her, kidnapped her, and did unspeakable things to my sister to hurt me.

He knew how much I loved my sisters, and how I felt it was my job to protect them.

There was no way for him to beat me in business, so he exploited my only weakness and took my flesh and blood.

“What can I do?” Amelia asked.

I looked down into her beautiful eyes and kissed her hard. When I let go, she was panting, and soon I would make her pant and moan my name a lot more. But in the meantime...

“I need you to do whatever you can to make sure no one at breakfast leaks this to the public. Buy me as much time as you can.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I’m going to get my sister back.”

CHAPTER 17



OLIVIA

Coffee.

The first thing wafting into my awareness when I woke up was the aroma of coffee. It smelled incredible—rich, aromatic, and just heavenly.

When I opened my eyes, however, it was like an ice pick had been stabbed through my temples. My stomach rolled.

I tried to stand up. My hips and core were incredibly sore. My knees buckled. It was as if I had gone to bed after an intense workout without stretching first.

It took me a moment to realize I wasn't in my bed, or the bed I was supposed to be in at the hotel. I looked around, and last night came back to me in broken flashes.

Marksen flirting and taking pictures at the wedding, then him carrying me out of the park.

Flashes of the abduction, then the fire, and then...

The shower.

His mouth.

His hands.

His...

Oh, God!

That was why I was so sore.

He took my virginity and worse, made me come for him over and over.

My cheeks flamed with humiliation.

I couldn't deal with this now. Giving myself a mental shake, I snatched the top sheet and wrapped it around my middle, determined to find some clothes, swallow some coffee and aspirin, and get the hell out of here.

I was supposed to have been at the wedding breakfast a half hour ago. There was a big, beautiful buffet we'd planned to celebrate the union one more time before sending the bride and groom off to their honeymoon and wedded bliss.

The whole family would be there.

They would have noticed me gone by now and must be worried.

I wasn't even sure where I was.

Somewhere an hour away by jet, so there was no way I was getting back in time, but I could at least give Charlotte a reasonable excuse to cover for me.

My dress was nowhere to be found.

It was useless anyway, Marksens literally tore it from me.

There was a wooden dresser against the wall. With fingers crossed it had something suitable, I rifled through it. The best thing I could find was a plain white T-shirt. I assumed it was Marksens's since it was big enough to hit me mid-thigh. The fabric was soft and well-worn, which unfortunately made it a little sheer.

The bra I had worn yesterday was built into the dress, which was destroyed, and the panties I had been wearing were also now ruined.

I took a look in the large mirror over the dresser. The shirt was thin but not obscenely so. It would have to work. My hair was a mess, and there were little black circles under my eyes that were more from leftover makeup than sleep deprivation. I looked like I had been ridden hard and put away wet, which I supposed I had been.

Was it weird that I kind of liked this look on me?

Usually, I was so done up, always wearing professional glam.

My hair was always perfect, my makeup flawless. I was a glamazon whose look had to be impeccable at all times. Sometimes I worried I didn't look human anymore. With every hint of a pore buffed out, every fine line that may or may not have been on my skin erased, every blemish irradiated, I usually looked like a statue. Someone important somewhere once said that beauty could be found in the imperfections and looking at myself in the mirror, I thought I understood what he meant.

I looked real. My skin had a natural glow I had never seen before, at least without blush and bronzer. My hair had volume in its messy waves, and there was something in my eyes that looked satisfied. With a blush, I realized I looked like that statue I had seen in the park last night, the one writhing in the grass. I guessed I got my answer. Women could be truly sated sexually, it was not always just a performance to make men feel good about themselves.

I thought about the conversations I had with some of the girls at the magazine, and I was sure what Marksens made me feel was not normal.

This may not have been the way I had intended to lose my virginity, but at least overall I could consider the sex to be good. A luxury most women didn't get.

I decided that instead of being a bitch about everything, or making a fuss that wouldn't do any good anyway, I needed to just move on.

It was time to get back to reality.

The prank was over, it was time for me to make sure my family wasn't panicking and get back to my life.

Just because it was Sunday didn't mean I actually had the day off.

Work-life balance was a luxury the boss rarely got to have.

Cautiously, I crept down the small hallway toward the kitchen where I could hear music playing.

Marksen was standing at the stove, listening to a radio while sipping coffee and scrambling eggs.

For a moment as he rocked his hips back and forth, dancing a little with the beat, he reminded me of that boy I used to know. He looked good wearing nothing but a pair of black silk pajama pants that sat low on his hips.

“You know, if you keep staring at me like that, I am going to start charging you.” Marksen turned and gave me a wink.

My mouth dried up as I tried to think of something witty to say.

“Coffee?” he asked.

“Please, cream, two sugars. So for the morning dance routine, do I pay per song, or is it a general entry kind of thing?”

“I accept tips but only if you tuck them in my pants,” he joked as he started dividing the eggs between two plates already loaded with slices of toast and some hash browns.

“Too bad I don’t have any singles.” I smiled, taking a sip of my coffee.

The relief was almost palpable.

He was teasing me, joking with me, and feeding me.

I had been right; this was all a prank that admittedly had gone a little too far.

We would blame the alcohol and maybe the kitchen fire and forget all about it.

Or at least try to forget.

No. I was a Manwarring. I would go home, get back to work, and forget this ever happened.

No one ever needed to know that I had spent the night in Marksen’s bed, that we’d had sex in the shower, or how he’d had his face between my thighs.

I would go home and pick up a plan B, or have my assistant do it so I wasn't spotted by the paparazzi or worse, a fan with a cell phone and an Instagram account.

The last thing I needed was for #ManwarringCEHoe to start trending.

Then there was the issue of Marksens and me.

Maybe now that he had gotten this stupid prank out of his system, he and Luc could go back to being friends and then maybe he and I could perhaps see if we truly had chemistry.

I was curious to know what this was, and if I was being honest, I wanted to see if there could be more. I had always had a huge crush on Marksens, before I even knew what that meant.

I had put all of that away years ago. The moment I knew I was going to school for a practical degree and have a career, I knew that the likelihood of my father choosing to marry me off to someone like the DuBois heir was slim. Such a man needed a professional wife, someone who would be there to run his life while he worked and ran the rest of the world.

That life would never be something that would satisfy my lust for life and need for challenges. Maybe he didn't want a bored housewife to come home to. Maybe he wanted someone with the same drive that he had.

Or maybe I was being a stupid little girl who thought sex had to mean more than sex.

It didn't. Logically I knew that, and I may not have my innocence anymore, but I still had my pride.

If Marksens wanted more, he was going to have to ask.

He would have to woo me after he got me home.

Keeping my tone light, I said, "I need to get back pretty soon." Then took a seat at the table.

I knew I already missed the brunch and all of that. I was sure Luc and Amelia had already left for their honeymoon, but I still had work to do.

“You’re kidding me,” he said with a bored expression on his face.

“I’m not kidding. I need to go over the data for the last quarter and make sure we are hitting our growth estimates. And then I need to see if the business can afford a few more staff writers and another photographer. I also need to go over the PR packages from the top brands for their Christmas lines and see what we will and won’t feature in November and December. Not to mention coverage for the Denim and Diamonds Ball for the Manwarring Foundation.”

Urgh, stop talking business!

This is why you were a freaking virgin at twenty-five and it took a stupid, drunken prank for you to finally get laid.

“You cover your own family’s events?” he interrupted me.

“Of course, well the magazine does, but there is also the Theophane Theatre Production, and this new club called Primal is opening up. I need to either assign someone to cover all of this or do it myself.”

The more I talked, the more Marksens just stared at me.

Finally, he took a seat on the bench across from me.

He raised an eyebrow. “Princess, I think I need to explain to you how a kidnapping works.”

“The prank is over. You had your fun. Now, let me get back to work. I have spent countless hours building the reputation of my magazine. I can’t let it all fall apart over a drunken joke between my brother and his friend.”

He bared his teeth. “I’m not his friend and this is not a fucking prank. You aren’t going anywhere. You are my prisoner. I was trying not to be a dick about it by not chaining you naked to the bed and feeding you moldy bread and water, but make no mistake. You are here for the foreseeable future.”

“You’re joking,” I said, the food falling from my fork before I set it back on the plate. My stomach twisted, and suddenly, the food that had smelled so good only seconds ago now made me want to vomit.

“I’m not. It is funny, though.”

“This stopped being funny a while ago, Marksens.”

“For you, maybe.” He sat back on the bench and looked at me. “Last night, you said love was more important than anything, including reputation.”

“I did.” My heart hammered inside my chest as I looked around. There had to be a way out, a way I could signal for help.

Some way to let my brother know where I was so he could come for me. Oh God, I hoped he hadn’t already left for his honeymoon. He would be unreachable for weeks.

The irony was killing me.

I was the one who told him to leave his phone and all forms of communication at home!

“See, you said that last night, but now you are talking about your little website’s reputation like it’s important.”

“It *is* important. I never said reputation wasn’t important at all. I simply said there are more important things.”

“Like love,” he clarified.

“Yes, like love.” A cold sweat broke out on my brow.

“So you can be mad this little hostage situation is going to mess with the reputation of your magazine, but I can’t be mad that your brother destroyed my reputation?”

He took a bite of his breakfast like it was just any casual morning, and my world wasn’t crashing down around me.

“Luc is an ass. Is that what you want to hear? My brother shouldn’t have embarrassed you as he did. But it’s over now; ruining all the hard work I have done won’t change that.”

“Oh, I know it won’t, but I still intend to do it. It’s not personal, Olivia,” he said. “Well, I guess it kind of is, but it’s not your fault.”

I gripped the knife next to my plate. “You’re still taking it out on me. I didn’t do anything to you. It’s not like my brother

runs his evil plans for world domination by me first.”

He eyed the knife and smirked. “You’re guilty by association. It sucks, but that is still where we are. Eat your breakfast.” He snatched the knife from my grasp. “You won’t be needing this. Now eat. We have work to do soon.”

My heart pounded in my ears, like it wasn’t getting enough oxygen.

I needed to get out of this house now.

All I had to do was get out, then I could get help and call, if not Luc, then my father if I had to.

When Marksens went back to his food ... I made a mad break for the front door.

It wasn’t far.

I jumped over the bench and threw myself at the wooden door.

I turned the knob, and it didn’t move.

I tried again, but it was no use, and I couldn’t see how to unlock it.

Before I could find any sort of release, Marksens was on me.

He pressed his body against mine, caging me against the door.

“There’s nowhere for you to run, princess. All the doors are locked remotely. I have the only access code. Even if you could get out, where would you go? We are isolated for miles in every direction.”

“Please, just let me go,” I cried, tears running down my face.

“Not yet.”

His hand went to my thigh and drew the shirt up to my hips. “How far do you think you would get, dressed in only a T-shirt?”

His hand continued to run across my skin, moving up to the flat of my stomach.

“At least I made it good for you. Don’t you want to be my good girl and get rewarded again?”

His touch sent shivers down my spine. The heat built in my core as my body responded to his touch.

Before things went too far, I pushed him off of me, heat rising to my cheeks, nausea building in my stomach, and a tightness squeezing my lungs.

Disgusted with myself for still wanting him, I screamed, “Get off of me!”

He grabbed me by the hair and kissed me hard.

In vain I struggled before submitting to the demands of his kiss as his hands ran down my back to my ass, where he squeezed. “Just be my good girl. Don’t think, just do as you’re told, and it will be over soon. I might even make this time we have together worth the loss of your little company.”

Hearing him call my life’s work my “little company” was like dunking me in freezing water. My entire body tensed as I pushed him off, and then slapped him across the face.

“My little company?” I yelled. “I built *my little company* myself. My daddy didn’t hand it to me. It was my work. Mine.”

I had to listen to my father and my brother and every other man in my life belittle my work, but I was not about to take it from him.

I pushed him back another step. Reaching over to the side table by the door, I grabbed a ceramic bowl and threw it onto the hardwood floor, watching it smash.

It felt good.

So I did it again.

I grabbed a ceramic figurine, and this time I threw it at Marksen.

He dodged it, barely.

Anything I could reach, I grabbed and threw.

“Olivia, stop this now,” Marksens ordered, dodging a vase.

“Or what? What are you going to do? Lock me up and destroy everything I have created for a petty vendetta? Oh, wait.”

I grabbed something else, not bothering to look at what it was, and threw it.

“If you are going to act like a child, I will treat you like one,” he growled.

I screamed at him as I threw a large, three-wicked candle that smashed into the drywall, leaving a massive gaping hole.

“That’s it.” He marched through the wreckage and grabbed me by the hair with one hand.

I tried to hit him before he grabbed my wrist with the other hand and bent it behind my back.

He pulled me over to the sofa and dragged me across his knee.

The first slap on my bare ass was like fire on my skin.

CHAPTER 18



MARKSEN

The way Olivia squirmed in my grasp was making me even more furious.

Then the way she started throwing things at me, saying how her business was more important than mine because she created it herself?

She brought this on herself.

I wasn't a fool.

I had heard the whispers when I started working for my father.

It was a family business.

Of course, he hired family.

Because nepotism was expected and tolerated didn't mean there weren't jealous men who said I didn't earn my place, that I was handed everything.

Like any other man in my position, I ignored the gossip. They didn't know what I had done to get to where I was. They would never understand how hard I had to work. They may have exceeded their parents' expectations by rising to the top, but by doing the same, I barely met the bar my father had set.

I had earned every single bit of that company, and I had to fight twice as hard to keep it. Shit coming from the mouths of men who couldn't hack it was to be expected.

Weak men always blamed others for doing what they couldn't.

Hearing those words come out of Olivia's mouth, however, was another story entirely.

Having her look down on me, belittling my work, made something in me snap.

Maybe it was because her brother did the same, or maybe it was because I had started to feel guilty about what I was doing to her.

Either way, her outburst was enough to remind me who she was.

I pulled the shirt she wore up and hooked it over my hand, the one that pinned her wrist to the middle of her back, holding her in place.

She had no idea what she was talking about.

I may not have started my family business, but I was going to take it further than anyone had ever dreamed. The digital age was changing the way business was done, and under my care, DuBois Investments was not only going to withstand the changes, but it would also flourish. We would be the name at the cutting edge of everything, not one of the many firms destined to go the way of the dinosaurs.

And this little princess had the audacity to think she was better than me?

My hand came down on her pert little ass and she shrieked, not in pain, but in rage.

She screamed out her fury as she twisted under my hands.

I spanked her again, letting out my hatred of her brother, her entitlement, and the fucking audacity that was apparently a dominant trait in the Manwarring bloodline.

"Let go of me," Olivia demanded. Her face turned a deep red color; pretty soon, her ass was going to match.

"You think that you can just do whatever the fuck you want?" I swatted her again. "That the rules don't apply to you, princess?"

"Let me go, now," she yelled.

“No, you acted like a brat. I’m going to treat you like one.” I continued the spanking, each slap growing in intensity. “I tried to be reasonable. I was going to let you out of this with only your reputation in tatters, but not now. Now, I am going to make all of this hurt. You think just because your last name is Manwarring you get to treat the whole world like your playground.”

“Said the man who kidnapped me, then fucked me in his shower like a toy,” she screeched.

I spanked her harder, over and over, although being careful not to hit the same exact place twice in a row. I was angry, but not a sadist.

Her ass was warm to the touch and glowed from my punishment.

I wasn’t sure when, but she’d stopped yelling at me and was sobbing instead.

For a moment, I was worried I had pushed her too far until I noticed the damp feeling on my thigh.

I laid my hand on her warmed skin and then felt between her thighs.

She was soaking wet for me.

She may hate me, but it was clear she loved the way I made her feel.

“Why do you make me do this to you?” I asked, pushing my fingers inside her.

Her quiet cries turned to moans.

“Why can’t you just be my good girl? Be my obedient little princess while you are here, and I could be so good to you.”

“Why would I?” She hiccupped, but her hips moved to grind against my fingers. “You don’t want me.”

“And what gave you that impression?”

“You want Amelia. You’re doing all this because Luc took Amelia.”

“No, princess. This”—I pushed my finger in deeper— “is because your arrogant brother thinks he can mess with other people’s business, betray friends, and get away with it unscathed. This”—I then pulled it free and swatted her ass again, making her jump— “is because you started throwing and breaking shit like a toddler. And this”—I thrust my fingers in her again, then pressed down, dragging my fingers over her G-spot— “is because you want it.”

“Fuck you,” she spat.

“Oh, does the little princess need me to wash her mouth out with my cock, too?” I said it as a tease, but fuck, that sounded good.

I let go of her arm and she stood up, her face still red, tears streaking down her cheeks.

I sat back, not bothering to hide how hard my cock was as it tented my silk pajama pants.

“How dare you, you arrogant, self-centered, asinine—”

I cut off her words by grabbing her hips and pulling her down on my lap hard, then sealing my mouth over hers.

Her lips were salty from her tears. Her fingers laced in my hair and pulled hard, yanking my head back.

“You think you can just grab me and kiss me, and that makes it all okay?” she said, then pulled my hair back harder and kissed down the column of my neck.

I grabbed her throat and pushed her back, getting off of the sofa and pushing her onto the floor.

“Yeah, I do because I know you want it. Your pussy is aching and wet for me, and you want my cock deep inside of you.”

“I don’t want it. You call me arrogant and entitled, but you think every woman will just open her legs to you willingly.”

“Fine.” I sat up with my back against the sofa and called her fucking bluff. “If I’m wrong, I’ll stop. I won’t fucking touch you. You can go back to the table and eat your breakfast. It might be more comfortable if you stand, though.”

I watched as her face went from shocked to angry, then the light in her eyes ramped all the way up to loathing.

“Unless, of course, I’m not wrong, and you would rather I just fuck you. But then I am going to need to hear it.”

“Hear what?” Her jaw was clenched so tight she spoke between her teeth.

“That you want this arrogant, entitled cock to make you come.” I gave her a smirk as I reached down under the waistband of my pants and pulled out my cock, stroking it slowly in front of her. “You seemed to like it well enough last night.”

“Fine,” she bit out and moved to climb on top of me.

I put my hand on her chest to stop her.

“No, not unless you say it.”

“Fuck you.”

“That is the idea, but you are still going to have to say it first.” I grinned, loving the way her small fists clenched and her eyes narrowed, staring me down. “Just admit you want it, Olivia. Admit that you crave my arrogant, entitled cock ramming deep inside you and I just might oblige.”

“I hate you.” Her voice quivered with every word.

CHAPTER 19



MARKSEN

*B*efore she could change her mind, I grabbed her hips.
“The feeling is mutual, princess. Now, say it.”

“I want you to fuck me.” Each word dripped with sarcasm and disdain.

Still, it was close enough.

The sweet, clean scent of her skin surrounded me. I wanted to make her beg for it, to hear her tell me she was sorry and she would be a good girl for me. But there was only so much temptation a man could take before he broke.

I held her hips still while I bucked up, slamming deep inside her.

Her moan was almost as loud as mine. Her tight, hot, wet heat gripped me like a velvet vice. It was perfect. So completely, undeniably perfect.

Of course, it was.

She was perfect. Why wouldn't every part of her be perfect too?

She wanted to come, but I was going to make her work for it.

I leaned back against the sofa and grabbed her hips, showing her how to ride me.

She picked up the rhythm almost immediately.

I let go of her hips and pulled the T-shirt off her.

Having her ride my cock while I was sitting, slumped down just a little, was my new favorite position.

Her tits were at eye level, and I could watch them bounce and tremble with her movements.

Her eyes closed as she bounced harder, a blush starting at the tops of her cheeks and moving down her neck, coloring the tops of her breasts.

With my hand on her back, I urged her to lean forward, the new angle forcing me deeper inside her and putting her pink nipples just within reach of my mouth.

When I pulled the first between my lips, her pussy got even tighter around me as she moaned my name.

Fuck, I loved the sound of my name on her lips.

If I wasn't careful, I would fall for this girl and then my plan would be ruined.

That was her plan.

It had to be.

Suddenly, her arms on the sofa cushions on either side of my head felt like a cage.

The way she was riding me felt like she was in control.

I couldn't let her command me.

I was in charge.

She would obey me.

I grabbed her shoulders and pushed her off of me.

Without letting her go, I flipped her face down onto the sofa and positioned her body so she was on all fours, her red ass high in the air. One hand tangled in her wild mess of auburn curls, pressing her face to the cushion, while the other pushed her shoulders down, forcing her to arch her back and raise her ass up toward me.

There was nothing gentle about the way I slammed into her, keeping her head pushed down so I didn't have to hear her cry and moan.

This wasn't about making her feel good anymore.

This was about controlling the woman who'd tried to control me.

Every time Olivia walked, or sat down, or even moved, I wanted her to remember that as far as she was concerned right then, I was her god.

I let go of her hair and put my fingers to her mouth.

“Suck,” I commanded, not letting up the brutal pace.

She tried to fight me, but I pushed my fingers past her lips and forced her to comply.

The way her mouth pulled at my fingers made me wonder how well she would choke on my cock.

I was going to find out soon enough.

When she started gagging, I withdrew my fingers from her lips and started drawing circles on her tight little ass.

If she had never had anyone inside her pussy before me, then I would bet her tight ass was virgin too.

Eventually, I was going to train every single part of her body to take me. I was going to make her addicted to my cock. Why stop at ruining her reputation when I could take it all?

The firmer I pushed against her body, the more she tried to fight my hold.

“Stop squirming!” I slapped her ass, and she jolted hard.

“Fuck you,” she said as I pushed a finger in her ass up to the first knuckle.

“You say that, but your pussy is dripping juice down my sack. You like this, you like being used as my little slut.”

I pushed my finger in further, still slamming into her pussy.

Her back arched, letting me in deeper.

She was so close to coming I could feel her trembling under me, and I wanted to fill her with my come.

“Say it, and I’ll let you come,” I taunted.

“You are an entitled, arrogant asshole, and I hope you burn in hell.”

“That would have been so much more convincing if your cunt wasn’t pulsing with need and gripping me tighter. Just admit it. You love my cock. You want to be my good girl, my sweet little princess, and my dirty little whore. Admit it, and I will make you cry out my name as you milk my cock dry.”

She needed to say it soon.

I wasn’t going to be able to hold on much longer. The pressure in my balls was building, sweat was dripping down my back, and there was only so long I could watch this beauty under me come undone before I followed. I was going to come soon and hard.

“Admit it,” I growled.

She pressed her lips together, trying not to make a single sound. If that was the way she wanted to play, fine.

I pushed a second finger into her ass and twisted. Then I slapped her butt cheek again.

She let out a howl of pleased pain.

“Admit it,” I demanded.

“You’re going to make me come, and I love it,” she screamed as she came, pulling me right along with her in the most intense orgasm I had ever felt, pulse after pulse of hot come burning through my cock and erupting into her tight cunt.

I collapsed on top of her.

Our sweat-soaked bodies pressed together as we both came down.

“Fuck, princess, that was the most amazing sex I have ever had,” I breathed against her neck.

All I wanted was a few seconds to come down and get my bearings again, and I would clean her up and let her eat breakfast in peace.

Then she had to go and open her fucking brat mouth.

“That was amazing. I can’t wait to find out what it feels like when a real man fucks me.”

The little bitch.

I stood, pulled my pants back up and without a word, picked her up and threw her over my shoulder.

She wanted to act like a bitch, fine.

I’d treat her like one.

She shrieked and pounded on my back. I ignored her and carried her into the bedroom, where I dropped her on the bed.

“What the fuck, Marksens.”

“Get cleaned up and stay there. Or else.”

“Or else what?” she screamed at me.

“Or else I will spank you again until you fucking can’t sit for a week, and then I will leave you chained to the goddamned bed.”

Locking the door on the way out, I paced around the small house.

Fuck this little girl!

No one else had ever gotten under my skin like she did. She made me want to scream, yell, and rage like a man far below my class. I didn’t understand how she had the ability to get to me the way she did. I had women say all kinds of shit to me after sex, mostly good but some negative in clear attempts to get me to fuck them again harder. None of that ever got to me.

No woman had ever made me so fucking crazy.

One moment I felt guilty for using and hurting her. Almost like it somehow made me the bad guy here. The next moment I wanted to take her over my knee, spank her, and force her to her knees so I could pry her mouth open with my cock. Not even a second later, I wanted to cherish her, see her as my equal, and let her stand by my side.

I had never felt anything like this for a woman before. Sure, I'd had girlfriends and women I just wanted to fuck.

Then there was Amelia. I never felt anything for her other than maybe a professional fondness.

Our marriage would never have been one of love; more like coworkers who functioned as partners to further the DuBois business. Her role would have been personal secretary handling the household matters, and the sex would have been compulsory and far less enjoyable.

I took a few deep, cleansing breaths and poured myself another cup of coffee.

There was work to be done.

In my office, I pulled up my e-mails. The first ones I saw were from my assistant, containing the stock reports and hedge numbers from last week. The e-mails were marked urgent, and I knew what had happened before I even opened them.

More red littering pages that used to be solidly black. More reports showing Manwarring bullshit. He was buying up more property, destroying deals in the making.

I knew Luc's business almost as well as I knew my own. We had worked closely together our entire lives to further both of our empires. So I knew each of these listings was useless in his current investment strategies. None of these would make him money or further his portfolio in any way. These weren't bought to make him money. They were bought with the sole intent of making me lose money.

Just like that, whatever guilt I felt toward Olivia was gone.

I had several missed calls from Luc, a few threatening voicemails, and then of course the glorious text messages threatening everything I had ever loved if I harmed one little hair on Olivia's head.

If only he knew how much I intended to harm her.

He was going to find out soon enough. It was about three in the afternoon now.

If Luc was still sending threats, that meant he hadn't left New York and was probably in his office or penthouse, trying to formulate a plan.

He was panicked enough to postpone if not cancel his honeymoon.

This meant the Manwarring clan was now in panic mode, right where I wanted them.

Time for phase two of the plan.

I grabbed a garment bag from the closet in my office.

Then brought it back to the bedroom.

When I opened the door, Olivia was wet, wrapped in a towel, sitting on the bed.

She had showered. Good.

“Put this on. There is makeup and hair products in the bathroom.” I threw the garment bag on the bed, and Olivia jumped back like it was going to bite her.

“Why?”

“Because I said so.”

CHAPTER 20



OLIVIA

I hated that the label on the garment bag made me curious enough to open it.

In my defense, I didn't know a single woman in the entire world who wouldn't at the very least be intrigued by a Dior garment bag tossed at them.

Besides, I didn't have anything else to wear.

Opening it didn't give me answers.

It contained a formal gown in a stunning ruby red, a color that matched my poor sore bottom at the moment. I had managed to catch a glimpse of the damage when I took a shower to wash his smell from my skin.

It didn't work.

I still smelled him on me, a heady mix of bergamot and peppermint.

It was rich but light, subtle but still overwhelming to my senses. His scent, like everything about him, was a contradiction which kept me confused and unable to understand what was happening or to even begin to sort through my muddled thoughts.

He had spanked me.

I'd have sworn I would kill any man who dared lay a hand on me, but it wasn't that simple.

Yes, he spanked me, but it didn't hurt in the way it should have.

It hurt in a way that I liked.

I hated how much I loved how it felt.

Not only while he was spanking me but also after.

Every single spank had sent a shock of sharp pain or a radiating dull ache through my body that somehow made the pleasure of what came after more intense. The lingering soreness was a powerful reminder of how it felt to be bent over his lap and then impaled on his cock.

I didn't understand it, or how I could like what he did. He'd taken me hard and fast, starting on the sofa then down to the floor. When he manhandled me, dominated me, it had been such an intense turn-on as he forced his cock into me.

No, that wasn't right.

He hadn't forced me. He'd made me tell him I wanted it, and I did.

Bouncing on top of him felt good. Even with his hands on my hips guiding me, I'd felt powerful and in control. It was intoxicating, but not as much as when he'd put me on all fours and pressed my back down, pushing my bruised ass in the air.

At the time it had felt incredible, like he owned me.

He'd taken charge and put me in the position he wanted, and I was powerless to stop him. I hadn't even wanted to. He'd known how to take care of me and give me what I needed.

I was still sore from the night before, but he'd made it so good that the ache had just added to the friction and pleasure.

Then we came and I had realized where I was and what I was doing.

He'd pulled out and the cold air hitting my heated core brought icy reality in a rush. His come dripped out of me and I was mortified. I had been trying to escape and with just a few sweet words and demanding kisses I had been reduced to a dirty slut.

Shame had burned through me on top of the mortification, and I'd lashed out. I had actually been grateful that Marksens threw me into this room alone. It gave me some time to cry in the shower and let it all out. Then I'd adjusted the water as hot as I could stand it and scrubbed every inch of my skin in a vain attempt to feel clean.

It seemed like I would be doing that a lot until I was allowed to go home.

With a shake of my head, I tried to clear the thoughts of sex and feelings of shame and inadequacy from my head and took another look at the dress to consider my options.

Everything was so confusing.

Why would he abduct me, fuck me, and then buy me couture?

The only answer I could come up with was that he must have been taking me somewhere.

Which meant I would have a chance to escape.

At the very least I would have a chance to figure out where we were and maybe get a message to my brother.

In the bathroom, it only took a moment to find the cosmetics. It seemed like he had all my favorite brands in the correct shades.

How did he know what to buy, and better yet, how long had he been planning this?

In other circumstances, in a parallel universe, this much attention to detail would have been sweet. But now it was just creepy. How did he find out what I liked, or what size I was for the dress?

It didn't matter, not right now. This moment was about making him think I was going to behave and do as I was told. All while being patient and looking for the first opportunity to escape.

The dress was a brilliant red, so I did a simple smoky eye and matched my lip color to the dress. I twisted my hair into a simple elegant updo and slid the dress on. It fit like a glove,

affording a simple, chic silhouette that showed off my long lean body perfectly. The plunging back mirrored a dramatic, deep V-neck that was slender enough to give a hint of a lot of cleavage without actually showing any. I loved this kind of dress. It gave the illusion of something scandalous and exciting without actually being trashy.

Allure was all about the mystery, after all.

Fully dressed except for shoes, I stood in front of the floor-length mirror in the bathroom. I had to admit, I looked good. Had I been home I would have given the dress a necklace and maybe a matching bracelet. But this would do for almost any event Marksens was taking me to.

Drawing a deep breath, trying to prepare myself for whatever was about to happen, I stepped out of the bathroom.

Marksens was standing on the other side of the door dressed in black slacks and a white button-down shirt. He looked good but also casual. Far too casual to match my gown.

Something was off.

I wanted to ask him where we were going and demand some real answers.

He held out a large, flat, red-and-gold velvet box. “Open it.”

I did as he asked, not because he asked but because curiosity would always be my downfall. Especially when it came to couture garment bags and velvet jewelry boxes.

The box had the most beautiful diamond choker I had ever seen. Rows and rows of brilliant round diamonds arranged in a lattice design set in polished platinum that shown almost as brightly as the jewels.

It was the most stunningly beautiful thing I had ever seen.

“Oh my God, it’s ...”

“On loan,” Marksens said, snapping the box closed, almost hitting the tips of my fingers. “It’s part of the DuBois collection. A piece that used to be part of the Manwarring

collection before your father lost it in a bet to mine. I think it's the perfect piece to send a message."

"A message?"

He nodded as he took the necklace from the box and motioned for me to turn around.

"The necklace belonged to your mother. Your father gave it to her on their wedding day. It wasn't just a gift, it was an investment piece. The first time he invested in something other than real estate and liquor. My father joked that it was the first time he invested in something that didn't require the brutality of the mob."

The necklace was cold, which made his fingers feel hot as they brushed the back of my neck while he hooked the clasp.

"Of course, we know that isn't true," Marksens continued. "There is no way these are conflict-free diamonds. The piece was made in the 1890's, and he paid two point four million dollars for it and then lost it in a poker game."

A lump formed in my throat at the painful family story.

The fit was perfect but the way he clasped this heavy weight around my neck felt meaningful, like he wasn't so much putting a necklace on me as collaring a pet. The way his fingers caressed my bare spine didn't help the feeling at all.

He moved me a few steps to the side and positioned me in front of a small mirror on the wall.

The necklace looked amazing, like it was made for me. Cartier always had a sophistication that was just breathtaking, but this deceptively simple piece was the perfect addition to any gown. It was elegant in its simplicity and intricate in its glamour. It was a show-stopping statement piece that would look good with almost any evening attire.

"As the eldest daughter, this piece should have been handed down to you. Now, because of your father's crappy poker skills, this necklace belongs to me. Just like because of Luc's shortsightedness, you are mine."

Being a Manwarring, I had diamonds, as well as several impressive pieces from Cartier. Some were modern pieces I had bought or received as gifts, others a few vintage pieces that were passed down. None were as spectacular as this one. It actually looked like I had stars around my neck.

“It looks so perfect on you, I would almost be tempted to let you keep it after all of this is over. Too bad bratty little girls don’t get rewarded with pretty necklaces.”

His words pulled me from the trance the stones had cast over me.

My back straightened as my lips thinned. “I am not a whore. You cannot pay for my body with pretty jewels.” My gaze narrowed on his reflection in the mirror.

“I already own your body. Now I want your complete submission.”

He stepped away and walked into the other room.

I stared at my reflection in the mirror and reminded myself of the plan. Just go along with what he says, do what he wants, and wait. When he relaxed, his guard would go down, and I could make my escape.

I followed him into the living room, which was a mess.

Not the mess I had left behind from all the things I threw, or even the sofa cushions misplaced from our earlier ... activities.

No, all of the broken glass and pieces of drywall had been cleaned up, though the hole in the wall was still there.

It looked like the aftermath of an out-of-control party.

Empty liquor and champagne bottles littered the hardwood floor. Glasses were scattered around, some empty, some broken, others half full with lipstick prints smearing their rims. I even spotted the remains of the dress I’d worn to the wedding on the floor. There were streamers and confetti all over the place. There was even drug paraphernalia—a few pipes, a couple of empty orange prescription bottles, and a syringe or two—lying around.

“What happened?”

“Nothing,” Marksens said as he walked over to a camera that was pointed at the coffee table. The table itself had more glasses, a few condom wrappers, a vibrator, and a mirror with a rather large pile of white powder, a few hundred-dollar bills rolled up into little tubes, and a few razors. Next to the mountain of what I could only assume was cocaine, there were several white lines of it, carefully measured out to the same length.

It looked like in the maybe two hours since I had been in the other room, a massive and very elite party had happened here.

“What ...” My words trailed off as I took in the entire room, the camera setup, complete with a tripod, a lightbox, and reflectors in the corners by the ceiling.

It was then I knew what was happening.

This is a set, or rather, a setup.

A stage for him to take blackmail photos.

“So I think we should start with the coke. You are going to kneel right there in front of the table and act like you are going to do a few lines.”

“The hell I will.” I took a few steps back. “This would ruin me.”

“Princess, this is the only thing that will save you.”

He pulled his phone out of his pocket and showed me pictures of myself, naked and asleep in his bed. “If you don’t do this, these pictures are going to be uploaded to the internet, and then I will send copies to every single publication I can think of.”

“What is to stop you from doing that with the pictures you want to take here?” I asked.

He gave me a wicked smile.

“You are just going to have to trust me. I want these pictures for my own use. They are going to prove a point. And

if you behave, nothing will ever get leaked to the public, at least not by my doing.”

“I don’t trust you.”

“You don’t really have a choice. You either take the pictures now like a good girl and you trust I won’t release them, or you refuse like a brat. Then I will treat you like a brat, and I will take far worse pictures of you. Then, I will personally release them everywhere and make them go viral. What will it be?”

Fuck.

“Please, this would ruin everything.”

“Princess.” He smiled at me. “That is the point.”

CHAPTER 21



MARKSEN

“*M*arksen, please don’t do this.” She begged so sweetly. It was almost enough to touch something inside me.

Almost, but not quite.

“What’s the matter, Olivia? Are you saying your reputation is important for your business?” I asked as I got behind the tripod and fired off a few shots.

Part of me wanted her admission to be enough, but it wasn’t. If I had been getting revenge on Olivia, it would have been. This wasn’t about her, though, so it wouldn’t be enough.

“You know it is,” she said as tears formed in the corners of her eyes. “I was wrong, okay. You have every right to be mad at Luc for what he did.”

“Is doing,” I corrected.

“Fine, for what he is doing. But I’ve told you, doing this to me isn’t going to change anything.”

“Oh, that’s just not true, princess. Destroying your reputation will make me feel better.” I smiled at her. “Don’t worry. There is a small chance your brother will do what he needs to, and these photos will never see the light of day.”

“What do you want him to do?” she asked.

I clicked the camera shutter. “Don’t worry your pretty little head about it.”

I was being an ass but watching her go from scared to worried to hopeful, then back again, was giving me some great shots. “There is a chance that all of this will be okay, and the only time anyone will look at these photos will be when I want to be reminded of what a good little slut you were for me.”

More tears built in her eyes and threatened to tumble down her cheeks.

“Careful, doll. We don’t want to ruin that gorgeous makeup just yet,” I mocked. “Do it now, or I start releasing the pictures I already took of you to the world.”

Her lips trembled as she moved to the table and got to her knees on the floor.

The large billowing skirt of the dress puffed out around her, framing her in a wave of red silk that made her pale skin glow. Her tear-filled eyes seemed brighter, and her painted lips darker.

She looked like a porcelain doll or some angel sent from heaven to test the virtues of men. Too bad for her, I had no virtues, and I would pull her down to Hell with me.

“Let’s start with some simple poses. Pick up one of the money rolls, put it to your nose, and act like you are going to do a line.” I squatted down so I was just below eye level, looking to see if I needed to adjust the tripod to get the best angles and lighting.

Her hand shook. “Please,” she begged again. “Don’t make me do this.”

“You don’t have to snort the powder to make it look real.” I centered her in the frame and got some great shots.

The set I had built was perfect. It had the appearance of a trashed hotel room. Perhaps I would be able to photoshop her sister and the other Astrid girl in as well—something to consider if I ultimately leaked this all to the press.

Her hand shook so hard she created a zigzag pattern in the powdered sugar as she tried to mimic snorting a line of cocaine.

“Good,” I said as she finally did as she was told. “Now, I want you to pick up the sex toy on your right. Don’t worry, it’s brand new. I bought it just for you.”

She cringed when I said that but looked around.

“What did you want me to pick up?” Her brow furrowed in confusion.

There were a few sex toys strewn around the room. A bullet vibrator lay on the floor next to her, some nipple clamps dangled from chains on the sofa, and there was even a clit sucker on the table. Those would all have been fun to play with, but overall, they were pretty tame.

The worst thing that could happen was if I released the photos and they were swept away as just another heiress with a sex scandal.

No, I needed something that would make this stand out, something to make sure that everyone was talking about it.

And no matter what Olivia did afterward, it would always be the first thing people thought of when they heard her name.

I needed the Kraken.

“The big rainbow thing next to your arm.”

She looked to her side, and her eyes opened comically wide when she saw the tentacle dildo lying on the table.

It was about thirteen inches long and started fairly small at the tip but tapered into a wide base that I could barely fit both hands around.

She held it with two fingers like it was an offensive object.

I couldn’t blame her. As a man with a large but normal-shaped cock, the tentacle monster dildos were, in fact, offensive. Though now that I saw it in Olivia’s hands, I wondered how it would feel if she had that monstrosity in her cunt while I fucked her ass. As her body adjusted to that thing and my intrusion, I would push her down to take more.

I shook my head to get that image out. There was work to do first. Playtime came later.

She was already so tight I doubted it would fit, even if that was the only thing she had inside her.

I considered for another moment how hot she would look if I turned our photoshoot into something even more scandalous. Perhaps a homemade amateur porn film was in order. I bet I could make her wet enough that she could take maybe the first half of it.

Something else to consider later.

If I were lucky, her ass would be as tight, if not tighter, than her untried pussy.

She didn't need that toy. No, tentacle dildos were for women who needed more, needed something kinky to get off. All Olivia would need was my cock, and maybe my mouth or my fingers. If I was going to make a home movie of her getting off, it was going to be on me, not some abstract hentai sex toy.

At least ... not yet.

"Lick it," I ordered.

Her eyes went wide as she stared at me in shock.

"It has a suction cup on the bottom. I want you to stick it on the table and then lick it." Just seeing her eyes wide like that while she held it was giving me some excellent shots.

"I'm not going to let you take pictures of this thing inside me," she said with her hand on the choker I had given her like she was clutching her pearls in fear.

"You will do as you are told. Or I have some very pretty pictures of you naked in my bed with my come dripping out of ..." I let the lie trail off.

She got the point. She didn't need to know the pictures of her in my bed were mostly tame. The ones I had sent her brother were practically PG ... well, almost.

"Fine," she huffed.

She didn't need to know what pictures I was keeping for myself, what was already sent to her family, and what I was

putting aside for Page Six. Besides that, one photo would have been enough to destroy her, and she knew it.

The damage was already done.

She grabbed the tentacle with both hands and stuck it on the table while sending me a burning glare, then closed her eyes and slowly leaned forward to run the tip of her tongue from the base to the tip.

Fuck.

I adjusted my hardening cock.

Seeing her sweet, innocent face as she opened her still kiss-swollen lips to let her pink tongue slip out and lick that obscene sex toy almost had me tossing the camera aside, grabbing her, and fucking her raw.

I cleared my throat. "Again."

She did it again, but when she was halfway up, I called her name.

Her big, beautiful eyes glanced up.

I got the perfect picture of her angelic eyes looking up at me while she licked the toy. It seemed intentional, like she was making eye contact with the camera, wanting the lens to capture her dirty little act.

As if she is looking at me.

Wanting to please me as she submits to my commands.

My cock twitched.

"Good girl," I praised, and she sat back, her lips pursed.

She knew exactly what I had done.

I stepped away from the camera and went to the sideboard, where I had a fresh bottle of champagne chilling. I poured her a glass and handed it to her.

"Here, take the edge off. This is going to happen, so you might as well enjoy it. Or at least loosen up a bit."

"I hate you," she gritted out.

I shrugged. “Then hate me.”

I turned my back on her, ostensibly to fix my camera. A dull ache pressed on my chest as if someone was twisting their fist into it, leaving a bruise as the tightness in my shoulders increased. Apparently, I did care. I clenched my jaw. Well, no reason for her to know that.

With a resigned set to my jaw, I turned back and had taken a few more photos of her drinking next to some pill bottles and a couple more of her touching the toy when I realized it was time to take it up a notch.

“Push down the top of your dress, princess. I want to see those perky little tits.”

Her shoulders hunched forward, her arm crossing protectively over her chest. “Marksen, please.”

“Do it,” I ordered.

She looked down and took a few deep breaths, then did as I directed, pushing the fabric in the cups down, folding it into the underwire.

“Red is definitely your color, princess.”

She didn’t say anything. Her arms moved to cover her breasts while she stared down at the table. She looked so vulnerable and crestfallen like that, I had to take a few more photos just for me.

“Now, I want you to take some of that powder and put it on your nipples.”

She stared at the pile of powder and bit her lip as she shook her head. “Marksen, no. What if it absorbs into my skin?”

“So what?”

“I don’t do drugs. I never have.”

“Calm down. It’s powdered sugar. It can’t hurt you unless you have diabetes.”

She leaned in, took a pinch of the sugar, and licked it from her finger.

I quickly snapped several photos.

I didn't think she even knew the blackmail gold she was giving me.

Then she did as I told her to and put some on her nipple.

God, I wanted to lick it off of her, as if those pert, pink nipples needed anything to be sweeter.

They could be a little stiffer, though. "Take the champagne glass and put it on your nipples. Get them nice and hard for me."

Her cheeks turned an even brighter shade of pink. "Please, don't make me."

"Do it, Olivia. Or I will suck them into stiff little peaks myself. Though I doubt I will stop there."

Reluctantly, she took the champagne glass and pressed it to her nipples one at a time. I got a few okay shots, but it wasn't giving me the effect I wanted.

"Hold still." I walked across the room to the ice bucket and grabbed an ice cube. "Come here."

Olivia got to her feet and met me in the middle of the room.

She let out the most delicious gasp as I ran the ice over one nipple.

She tried to back away, but I snatched her back to me with an arm around her waist.

Her hips slammed into mine.

Our gazes clashed the moment my hard cock pressed against her stomach.

Lowering my gaze to her breasts, I ran the ice cube over her sensitive nipple again, tightening my grasp when she again tried to pull away. It hardened instantly. I moved to the other breast. Enjoying how the skin around her nipple puckered in the most sensual way.

It made me want to fuck her again right here and now.

Screw the photoshoot.

The way she arched into my touch as her lips parted was primal. I doubted she realized what she was doing or the profound effect it was having on me.

Her breasts were sensitive, and I would bet good money if I reached underneath her dress, I would find her sweet pussy slick.

God, she was so beautiful, so responsive.

I wanted to spend hours licking and sucking her tits, trying to find out if it was possible to make her come just by playing with her breasts. I would sit her on my lap and make her keep my cock warm while I teased her.

I resisted.

There was still work to be done.

I flicked a hardened nipple with the tip of my finger. “You know, these would look so enticing with a golden barbell through them.”

“Is that what’s next in your wretched blackmail scheme? Piercing my nipples and hanging a sign between them that says, ‘Slut for DuBois’s dick?’”

“No, of course not.” I tilted my head to the side and glanced at her with my hand to my chest, feigning offense. “‘Marksen’s whore’ will be sufficient.”

“Asshole,” she muttered under her breath.

Grabbing her behind her neck, I moved her back in front of the camera.

“Back on your knees, Olivia,” I ordered.

She did as I commanded and gracefully sank down as she looked up at me, careful to avoid glancing at the erection straining out of my pants.

I reached around her and pinched a little of the sugar between my thumb and forefinger and smeared it on her breast. It stuck to her damp skin. Then I spread more under her nose.

“This is almost perfect,” I said. “Look up at me.”

Her big brown eyes had tears gathering in the corners again. Even with the white dusting under her nose, she looked pristine.

I needed to ruin that like I had ruined her.

“Why are you being so cruel?” she cried.

I cupped the side of her jaw and ran my thumb over her red lips, smearing the lipstick from her lips over her cheek.

“If you prefer, I could have gone with my first option and hired a group of men to tie you to a bed and fuck every hole and cover you in come while I take photos. Would that be more to your liking, princess?”

That had never been an option, but seeing my own reprehensible guilt reflected back in her innocent, heartbroken eyes was becoming too much for me.

She sniffed as she hugged her arms around her middle. “Instead, you are forcing me to take part in my own destruction.”

“Yes, I suppose I am.” I could have denied it, but what was the point? “Now smile for the camera.”

She didn’t smile but it was okay. She didn’t have to. The camera saw enough.

“Take the tentacle and cradle it between your tits.”

Olivia downed the rest of her champagne in a single gulp.

She didn’t look at me while she followed my order, placing the giant toy between her breasts. I called her name a few times, but she refused to look at me or the camera.

“Olivia, look at me,” I ordered.

“No.”

She stubbornly looked at the floor.

I clenched my jaw as I tried to control my temper.

She was being a brat again, so I would just have to treat her like one. It was time I gave her a lesson in what her mouth

was really good for.

Spoiler, it wasn't for talking back.

"This is such a nice camera," I said. "It even has a great video feature."

She lowered her head, letting her hair obscure her face. "Please, Marksen, don't you have enough?"

"I'll tell you when it is enough." I unhooked the camera from the tripod and switched it to video mode.

Stalking closer, I knelt on the floor in front of her and set the camera just to my side, within easy reach. "Take out my cock, princess."

Refusing to look up, her hands shook as she reached for my zipper.

I laced my fingers into the hair at the back of her skull and pulled so she would be forced to stare straight into the camera lens as she sucked. I placed the tip of my cock in front of her closed lips.

"Open your mouth."

CHAPTER 22



MARKSEN

Olivia had no choice but to obey.

After she opened those smeared, pretty red lips, I traced her bottom lip with the head of my cock, coating it with my precum.

Her tongue darted out like she was curious to taste me, then disappeared back into her mouth as if she regretted the impulsive act.

“You know what I want you to do, princess,” I said, giving her hair a tug.

“I really don’t.” A dark blush tinted her cheeks as she desperately averted her gaze, trying to look anywhere but at my shaft. “I’ve never done this before.”

“Just put your mouth on my dick and suck.”

She flinched at my crude language, before hesitantly opening her lips wider and tilting her head forward until my cockhead slipped inside her warm, wet mouth.

Her mouth was almost as good as her pussy. She was timid, shy almost, reminding me how innocent my babygirl was still.

This wasn’t the plan.

I was never supposed to be in the pictures or any video.

No part of my body or my voice, nothing that could prove I was the one that did this.

There was just supposed to be one sign that I was a part of this, nothing that could link me in the eyes of anyone other than Luc and Lucian Manwarring.

Just the necklace reminding her father and brother that this was my doing.

I had their little princess, and I was making her my whore.

That was the plan.

It was a solid plan.

Then she had to look so fucking perfect.

She was so sweet, so pure, I had to touch her.

After watching the way she'd licked that stupid tentacle, I knew I needed to feel her lips on my shaft.

She did not disappoint.

I closed my eyes for a moment and lost myself in the hot velvety warmth of her mouth pulling at my cock.

"Fuck, good girl," I groaned as I pushed into her mouth a little deeper, picking up the camera, grateful for the LCD screen allowing me to film while watching the way she struggled. I pulled on her hair, tilting her chin up just enough that I could watch her eyes as she was forced to take my cock deeper down her throat.

I pressed in a few more inches.

She started to fight me as she gagged on my cock. Her fingernails dug into the tops of my thighs, her shoulders shaking as she choked. I kept a tight grip on her hair, refusing to let her pull back.

Her throat tightened around my shaft as she struggled harder.

Finally, showing a small amount of mercy, I let her lean back and take her first gasp of oxygen.

The camera caught a line of saliva from the tip of my cock to her lip, and if that wasn't the hottest thing I had ever seen.

My balls tightened with the anticipation of painting her face with my come.

I reined in the feral urge.

Having Olivia Manwarring on her knees worshiping me with luscious lips was not an experience to be rushed. It was an experience which needed to be savored.

Not on a camera screen but enjoyed in the moment. For a brief second, I considered calling everything off and just taking her as my own. Letting her brother do what he wanted and just taking my princess as retribution.

The thought hit me hard, and I had to push it down.

This was her doing. I had abandoned my perfect plan because she made me want her. Maybe she wasn't as innocent as I had thought. For a woman so unpracticed in sex, she knew exactly what buttons to press to make me break.

Fucking conniving Manwarring bullshit.

She was a manipulative snake, just like her brother and her father.

I could just fuck her throat right here, make her gag, let her make a mess on my floor just so I could come all over her pretty little face and perfect tits.

It would be the most beautiful thing ever caught on film.

A princess ruined at the hands of a king.

I would take my frustrations out on her pretty little lying lips. My cock was probably the most honest thing to ever come out of her mouth, so it only felt right that it would be the most honest thing to come inside it.

“Open your mouth wider and stick out your tongue.”

When she did as she was told, I pushed my cock in as deep as I could and held it there, letting her choke. Ruthlessly watching as spit flowed from her lips, some trailing down her face to drip on the high curves of her breasts.

She was a mess, and it was so infuriating that it made her even more beautiful.

In complete submission, she wasn't a princess. She was a fucking goddess. The way her muscles struggled around my thick cock was sublime.

"I'm going to have to train you on how to deep throat," I threatened, before pulling out and letting her double over to cough, then suck oxygen into her straining lungs.

Tears ran down her face, mingling with the spit smeared over her lips, making them shine. If anyone saw that film or any of those pictures, she really would be destroyed, and all because her brother was a dick.

God damn it.

I turned off the camera and threw it across the room.

Luc didn't create her empire; she did.

It may have been seeded with her father's money, but it was her sweat and tears.

The only thing Olivia had ever done to me was give me blue balls.

I snatched her arm and shoved her onto the sofa.

She fell back with a startled shriek. I lifted her dress and buried my face between her thighs.

Her pussy was dripping with the sweetest nectar I had ever tasted. I was right. She liked what we were doing; at least, she responded to some of it.

I slid two fingers into her tight, quivering body and focused my lips on sucking around her clit.

"Marksen, why are you ... Oh God. Marksen." She moaned my name again and again.

It made fire run through my veins. My cock was so hard it fucking hurt. I wanted to hear her scream my name, and that was precisely what I intended to make happen.

I fucked her with my fingers while flicking my tongue over her most sensitive spots. Her hips bucked against my mouth. I had to hold her down with my free hand.

My princess was going to come for me, and she was going to come hard before I flipped her over and fucked her so thoroughly, I would be the only man she ever thought of again.

“Marksen! Oh God!”

Sweeter words had never been spoken.

“Marksen, it’s too much. I’m going to—” Her words were cut off by a scream of pleasure, her back arching so hard her hips rose off the sofa for a few moments as her core squeezed my fingers, and then she gushed all over them.

My princess was a squirter. I would have never guessed that.

I had heard of women squirting before, but I had never been with a woman who was able to do it. It may be more accurate to say I had never cared about a woman’s pleasure enough to try to make her come that hard before.

I wasn’t done with her yet.

Her entire body jolted with each tiny flick of my tongue. It was such a power rush, knowing I had made her that sensitive. Just a slight movement of my mouth and her entire body jerked as if she were being shocked. It was like she became my puppet, and I could make her dance by just knowing where to lick.

“Marksen, please, please,” she begged again so sweetly. After the last two days, “Marksen please,” was becoming my new favorite phrase.

Maybe instead of piercing her nipples and hanging a sign, I would just tattoo that phrase in a delicious curve over her pussy.

She was panting on the sofa when I rose from between her thighs for air.

My cock throbbed.

I needed her now. I needed to know how it felt to be buried to the hilt in a pussy dripping like hers and still quivering from her extreme orgasm.

Grabbing her hips, I flipped her over and threw the skirt of her dress over her head, exposing her ass that still wore the marks of her earlier punishment. I pressed my thumbs into two bruises forming on her hips as I thrust into her with everything I had.

“Fuck!” I swore again as I slammed into her over and over.

Her body squeezed me tight, pulsing around me like it was trying to milk my cock for my come. Sweat dripped down my brow as I gave her everything I had.

I pulled the skirt away from her head, and I could see her biting into the pillow, trying to muffle her cries of pleasure.

My hand reared up and came crashing down on her ass with a loud slap.

She screamed.

“Each one of those moans of pleasure and pain are mine. I created them. I earned them. I want them this time. You will not take them from me.” I grabbed her hair and pulled her head up and away from the throw pillow, then threw it on the floor.

She bit her lips, trying to muffle the sound, so I spanked her again. As my hand landed, her pussy squeezed my cock harder, making lights flash behind my eyes.

“Does my filthy little princess like pain with her pleasure?” I asked before spanking her again. “Answer me,” I yelled when she remained silent.

Still, she didn’t say a word.

I leaned over and whispered in her ear, “You will answer me, or I am going to assume my cock in your cunt isn’t working for you, and you would rather I fuck your ass.”

“Please, don’t,” she cried as she clawed at the sofa seat cushion, trying to get away from me.

“I won’t, not yet, if you are a good girl and answer my question. Do you like it when I spank this ass while fucking you?”

She tried to hide her face in the cushion, so I pressed my thumb into her ass.

“Yes,” she screamed out. “I like it, I like the way it feels when you fuck me hard, and I like how it feels when you spank me. I even liked how it felt when you pushed your cock down my throat. It hurt, and I liked it.”

“My little princess likes being fucked like a whore.”

She didn't say anything as I drove into her harder.

“Answer me,” I warned.

“You didn't ask a question,” she said, trying to crane her head around to look at me.

I grabbed her hair in my fist, pulled it back like reins, and held her head up and facing forward, just high enough she could see the mirror on the opposite wall. I watched her watch us, and the way her eyes were heavy-lidded with lust told me everything I needed to know.

“Tell me you like being my little whore, or else.”

Olivia stared at her reflection in the mirror and said nothing.

I spanked her again, then spit on her asshole and pressed my thumb further inside as a clear warning.

She screamed again, tears pouring down her face as her body pulsed around me. She was on the verge of another orgasm, but so was I.

My balls were aching and tightening. I wouldn't be able to hold on much longer.

“Say it,” I demanded.

“I like being your whore,” she cried out, as her body betrayed her and she came again.

“Good girl. Now beg me to fill you with my come.”

“I can't.” She stared at me now in the mirror. Her face was a mess of smeared lipstick and melted mascara.

“Do it.” I pressed my thumb deeper into her ass.

“Please, Marksens, please come inside me. I want you to fill me up with your come. Please.”

I let go of everything with a roar, thrusting into her harder, until I was empty and completely sated in a way I didn't know was possible.

I looked in the mirror at Olivia, at first afraid of what I would see.

Evidence that I was a monster and had ruined an innocent girl in a way that was impossible to come back from.

She should have been a crying mess that was terrified of me.

Instead, she looked calm and peaceful. She was still a ruined mess in need of a shower, and maybe a priest, but she looked satisfied and exhausted. She looked like a woman who was well-fucked and happy.

I got off of her, stormed across the room and snatched up the camera as I headed to my office, slamming the door behind me.

That wasn't supposed to happen.

I wasn't supposed to be on the film at any point. I wasn't supposed to leave my DNA in her, and she wasn't supposed to like it. Any of it.

Fuck her.

There'd been a plan, a good plan.

When I put her into that room, I was in command.

I had objectives that were going to be met— she would obey any order I gave—it would break her spirit—and I would have it all on film.

Nowhere in the plan did it say Olivia Manwarring was to be happy. Just like a fucking Manwarring to get pleasure from this. Somehow, she manipulated the situation, turned the tables, and that scheming, manipulative little bitch got what she wanted.

She came three times, so hard she squirted. She liked being my whore.

I didn't know how she got control of that situation, but she did.

Why else was I in my office pissed off while she was lying on my sofa, freshly fucked and euphoric?

Well, we'd see how much she liked it when everyone she loved knew what kind of woman she really was.

CHAPTER 23



LUC

I sat at my desk, looking out at the world spread below my feet.

Amelia called it my brooding Mount Olympus view; she wasn't wrong. Then again that wife of mine was rarely wrong.

She was at the art school I bought for her, helping the younger classes with finger painting or whatever they did. I didn't begrudge her that. She was trying to stay busy while I was here working.

We should have been on a private beach enjoying the waves and sun and lots of sex. I should have been balls deep in my wife, trying my damndest to overload the effectiveness of what was left of the birth control in her system with the sheer volume of my come flooding her womb.

Instead, I was in my office heading up every private military group in this hemisphere that was chasing down her ex-fiancé, my ex-friend, the rat bastard who took my sister.

It had been two days, and there was no sign of her and not another word from him.

My phone pinged from my inner jacket pocket. I took it out expecting a message from Amelia or something from the private teams.

Instead, it was a message from the rat bastard himself.

***Marksen:** You know I am learning a lot about your sister. She really has grown up since we hung out as teenagers. Tell*

me, which do you think she is more addicted to? The party lifestyle and the drugs?

Attached was a picture of what looked like Olivia doing a line of coke off a glass table next to a giant rainbow tentacle. I did not want to know what that was used for.

Marksen: *Or is it my cock?*

The next attachment was Olivia, with what I assumed was Marksen's cock down her throat.

Marksen: *Either way, the Manwarring Princess isn't as innocent as most think she is.*

Marksen: *Well, not anymore.*

I could practically hear Marksen's mocking laughter in my ears.

I threw my phone on my desk and pressed the heels of my palms into my eyes, leaning forward as I tried to control my breathing and my temper.

It didn't work. The only thing I could see was the phone screen lit up on the desk, mocking me.

In a moment of weakness, I lost control.

A yell of pure rage tore from my lungs, and in a sudden fit of violence, I swept everything off my desk onto the floor before throwing my chair across my office. It went straight through the glass wall, shattering it into a million pieces into the hallway.

A few women screamed, then there was silence as I braced my hands on my desk and worked to get myself back under control.

A loss of control was a sign of weakness, and I needed to be strong for Olivia.

A crunching sound came from the hallway. My father walked over the glass and looked at the wreck that used to be my pristine office.

"What?" I bit out.

“So, I see you got the photos, too. What are we going to do? What is our next plan?”

“I’m going to kill him with my bare hands,” I ground out as if I were physically chewing the shattered glass under his feet, meaning every single word.

My father nodded, for a moment considering my words.

“That would send a message.” He grabbed my chair and pushed it back into my office, brushing some glass shards from it and taking a seat. “I’m not saying we aren’t going to do that, but let’s think this through.”

“What is there to think about? This is my fault. I need to handle it.”

“Why is he doing this? Why is he starting a war he knows he can’t win? Marksen is arrogant, but he is not stupid.”

“He’s still furious I stole Amelia.”

My father scoffed. “Your bride is pretty but she’s not worth all this.”

“She is worth any price.” I hit my chest. “*Me*, I should be paying it. Olivia should not be paying this price for me. She is innocent.”

“Your sister will be fine. We will get her from the DuBois boy, and she will survive.”

“She is ruined.” I looked disbelievingly at my father. “She built a career of her own, and now because of my actions, if this gets out, she will be destroyed.”

“It’s just business. Your sister will understand. Sure, it will impact that stupid hobby rag of hers, but it won’t matter. Our focus should be on figuring out how to stop this from impacting the Manwarring businesses.” The casual way those words left my father’s mouth floored me.

This was his daughter. Her virtue was taken, and her business was going to be in shambles if these photos leaked. And he was treating it as any other inconvenience, just another day and any other attack on the Manwarring name.

I couldn't fathom how he could be so cold to his own daughter, watching as he sat and stared at his phone with a casual detachment. My stomach turned when the realization hit.

Had this happened to Olivia before Amelia came into my life, I would have been just as cold.

I would have still been enraged, but not because I was worried for my sister. It would have been because Marksens had made a move against me and my family, my property.

Amelia was the reason I felt this so deeply and why I was terrified for my baby sister.

If it wasn't for my wife, I doubted I would have seen Olivia as a person in trouble instead of an asset at risk of losing value.

My father didn't deserve my disappointment in his reaction. He deserved my pity. Maybe if my mother was still alive, it would be different, but I doubted it.

Olivia's safety and the protection of her reputation had to be my first priorities. Everything else had to come second for me because they weren't even on my father's radar.

"DuBois isn't going to kill her or anything. She'll be fine, and she will understand. Our reputation can be saved by admitting her to some inpatient facility and saying she is getting treatment. We will leave her there for as long as it takes for the media to forget about her. Then we will marry her off. Problem solved. In the meantime, we need to consider getting the other one married before the scandal hits and she loses some of her value as well."

"Charlotte." I rubbed my eyes as I intoned it. "The 'other one's' name is Charlotte."

"Yes, yes, whatever." He waved me off dismissively.

"No, if this comes out and we are in the middle of making a deal for Charlotte, it will taint that arrangement and lower her value as a commodity." I felt nauseous talking about my sister like this, but if I didn't put this into terms my father would respect, then there was no saving either of them.

“Then what do you suggest.”

“First, we get Olivia back, then we deal with any fallout, burying what we can, denying what we can’t. Then we will make a lucrative match for Charlotte.”

I walked over to the end of my desk and picked my phone up off the floor. I deleted the pictures first. I couldn’t stand looking at them, but I needed to reread the messages and see if I could get anything from them. There really weren’t any clues, just him insinuating that he took Olivia’s innocence.

“Do you think the Astrids could have anything to do with this?” My father’s question made me think.

“Maybe,” I admit. “I know Amelia doesn’t. She loves Olivia. I don’t think Harrison would. This isn’t his style. It’s too brash, too vulgar for him. But I don’t know. There were those who weren’t happy about the way I stole Amelia, and the Astrids did stand to make a lot of money from joining with the DuBois’s.”

“Voiding that contract did cost both families millions, and since you took Amelia and she wed without the negotiations and a similar contract in place ...”

“We have contracts with the Astrids. Our partnering on several ventures is making them quite a lot of money,” I said.

It was true, but there was something to my father’s train of thought. Something was starting to click together in my mind.

“But the DuBois’s have always been more public in flaunting their wealth and power.”

“Did you notice at the brunch how Mrs. Astrid was trying to take over? She was talking to anyone who would listen about Olivia. We had to tell people Olivia was hungover and Mrs. Astrid was still drunk from over-imbibing at the wedding. Amelia had her removed. She was practically screaming about Olivia being taken and—”

“And how her son was going to be the one to save her.” My father finished my thought.

“If Harrison is looking at running for a different office, mayor or senator or something, then being the hero that saved his sister-in-law from a kidnapping would be a good way to get a lot of positive press.”

“Are you certain Harrison wasn’t a part of this?” my father asked. His brow furrowed, as his arms crossed over his large chest.

“I ... maybe.” I didn’t think so, but I had no idea what Harrison was and wasn’t capable of. It didn’t seem like his style, but if he was trying to make himself out to be the hero, then it would make sense that the villain, in this case DuBois, would have to be particularly repugnant.

“If it is Harrison, it is a brilliant move,” my father said. “Dragging the DuBois name down, along with the Manwarring one, would go a long way in swaying more left-leaning voters toward him even if he would be a Republican candidate. He’s still a wealthy heir in his own right, but taking down two of the most powerful families would show that he was a man of the people.”

“He would be able to save the lost princess, show kindness to addicts but a firm hand with the wealthy all in one go,” I agreed. “Politically, it’s brilliant, but it still doesn’t strike me as something Harrison would do, and Marksens wouldn’t agree to be a patsy.”

“Of course not.” My father stood and crossed his wrists behind his back as he paced around the room. “But he could be manipulated into it.”

“That is where I am having problems connecting the dots. Manipulation like this, it’s too indirect for Harrison. Too many things could go wrong.”

“Explain.” My father stood at the window, his back to me as he looked out at my Mount Olympus view.

“There are more direct ways for Harrison to show he is tough on the rich. Ones that would make a real difference and still make headlines, that are more of a sure thing.”

“Such as ...”

CHAPTER 24



LUC

“Going after any number of families for embezzlement, fraud, tax evasion.” I stopped to think about that for a moment before I added, “Tax evasion is how Harrison would do it. That is the hot button topic in class struggles right now. The general population believes we are cheating them out of a better life by not paying what they believe is our fair share in taxes. So he would be a man of the people if he prosecuted a few billionaires for tax evasion and forced them to pay out the nose.”

“Would that garner the same publicity as rescuing a damsel in distress?”

“Not in the short term, but the long-term benefits would far outweigh the short. The kidnapping thing would paint him a white knight for one, maybe two news cycles, and then it would die down. It would be nothing more than a flash in the pan. The second a B-list celebrity was accused of having a drug addiction or being abusive, he would be forgotten about. Right now the news is buzzing about some pretty boy model using rich women even though he has a boyfriend.

“Something that stupid would be enough to overshadow Olivia’s kidnapping. But a trial where he was going after billionaires would be in the news for months. He would probably ensure the trial itself was televised, or at least arrange for press coverage through live updates on social media.”

“So what are you saying exactly?” my father asked, looking bored.

“I’m saying this is too flashy, too fast for Harrison, and far too much of it is up in the air. What if Olivia fought and DuBois killed her? What if they went to another country and disappeared, or it went out of his jurisdiction to prosecute? Hell, if DuBois stole her from the wedding, then the crime was committed in New Jersey which is where he would stand trial. Harrison wouldn’t be able to control shit.”

I put my hands flat on my desk and leaned on it. There was something I was missing.

“So Harrison wouldn’t do this?”

“No, it doesn’t serve him, and he has no reason to lash out against us or the DuBois’s. Harrison approves of my marriage with Amelia, and he helped me win her back—”

“You gave her too much power letting her leave in the first place,” my father interrupted. “You need to have a firm hand with your wife to make sure she behaves as she should and knows her place.”

I decided not to take his bait and start this argument over Amelia again. There was a time and place, and when the time was right, he would be the one I would be putting in his place. Just as soon as Olivia was safe.

“The point here is that Harrison approves of the match, and he has no personal vendetta against the DuBois’s. As far as I know, their paths have never crossed, not in any real, significant way, which is why Marksen wanted to marry Amelia in the first place.”

Then it all made sense. I could see the webs of deceit and bullshit in my mind and how the strings linked together, and more importantly who might be pulling them.

“So this wasn’t Harrison’s doing, and we have no idea what is pushing DuBois this far,” my father summed up, “and you have been wasting my time.”

“No, this isn’t Harrison, but do we know another Astrid who would want to prop Harrison up and garner as much attention as possible?” I asked, spoon-feeding my father the answer.

He turned to look at me, confusion in his eyes until the realization set in.

I swore I could practically see the light bulb turn on behind his eyes.

“That meddling old bitch,” he said, eyes wide.

“That would be the one,” I said.

“You think Mary Quinn Astrid is behind DuBois taking Olivia?” he asked.

I had to spell this out for him. Slowly, using small words. My father was not a stupid man, but he constantly underestimated the people around him if he believed they were beneath him.

Even more so if they were female. He not only thought of himself as better than most people, he also believed the only value a woman could have was if they were literally beneath him.

Seeing him clearly for the first time, I was even more grateful to Amelia for showing me the error in that way of thinking. If it wasn't for Amelia, I would be just as ignorant as my father.

“That woman was livid at my and Amelia's union. Not only because of the very public way I humiliated her, but the blackmail too, and I may have been less than respectful in the way I dealt with her.”

“But that doesn't mean she could.”

“She is the only one that could have orchestrated this. Before she agreed to DuBois's proposal, she would have done her research on the man himself, not only his holdings and assets but also what mattered to him, how he could be controlled. Amelia told me about the dossiers she'd had made up for the eligible men in the area.”

“So she knows about his business.”

“She knows everything about his business and what he does and doesn't care about. She would know how to press his buttons to control him. She did the same research on me and

found that I could not be easily manipulated. So she disapproved of our union. More to the point, this puts her son in the limelight in a Prince Charming sort of way. This could help not only with career ambitions, but I bet she is looking for a mini version of herself to be Harrison's wife. Someone she can groom to be her pawn. Putting him in a favorable light will help her do that."

"She can also use it as leverage for us to keep our mouths shut about Harrison's paternity."

"Exactly," I said. "She is punishing DuBois for not being man enough to take Amelia back from me, punishing Amelia for marrying me by dragging my name in the mud through Olivia, and propping up her son in a way that makes sure we won't want to reveal her secrets. We just need proof."

"Why?"

"So we can take it to Harrison and demand he get his mother in line and stop all of this from going further."

"What kind of proof?" he asked.

"The kind we can only get by finding Olivia," I lied. There were other ways, easier ways, to prove Mrs. Astrid was behind everything, but if I used them, my father would lose focus on getting Olivia back sooner.

Olivia came first, and then revenge would swiftly follow.

When I was done, Mary Quinn Astrid and Marksen DuBois would both wish I had just involved the police.

Because I was going to destroy them.

I pulled my desk chair back to the desk and grabbed my phone to call about having the glass in my wall replaced when Henry, my assistant, poked his head through the now empty space where the wall used to be. To his credit, he didn't even blink at the shattered glass.

"Sir, we know where she is being held. Mr. Dubois took her to Newport. The infiltration team is already en route. The secondary team is gearing up now. If you would like to accompany them, we need to leave immediately."

“I’ll call once she is safe,” I said over my shoulder to my father as I ran out of my office to the elevators, leaving him leaning over a cigar box I kept for clients, focusing on selecting one for himself. Without looking up he said, “Who’s safe?” Already no longer interested in his daughter and more interested in his immediate needs.

To hell with him.

My baby sister was coming home tonight, and then Marksens was going to regret ever being born.

CHAPTER 25



MARKSEN

The darkness was broken by a flashing beam of light, then another and another.

I had been lying in my bed, Olivia asleep next to me, keeping an eye on my tablet for those lights.

If Luc's men were worth the no doubt impressive amount of money he was paying, they should have found my Rhode Island home hours ago.

Maybe Luc was a little short on funds after fucking me over all summer, or maybe the Manwarring Princess wasn't as high on his priority list as I had thought.

I looked down at Olivia sleeping peacefully tucked inside my embrace. Her auburn hair fanned out beneath her. The soft, reddish locks poured over my arm and the silk pillowcase.

No, he was coming for her.

She was too precious to not take the highest priority.

After I sent the texts, I was overcome with more guilt.

I even tried to hack into Luc's phone and retrieve them before he saw them, but was unsuccessful.

Fuck. What had I done?

Forcing the unwanted emotions aside, I had turned to caring for Olivia.

I ran her a bath. Despite her protests, I lifted her into the tub filled with silky bubbles and against my better judgment,

gave her the privacy she was probably craving to soak her no doubt sore body.

When she was clean and relaxed and her fingers had started wrinkling like prunes, I returned to lift her out like a child. Once more enjoying drying her off and wrapping her in a towel I had warmed in the dryer. Afterward, I dressed her in one of my dress shirts and even let her use one of my expensive designer ties as a belt to make it look like a chic dress.

Personally my favorite part was knowing she wasn't wearing anything underneath.

Then I fed her a simple meal of grilled cheese and tomato soup.

Enjoying the domestic intimacy of having her sit on the counter and watch me cook. When I let her use a spatula to flip a sandwich, she actually bounced up and down and laughed with delight, proud of herself for doing it right. I didn't have the heart to tell her she flipped it too hard and now the bread was messed up.

Instead, I distracted her by requesting something from the refrigerator and fixed it as best as I could.

Olivia was being a good girl for me. She didn't even fight when I blindfolded her and put her in the car to head to the docks.

I thought she hoped I wouldn't send those pictures out if she were good.

Too bad she was too late.

Too bad I was a bastard and acted out of anger.

Too bad I let my petty revenge scheme ruin her sweet innocence.

Too bad I fucking destroyed something that could have been ...

Dammit.

I kept her blindfolded on the boat until we were a ways out to sea. When I came to remove it, I found her asleep on the bed. Curled up again, like a cute little chipmunk.

Knowing she needed the rest after all I had put her through, I removed the blindfold and crawled into bed next to her, wrapping an arm around her waist and pulling her close.

Now, flashlights moved around the yard surrounding my darkened home. Carefully, so as to not disturb Olivia, I slid my arm out from under her, then got up and silently slid open the glass French doors.

I wanted to watch the show, and initially, I had intended to have her watch with me, but given the strange turn of events, it was better if I let her sleep.

Ever since our hate fuck this afternoon, she had been docile. I was a little concerned I had managed to literally fuck her brains out until she called me a “self-entitled prick.” At that point, I figured it was just exhaustion, and she would be fine once she rested and then maybe ate something.

I took a seat on a lounge chair on the deck. I had picked the perfect spot to sit back and watch the show.

The air was perfectly cool, and crisp fall was settling in. Even in the dead of night, the full moon gave just enough light to hint at the brilliant reds and yellows of the trees. New England autumn truly was breathtaking, and the perfect backdrop to watch Luc Manwarring fail again.

Failure was a new experience for Luc, which made my victory so much sweeter.

It may be a bit early for a celebration, but fuck it.

I pulled the cork on a lovely red blend from my family’s vineyard in the Southern Rhone Valley, really the only region suitable for such robust red wines.

Well, there and the Côte d’Or, Burgundy’s “Golden Slope.” As soon as all of this was over and the Manwarrings were adequately dealt with, I would be expanding my family’s vineyards to include several acres in the region.

But that was a problem for a different day. In the meantime, I poured myself a glass and swirled it to help aerate the wine a bit before taking a sip and letting the bold, full flavor coat my palate as I settled in my seat. It only took a few moments for those beams of light to surround my home. There were a few on the inside, but most were around the perimeter.

“Mr. DuBois, come out with your hands up. We have you surrounded, sir.”

Mr. DuBois? Sir? I chuckled.

Even after kidnapping a New York princess, defiling her, and sending the evidence to her brother and father, I still was shown respect by the men who were hired to hunt me down like a dog.

Even when they pursued me, they recognized me as their better.

Now it was time for Luc to get the fucking message too.

I didn't even try to hide my satisfied smile as I heard the first loud bang on my front door. I leaned back and pictured the four men on the other side of my front door carrying a large battering ram. The sound of it hitting the aged oak was surprisingly loud. The bang echoed over the calm black water.

Another one quickly followed.

That door was solid oak and reinforced.

Whoever was using the ram was going to get their workout in today. Though I didn't understand why they just didn't go around to the back. The glass doors would break much more easily and they were unlocked.

I guessed common sense was not an asset of the grunts Luc hired.

Finally, after several louder slams, there was a distinct cracking as my door splintered. Two more hits and the boys had finally made it through.

From the deck of my yacht, I watched as my hideaway was infiltrated by a second-rate security force.

“Clear,” the first call came out.

“Clear,” the next one yelled.

Soon someone flipped switches and turned on the lights.

Even knowing what they were going to find, or rather what they *weren't* going to find, it was still entertaining as hell.

The French doors next to me slid open, and Olivia ran to the railing and screamed, “Here, I’m here! Help me!”

She looked so damn good wearing nothing but one of my shirts, the tie belt long forgotten.

I had never felt the need to take care of someone like that, let alone so intensely that it made my chest ache. It was physically uncomfortable to pull myself away from her. I had to, I couldn’t let myself get too attached. I had to see my revenge plan through.

It was too late to turn back now.

The damage was done.

Making her change into my shirt was a mistake. Having her smell like me and knowing the only thing between my body and hers was a thin layer of cotton made me possessive. I wanted to keep her, never let another person see or touch her. Which was greedy, even by my standards. A woman this beautiful was made to be shown off, not hidden away like a jewel in some vault.

She gave another call over the railing.

I swirled my wineglass, unconcerned. I sighed, hating having to hurt her again. Yet also hating that I hated it. “They can’t hear you, princess. We are too far out, but if you want to keep screaming, go for it.”

“What do you mean they can’t hear me? I can hear them just fine. They should be able to hear me.”

I held up the tablet that was playing the live feed from the cameras I had set up around the house.

She scanned the still, dark waters. “It doesn’t look too far,” she said mostly to herself.

“It’s a lot further than it looks,” I said, standing in case she tried to do something stupid.

She climbed onto the first rung of the railing, and I took a deep breath and casually walked over to her, keeping my hands in my pockets.

If I touched her again, I wasn’t sure I would be able to stop.

“I wouldn’t do that. We are two miles out, and you aren’t wearing anything but a shirt. You will get hypothermia and die before you are halfway there, assuming you don’t get caught in a rip tide and drown first or get eaten by a shark.”

“You don’t care if I get eaten by a shark,” she tossed over her shoulder as she climbed another rung and swung her leg over to the other side.

I grabbed her by her hips and pulled her back over, then picked her up and brought her to the lounge chairs I had set up so she could watch the show with me. “That’s just simply not true. If you were dead, how would I get your brother back for everything he is doing to me? And besides, I’m the only one allowed to eat you.”

She struggled for a moment, and then when she realized I had no intention of letting her go, she laid back against me and relaxed as she stared at the screen.

The men moved through my house, breaking open doors and flipping over furniture.

Finally, they got to the bedroom.

I double-tapped the window, so it took the entire screen.

A moment later, Luc Manwarring walked into the room.

CHAPTER 26



MARKSEN

Olivia sucked in a startled breath and reached out her hand, touching the screen with her fingertips.

He was dressed for the office, but something was different. His usually impeccable suit was wrinkled, and his hair was a mess. Even his eyes looked red and bloodshot, and his skin seemed a bit gray.

I didn't even try to hide my satisfaction from Olivia.

I ran the backs of my knuckles over the soft skin of her neck as I pushed her hair over her shoulder to expose the delicate whorls of her ear. I leaned in to whisper cruelly, "It looks like your brother hasn't been sleeping well. Do you think it's his new wife's pussy keeping him up, or is he worried about you?"

She smelled so good, clean and fresh. Even though I knew she didn't want to be on my lap, her body still fit perfectly into mine, like she was made for me.

The breeze coming from the open water was chilly, so I pulled her tighter into me, trying to shield her body from the cold, despite how her back stiffened against my touch.

The plan said I was supposed to give her back at the end of all this, but I didn't want to.

I wanted to hold on to her, keep her by my side and in my bed. I shook those thoughts from my mind and refocused on the woman in my lap.

She stared at the screen, her lower lip trembling.

“Why are you doing this to me?” she sniffled. “I don’t understand.”

“Shh, watch the show,” I whispered. “I’ll explain more after.”

Luc picked up the photo I had printed for him.

As much as I regretted sending the texts, I knew I had no choice but to follow through with my plan. Regrets were for the weak. You didn’t build and protect a kingdom by worrying about the feelings of the pawns sacrificed in the strategic power game that was empire building.

I had to keep reminding myself, Olivia was a pawn to be used and sacrificed.

Nothing more.

Perhaps when all this was over ...

No. It was pointless even thinking it.

A moving army always burned the bridge behind them when at war.

The photo was one of Olivia, topless, with white powder spread under her nose and her red lips wrapped around the tentacle dildo. Her eyes were staring straight into the camera.

On the photo, I’d written a simple message. *“Do you think you can save her before I ruin her?”*

Luc’s face went red, and he threw the photo back down on the bed facing the hidden camera.

Olivia gasped in my arms and started shaking.

“Why,” she sobbed, tears spilling down her beautiful face. She tilted her chin down to let her hair cover her face, but I brushed it back again and caressed her wet cheek.

“Don’t worry, princess. None of it is real. It’s all an illusion.”

“What?” She looked into my eyes, her brow furrowing.

“Don’t you see this isn’t real? None of it is real, not for you. This is all just an illusion.”

“How is this an illusion? You kidnapped me, punished me, took my innocence, and then you made me ...” Her words trailed off as her gaze lowered and her cheeks heated.

“I made you what?” I probed as my thumb rubbed her earlobe.

“You showed my brother a photo of me that makes me look like a strung-out coke whore.”

“Yes, exactly.” I nodded. “I made you look like a drugged-up coke whore. But you aren’t one. You have never been high, and the only cock you have ever taken is mine.”

Or will take, I silently finished, unsure how I felt about the unwanted possessive thought.

“But ...”

“What your brother did to me? That was real. It started as an illusion when he made it look like I was the fool who loved a woman he was sleeping with. He made me look weak.”

“What does that have to do with me?”

“He took something very real from me, and then he cast an illusion that nearly destroyed me. Am I a soft-cocked cuckold that can’t keep a woman satisfied? I think you, of all people, know that isn’t true.”

I slipped my hand lower to gently wrap around her throat, her pulse rapid against my palm.

“He is trying to reinforce this illusion that I am weak. So he can cover up his shady, unethical business practices. He is forcing my hand. I need to dissolve his illusions and replace them with some of my own. So I can take control of my empire back, and rest assured, princess, I will be coming out on top in the end.”

I squeezed my hand lightly.

She tilted her head back to ease the tension in my grip as she swallowed. “I don’t even know what you are talking about. I don’t understand what he took from you other than Amelia. He shouldn’t have done that, especially so very

publicly. But I didn't do that to you. You aren't creating a narrative that will destroy Luc. You are destroying me."

"No, I am destroying him. I am going to prove that he doesn't have control over his little sister. And if he can't control one little girl, how the fuck is he going to control an empire?"

She wrapped her small hands around my wrist as she desperately captured my gaze. "Marksen, look at what you are doing to me. Yeah, maybe Luc will lose some face, and so will my father, but they are not stupid. They will claim these photos are faked, a combination of AI and a skilled deep fake artist, or they will have me committed. Yes, it might cause a scandal for a week, maybe a month. They will recover. I won't."

I broke her gaze as I turned to stare at the screen, watching as Luc tore apart my bedroom in his anger. "You will be just fine. You have your trust fund. I doubt your daddy will take that away."

She was never in any real danger, I tried to convince myself. The most she would lose was her little hobby. "If he does take it away, you can always come crawling back to me on your knees. I am sure I can think of a few positions where you can earn your keep."

"I don't see how any of this is going to get the results you want. This won't hurt Luc. It only hurts me."

It was a ploy.

Olivia was trying to manipulate me again by making me feel guilty.

I released her throat. "You are only one tiny part of my plan, princess." I spit the word out like an insult. "You are the crack in your brother's otherwise impenetrable armor. Don't worry. You are just a tool to get to him. He will pay a far dearer price later. I'm afraid you are just very pretty collateral damage."

She sniffed as she lifted her chin. "I still don't see how I help you get to him."

My lip curled as my stomach twisted with bile at the horrible words I was forcing myself to say to her. “You don’t need to. You are playing your part beautifully.”

Needing to stop this conversation, I wrapped my hand in her hair and pulled, forcing her sweet lips down to mine. I kissed her hard, reminding myself what her role here was. When the kiss broke, she wiped her arm over her lips. Whatever she needed to tell herself was of no concern to me.

“I hate you,” she whispered and rose off my lap.

“Be that as it may, my offer stands.”

Her brow crinkled, and the most adorable line appeared in the very center of her forehead.

“When this is all over, if your daddy cuts you off, I will happily keep you in the lifestyle you have become accustomed to in exchange for an ... arrangement,” I said, needing her anger.

If she was mad at me, then she wasn’t playing at being a good girl to make me feel something for her.

Olivia Manwarring was not the only one who knew how to manipulate her enemy.

“I won’t be your whore.” She wrapped her arms around her middle, unaware the move only tightened the fabric over her breasts, showing the tight buds of her nipples from the chilled air.

“Aren’t you, though?” I jeered as I leaned back in my chair and raised my wineglass in a mock toast.

“Fuck you,” she said before turning her back and walking into the bedroom, slamming the sliding door closed behind her.

The wine had turned sour in my stomach.

Olivia was getting to me, and I was battling guilt over the way I was treating her. I had to let it go, she was clearly trying to get a reaction from me, and I couldn’t let that happen. If she knew my resolve with her was starting to fray, she would exploit it in a second and everything would fall apart.

She did have a point, though.

I could leak those photos now, but without irrefutable proof, a talented PR rep, of which the Manwarring Corporation had several, would be able to spin them as fakes or make her out to be the victim.

Her magazine would never recover, but it would barely be a blip for Luc, or his father.

I was going to need something bigger, with witnesses, to make it impossible to spin into anything other than Olivia's fall from grace.

I needed to come up with something now, before Olivia managed to wiggle her way even deeper under my skin.

Despite knowing how manipulative and underhanded her family was, and by extension she as well, I was starting to feel for her.

This needed to escalate quickly so I could get rid of her.

CHAPTER 27



OLIVIA

I stared at my reflection, taking it all in.

The gold Grecian-style gown Marksens gave me was simple and elegant.

The top was made of two long pieces of fabric that layered on top of each other to perfectly cup my breasts before giving me a wide shoulder and then flowing down my back to attach to the gold cord waistband. The long skirt flowed beautifully when I walked and just barely brushed the tips of my toes in my four-inch stiletto gladiator sandals.

I couldn't have put together a better look if I tried.

My hair had been pulled back from my face in an elegant updo, and my makeup was professionally done in a way that made me look like Aphrodite herself.

Natural, but somehow shimmering, and my skin seemed to glow from within. I was choosing to believe that was from the makeup and not the endless orgasms that Marksens seemed to delight in giving me before insulting me.

He ran hot and cold.

I never knew what I was going to get with him.

Sometimes he was cold, just this side of civil.

Other times he was kind and sweet and even made me laugh.

Then there were the moments when he was inside of me or had his face buried in my core. He was attentive in a way I

didn't think most handsome men of privilege were because they didn't have to be.

One of the models who also wrote for my site once told me she only dated men who were way beneath her league either financially or in appearance. According to her, men who were attractive or wealthy knew they could get a number of beautiful women, so they were not concerned with having to keep any of them. These men were far more likely to be selfish lovers, and even if they knew the female orgasm wasn't a myth, they weren't really concerned if it happened or not.

Ugly or poor men, she said, couldn't just pick up another hot girl at the bar the next night, so they appreciated what they had and would work to keep it. Even if they weren't particularly skilled, they took their time and knew how to truly worship a woman the way they deserved.

I didn't know if I really believed her when she explained her theory, but logically, to a virgin, it had made sense. At the time I had smiled and nodded, I may have even said something about her being a genius and how I was going to try that next time, just so she didn't realize how inexperienced I really was.

After the last few days with Marksens, I could confidently say that the woman was talking out of her ass.

Marksens was extraordinarily wealthy and devastatingly handsome, but I couldn't ever imagine sex could be any more erotic or satisfying, and he was definitely attentive and thorough. Even when the sex started out angry and passionate, like he couldn't control what he wanted and he was mad at himself for being attracted to me, it never ended like that.

But then, as soon as he came down from his own high and caught his breath, he was back to being ice cold. Like he blamed me for pushing myself down on the sofa or ripping his shirt from my body. I just couldn't read him, and I had no idea what he would be like or what would happen moment to moment.

Like today. He had been kind as we took the boat out. While spending most of his time working on his computer, he

had grabbed a copy of Shakespeare's plays and handed it to me.

Marksen remembered from when we were teenagers that I was in love with all things Shakespeare. He even remembered my favorite play was *Much Ado about Nothing*. Who did that?

Then he blindfolded me again when we docked and took me to this suite.

Everything with a monogram had been removed.

Even so, it clearly was an upscale hotel room, and I knew I was in the city.

New York had an energy that could be felt from the moment you arrived. He might have kept me blindfolded, but he couldn't mask the sounds of the city or the stop-and-go movement of the traffic while we rode in the Town Car. The blindfold wasn't removed until he had me in the suite, where the windows had been covered in a gorgeous, thick black damask paper.

Classical music played throughout the entire suite, so I couldn't even hear if we were by a subway or the water.

Nothing in the hotel suite gave it away.

But it was too late.

I knew I was in the city. Unfortunately, I had no idea specifically where. I couldn't tell what borough I was in, or even what time of the day it was.

A few hours after we arrived, two women dressed in skintight animal print dresses that revealed far too much cleavage arrived. They had a few black suitcases with them and looked me up and down with matching looks of disdain.

I couldn't say I blamed them too much. I was only wearing a shirt that was clearly not mine and I had been in it for almost two days, my hair was in desperate need of a wash and conditioning treatment, and my bare feet were filthy. I was sure I looked homeless.

Marksen said something to them in French and their attention went right back to him, smiling and preening and

touching his arm with their tacky, fake red nails like I wasn't right there wearing his shirt. I knew I was his hostage, but I assumed they didn't know that.

It was rude, and I took offense at their assumption that I wasn't with him, and he could be taken. I wasn't at all jealous. The hot, possessive feeling in my veins and my twisting gut was offense, not jealousy.

Marksen told me these women were brought in to get me ready for a special event.

He then explained that they didn't speak a word of English, and that he'd told them I was his crazy sister and not to believe a word I said. So they couldn't help me even if they wanted to. The way they looked at Marksen, I doubted they had any interest in me at all.

They were hired to do whatever Marksen said, to make me up for whatever it was that he had planned for the night. Hair, makeup, dressed and styled like the woman I was when I wasn't an abductee. The women didn't say a word to me the entire time they were there. There were no half-hearted attempts to mime something or to speak to me in any language. They talked to each other in rapid-fire French.

Of course, Marksen spoke it fluently, but my skills were lacking after only a year of high school French.

I may not have understood the words they were saying, but I did understand the way the women angled their bodies toward him and bent low to give him a peek at their cleavage or leaned over way too far in a way that was practically presenting him with their asses like stray cats in heat.

They were pathetic and obvious, but to Marksen's credit, he didn't even seem to notice. He joined me in the bathroom when he sent me to shower, then stayed with me in the main room the entire time the women were there.

And every time I looked at him, his eyes were focused on my reflection in the mirror.

I refused to blush under the attention.

This wasn't a fairy tale, and I refused to be the beauty with Stockholm syndrome.

His focused attention did earn me a few glares from the women. One even burned me with a curling iron. Then said something to Marksens. I assumed she was making her apologies to him for burning me or explaining it was some kind of accident. How she could have accidentally pressed the hot iron to my neck instead of the hair that was mostly finished in the updo was beyond my understanding. But really, at that point, what was one more mark. Fortunately it wasn't really noticeable.

The women continued to speak just to each other and Marksens, then plucked and prodded me until they produced the result he wanted. When he was satisfied with how I looked, he kissed each woman on the cheek, and a spike of white-hot jealousy shot through me.

I assumed he was dressing me for another depraved photoshoot until he disappeared into the bedroom and came out a few minutes later looking devilishly handsome.

He stood beside me dressed in a black Ralph Lauren tuxedo that would have been perfectly appropriate for my brother's wedding. Instead of the classic red rose in his lapel, he wore a white rose, its edges dipped in gold paint and adorned with what looked like leaves from an olive tree. Clearly, the theme for the night was Ancient Greece, and something about that made me think I should have known what was happening.

His appearance in the tux did tell me a few things that I knew for certain.

First and most importantly, this wasn't just another photoshoot.

If it were, he wouldn't have gotten dressed up himself. He had also planned everything down to the last detail, including how I was to behave and what would happen if I didn't.

"Tell me, princess, what are your rules for the evening?" he asked, looking at me in the mirror.

I hated seeing us together like this.

It almost looked normal, like we were an actual couple getting ready for some charity event. That could have been us if our family hadn't had so much bad blood in the last year.

I really did have feelings for Marksens when we were younger. I would have been overjoyed if we had run into each other at my brother's wedding or any number of events we may have both attended and, instead of kidnapping me, he had just asked me for a dance, or even better, a date.

I would have said yes so fucking fast. I would have gladly been his "good girl" or his "princess," and I would have loved every minute of it.

We would have had a whirlwind romance for the ages. We were both of an appropriate age, from the same economic and social classes, and although, no, I had not been brought up to be a wife like Amelia had, I was sure for the right partner I could manage staff in the running of a house.

In a year or two, I would have even been open to selling my magazine or hiring a CEO to run the day-to-day so I could stay home while we raised our children.

That alternate reality version of us would have been happy, going on new adventures and exploring the world, even taking our time exploring each other.

The idea of me and him in another life where he guided me with a firm hand in the bedroom, showing me what he liked, exploring different kinks, and finding what worked for me sounded incredible. In that life, maybe his idle threat of tying me naked to a bed would be more exciting than scary. I might have even been open to experimenting with the big tentacle thing he had. Although, I had spent the last few days sore enough just from Marksens's cock that the idea of anything bigger was a little terrifying.

He stole that opportunity from us.

I would never forgive him for that.

Seeing us together, reflected in the mirror side by side like this, was a twisted perversion of all the things I had hoped for

when I was a teenager with her first crush.

I sighed as I rolled my eyes. “I am not allowed to speak to anyone. I am to attend the event as an anonymous guest. Under no circumstances am I allowed to make people aware of who I am or that I am there against my will or I will regret it,” I recited. “Now, where are we going?”

“You will find out soon enough. What happens if you are a bad girl tonight?”

I took a deep breath and glared at him in the mirror while he adjusted his already perfectly straight bow tie.

“If I am a bad girl, then you will pull me out of there, release the photos of me ‘doing coke’”—I curled my fingers in air quotes— “and sucking your cock on the internet. I will be all over Page Six by Monday and be publicly ruined.”

“And...” he prompted.

My cheeks flamed red. I focused on the wall just above his head, refusing to look him in the eye as I added, “And you will strip me down and chain me to a bed and leave me there until you feel like using me.”

“Good girl.” He grabbed my shoulders and spun me around to face him, then kissed my forehead. I hated how that little act of affection set butterflies aflutter in my stomach.

“There is just one thing you are missing.”

“Is it underwear?” I asked with false sweetness. “The courtesans you hired to dress me forgot that part.”

“Courtesans? Is my little princess jealous?” he teased.

“Of the women who got to leave your presence? Extremely,” I deadpanned while moving out of his arms.

He threw his head back and laughed at me.

“Don’t worry. Behave tonight, and it won’t be too much longer. I will be moving to the next phase of my plan shortly, and you might even get to go home ... eventually.” He leaned in and whispered in my ear, “But you know you are going to miss the way I make you feel alive when I fuck you.”

I looked at his reflection and said, “I’m sure it won’t take me long to find a better lover, now that I know what I am looking for.”

“And what is that, princess?”

“Anyone but you.”

His jaw clenched before he grabbed my chin, pinching it between two fingers, and tilted my head up to meet his eyes. “You are still missing something, and no, you will not be needing panties tonight.”

I tried to pull my head out of his grip.

“How am I supposed to attend as a guest and have no one recognize me? I am in the papers and magazines all the time. What if someone knows me?”

“They won’t.” He reached behind me and opened the long center drawer in the vanity, pulling out a large velvet box. “Open.”

This was the kind of box that contained expensive jewelry. I was confused. This dress was gold and shimmering. Any jewelry would take away from it, especially with the shimmer in my makeup.

I opened the box to find two stunning masquerade masks. The feminine one was a sheep mask in white with golden trim and diamond accents, and the other, a masculine one, was a black ram with golden horns.

This all seemed so familiar, but I couldn’t place it.

Marksen turned me to face the mirror again and secured the sheep mask to my face, hiding my identity.

Then he put on the ram mask, and it all clicked in my head.

The Grecian dress, the masquerade masks, the sheep, and the ram.

It all made sense.

He really was going to destroy everything I had ever built in the most public way possible.

Theophane.

CHAPTER 28



MARKSEN

Any man could find out anything they needed to know about a woman by just listening.

It was a simple fact of life.

Why so many people refused to pick up on that was pathetic.

I had wracked my brain for hours trying to think of how I could make it impossible for any PR rep to spin the photos I had taken of Olivia. Videos and photos could be faked to a surprising degree. It was practically impossible to tell a real photo from a fake.

Olivia knew it right away since she had her online magazine, but running a massive conglomerate and a small family whiskey business didn't give you the same set of skills and knowledge, so Luc wouldn't know that. But he would be able to find out. It was actually surprising he hadn't put that together already.

He must have been slipping.

I needed her to be forced to admit it was her in the pictures, preferably with witnesses.

Sure, Luc would have the internet scrubbed and pay off most media outlets that would run the pictures, but I needed a way for him not to be able to get to all of them. Once I figured out how to do that, the rest was easy.

The first step was taking more photos in a crowded place, and Olivia herself told me where to do so. When she'd been

telling me she had to leave, she had shared the places she was expected to be, and I'd paid attention.

She'd said she was planning to attend a unique theatrical experience that was based on the Theophane myth. After that, all it took was a quick search on Google and a few calls to get everything in place.

It didn't take me long to realize that my little princess had no idea what kind of event she had planned to attend. I couldn't have arranged this better if I had tried.

Everything was lining up for me in ways I hadn't even thought to hope for.

Armed with the belief that everything clicking together so beautifully had to be a sign from the universe that my crusade was a necessary evil, I moved forward with my plans.

The universe's approval vindicated everything, and the guilt I had felt faded into the background.

This was happening. It had to happen.

The penthouse I procured for the day had direct elevator access from the suite to the basement.

I took Olivia down to the limo. The driver informed me he had finished covering the inside windows with the same lush paper the hotel covered the suite's windows with.

Even I had to admit I was surprised the hotel didn't bat an eye at my unusual request. I chose to believe it was because they were used to guests who were jet-lagged or recovering from some medical procedure ... Either way, they had what I needed and took care of everything.

Leaving me time to enjoy tonight's festivities.

Olivia looked simply fuckable in that golden dress.

She didn't look like a princess; she was a gilded goddess.

And to think the beauticians I hired solely because of their reputation for discretion thought they had a chance to tempt me from her.

Olivia's reactions almost made having to put up with those harpies worth it. They smelled like cheap perfume and cigarettes, and their makeup was caked on to cover the fine lines around their eyes and lips. Even their skin was an unnatural orange color that was rarely found outside of a bottle.

Still, it was fun to watch Olivia stew. I stayed with them the entire time they worked, partly to make sure Olivia didn't try to misbehave and escape, but mostly because I didn't want those ... women to make my princess look like a clown.

It was laughable, though I had to admit I enjoyed watching Olivia glare and scowl at them every time they giggled at something I said or touched my arm. Her jealousy made me feel vindicated in a way that I really didn't want to look at too closely.

I had told Olivia that the women were under the impression she was my sister.

I lied.

The women thought she was my wife, and still, they hit on me and tried to flirt in front of her. When the one burned her with the curling iron, I had to stop myself from throwing her from the balcony.

That stunt had lost them a tip and once I made a call to their boss, they both lost their jobs. No one hurt what was mine.

I hadn't even realized I started referring to Olivia as "mine" in my head.

The limo pulled to a stop, and a moment later, the chauffeur opened the car door to reveal an ugly concrete building. It looked like an abandoned warehouse of some sort. I even doubted we were at the right place until I saw the ram's head painted in gold on one of the doors.

"I can't believe this is where you brought me."

Olivia was fuming.

I knew the second she put it all together in her head at the suite, but she didn't say anything the entire ride over.

Her arms were folded over her chest as she stared at the black paper like she was trying to see through it or memorize the pattern.

She thought she was mad in the car. She had no idea how mad she was going to be by the end of the night.

“Of course this is where I brought you, princess. You told me you wanted to come see the show,” I taunted as her lips twisted into a petulant pout.

Taking her arm, I led her to the steel door with the gold ram's head.

The door opened as we approached, and a woman holding a tray of golden goblets and wearing a white tunic with her top untied and hanging down to her waist, exposing both of her very large, fake breasts whose pale nipples were clearly enjoying the rush of cold fall air, greeted us.

“Good evening, sir, madam. Tonight is an interactive event. Inside, you will find a most splendid party with nymphs and dryads and even a satyr or two. Please enjoy the food, the wine, and the activities. Later tonight, Poseidon himself will take his Theophane and claim her as his own on the dais. The rules for the party are simple: eat, drink, be merry, and let the passions of the night lead you where they may.” She handed us each a golden goblet and ushered us through the door.

The transformation was impressive.

Outside, it was an ugly concrete box like every other concrete box in the city.

Inside was a feast for the eyes.

The walls were a light sky-blue, matching the same brilliance of the waters surrounding Milos. Thick white curtains hung down, creating little alcoves to give the illusion of privacy. Ornate white plaster planters were scattered about, filled with bright green plants with pink flowers. White columns separated different raised stage-like areas where people all dressed in tuxedos and Grecian-inspired gowns

talked amongst each other and with the actors, who were all fairly easy to spot since they were wearing more historically accurate garb.

I had to admit the cast had done an impressive job trying to recreate ancient Greece. There was even a small live band playing harps and lyres for background music, and it was a nice balmy eighty degrees in here. Not hot, but definitely not the cool weather outside.

“Wow,” Olivia breathed next to me.

“What are the rules?” I asked again.

“Don’t talk to anyone. Don’t let anyone know who I am or that you kidnapped me and are holding me against my will and forcing me to do depraved things.”

“Good girl.” I took a sip of my wine. It wasn’t great, but better than what was usually served at theater events. “Though, let’s be honest.” I leaned down to whisper in her ear. “You have loved every single depraved thing we have done, and I have hardly had to force you. In fact, I seem to recall you begging for some of those depraved things.”

Her lips parted, and the sensitive skin on her neck pebbled under the caress of my breath.

She didn’t say a word, just tipped her golden goblet to her lips and drained it.

Several waiters walked around in simpler tunics, carrying trays filled with wine goblets and decorated with figs and grapes. A bit on the nose, but I could still appreciate it.

I grabbed a fresh goblet for myself and then took Olivia’s hand and pulled her to one of the alcoves containing a stone bench. She attempted to sit next to me, but I pulled her onto my lap so I could whisper in her ear.

“I have to admit I was surprised this is the event your magazine wanted to cover.”

“We cover different theater pieces all the time.”

“Yes, Broadway, the ballet, opera, and even some off-Broadway. But this ...”

“What is wrong with this? It’s incredible. It’s like we are transported back in time,” she argued. I could feel the indignation radiating from behind her pretty sheep mask.

“They did a fantastic job,” I agreed. “It just seems a little wild for you, though I think we are both discovering you are far wilder than you think. I bet there is the soul of a truly insatiable woman under all that faux shyness. But a bacchanal? Even I didn’t see that coming.”

Her back stiffened. “A what?” she asked.

For a moment, I wondered if she really didn’t know what this particular theater piece was actually about.

“Olivia, what do you think this event is?”

CHAPTER 29



MARKSEN

Her fingers twisted in the loose fabric of her gown. “It’s like an interactive play.” Her voice quavered as she spoke. “There are actors in character, and they are improvising conversations with the audience.”

“Well,” I tried to hold in my laughter, “you aren’t wrong. Look around you, princess. Tell me what you see.”

“I see a beautiful set and people dressed in Greek-inspired gowns, tuxedos, and actors in costume.”

“Good, keep looking,” I encouraged with amused interest. It was early in the evening, but the “nymph” who greeted us was not the only woman showing a fair amount of skin.

“I don’t know what you mean.” Her head swung around as she took in the room.

“Do you know the myth of Theophane?” I clasped her shoulders and pulled her back on my lap so she was leaning against my chest.

She fit in my arms so perfectly. Her warm body felt so good in my arms that it was distracting.

Her tone was stiff as clearly her uncertainty and confusion grew. “She was the mother of the sheep who had the golden fleece.”

“She was,” I confirmed. “But there is a bit more to her story.”

“Tell me.” It was an order, and under other circumstances, I would have bristled at her command and considered ways to

punish her for it. But in this case, I was willing to let it slide for now.

“Theophane was a princess of the Bisaltes tribe who was hailed for her beauty. So much so that she was almost constantly surrounded by suitors,” I whispered in her ear as I traced my hand from her shoulder down her arm, reveling in the softness of her skin. “She also caught the eye of the god Poseidon.”

Her skin was pebbling under my touch. I loved how it didn't matter how mad she was. She never failed to respond to my touch.

“She loved Poseidon, but that didn't matter to the other suitors. Her beauty was so extraordinary they were willing to anger the god of the seas himself for a chance to love her. The poor girl was harassed day in and day out by countless men who wanted to claim her as their own, so Poseidon took her and brought her to the island of Crinissa.”

“Is that where this is supposed to be?”

“Probably.” I leaned down and placed a chaste kiss on the long column of her throat, her skin tasting, as always, so sweet and clean. “Anyway, the men who hounded poor Theophane followed her to the island.”

“Why?”

“Because when a woman is that beautiful, some men will stop at nothing to possess her.” I wished she wasn't wearing the mask. I desperately wanted to see what emotions swirled behind her eyes as her lips parted in a gasp.

“What happened next?” she breathed, her hips shifting on my lap, teasing my already aroused cock.

“To help his lover be rid of her other lovers, Poseidon turned her into a ewe and then himself into a large ram. He turned every single inhabitant of the island into an animal. Then he took her over and over while her suitors killed the other animals looking for Theophane. Eventually, Poseidon turned himself and Theophane into wolves that killed the

mortal men who dared try to take what he had rightfully claimed as his own.”

“I don’t understand how the myth makes this event any different than other interactive plays.”

“Because this is the island after Poseidon turned everyone into animals. Look around again and tell me what you see. Look closely. What is different here than at other events you have been to?”

She looked around again, as my hands moved to her thighs, finding the slit in her dress and moving it aside so I could caress her bare leg.

“The people are all wearing animal masks.”

“Good, keep looking. What else?”

“Several of the women’s dresses have been unhooked or removed to show their chests.”

I hummed in encouragement as I kissed her throat again.

“It’s not just the actresses and waitresses that are exposed.” Her words came out with a gasp.

I couldn’t help the dark chuckle that rumbled in my chest.

“Look at the other alcoves like this one. What do you see?”

“Directly across from us is another man in a tux. He has two women with him, both kneeling at his feet. They are kissing each other.”

“What else are they doing.”

“Touching and ...” Her words trailed off when one of the women took the other’s breast in her mouth.

“What about over there?” I turned her head in the direction of another alcove where a woman was lying across the laps of two men, sucking off one while the other fingered her.

“Oh, my ...”

“Look around, princess. Tell me what else you see.”

“What is this?” she asked as I snaked my hand between her legs and found her bare pussy dripping. I could slide into her tight little body right now with no resistance, but I had a plan.

“Tell me what you see,” I prompted again, ignoring her question.

“Some alcoves only have two people. Some have more. Some groups are just watching, others are kissing, and some are doing ... more.”

“What are they doing?” I asked, circling her clit with my index finger, her thighs parting wider for me.

“The girls across from us are putting on a show for the man they are with.”

“Do you like the show?”

“I ...”

“Don’t lie to me, princess. I can feel how much this excites you.”

“Please,” she whimpered.

“Let me tell you what I see. I see a naive little girl who unwittingly came to an orgy, who is going to love every moment of this new experience. A princess who has been so sheltered by her father’s money and influence that she doesn’t even know the pleasures life has in store for her. I see her watching others please and pleasure each other, and it makes her cunt drip with need.”

Her thighs trembled, so I slowed my movements down. She would be coming hard tonight, but not until I was ready.

For my plan to work, I needed her desperate for my cock.

I needed her mad for it. This party was far more effective than I had even dared to hope.

A flash of light in my peripheral vision caught my eye. It was from a diamond around another woman’s neck. She was alone, sitting in her own curtained alcove. Still fully dressed with a goblet of wine in her hand, her attention was completely focused on Olivia.

“Do you see that woman over there? The beauty with the blonde hair and red lips?” I asked.

Olivia nodded.

“I think she is fascinated by what is going on under your dress. Should we give her a little peek?”

Olivia didn't answer me. She couldn't admit out loud that she wanted me to show off her arousal to another woman.

Without stopping the slow circles around her clit, I reached over with my other hand and pulled her skirt up, baring her from the waist down.

The other woman's lips parted as I hooked Olivia's legs on either side of mine and pulled them apart.

“She thinks you are as beautiful as I do.” I kissed the side of her neck, and her head rolled back onto my shoulder. “Should I tell her to come over here? Maybe have her lick your sweet little pussy while I tell you what a good girl you are for me?”

“Please,” she whined again.

I lifted my finger, wet with her juices, to her mouth and painted her lips with her own arousal.

Her tongue darted out and licked her top lip.

Nothing I had ever seen had been so completely erotic as watching Olivia, lost in her arousal, acting on instinct.

She was primal and pure sex.

I grabbed her chin and pulled her face to mine, kissing her, claiming her lips as mine.

“No. That woman can watch me take you apart. Anyone in this room can watch how I touch you, how I claim you, and how your body bends to my will, but I am the only one who will ever know how soft your skin is, how sweet your mouth is, or how tight your body is as you struggle to take me. Is that understood?”

She bit her lip and nodded as her lust-hazed eyes gazed back at me.

“I’m going to need to hear you say it,” I growled, and to my utter astonishment and delight, she arched her back and spread her legs further, taking my hand and pressing it between her thighs.

“Anyone can watch me in this dark corner with you, where we are anonymous. They can see what you do to me, but no one else can touch me.” She was practically purring, and I barely hung on to my control.

This was better than I could have hoped for.

She was not only desperate for my cock, she was turned on by the entire event and giving herself over to it completely. She wasn’t just needy. She was wanton and greedy for it.

I wrapped my hand around her throat and held her to me while I circled her clit several times. She moaned, that beautiful flush running down her neck and her chest, disappearing under the delicate golden fabric. She was ready to come for me, and hard by the looks of it, but I wasn’t ready for that just yet.

“You are not allowed to come before I allow it.” I spoke into her ear, and she gave me a quick nod. “Good girl. Now open your eyes again and tell me what you see.”

“Almost everyone is undressed, at least in part. Every corner has people touching, kissing, or watching others play. It’s sensual and overwhelming and ...”

“And...” I prompted when her words faded out.

“And seductive,” she finished. “Everyone’s identities are hidden. No one is judging each other for being here. They can’t because they are here too. No one is being shamed or humiliated, people are free to want, watch, and touch, and it’s liberating.”

“I’m glad you said that. I have one more little surprise for you.”

Just then, the photographers I hired to cover the event came in. It didn’t take much to get them access, just money in the right hands and a lie that the photographers would distort the identities of any and all attendees and staff.

To be fair, only one person here would have her identity exposed.

“What’s the surprise?” she asked, her thighs shaking again as she tried so hard not to come from my fingers mercilessly rubbing her sensitive clit.

The lights dimmed even further, and a spotlight was pointed at the raised dais in the middle of the room.

“Lords, ladies, nymphs, and satyrs, your attention for just a moment,” a man called as he walked up to the podium.

He was naked except for a crown of golden laurel leaves on his head. “Tonight, as you all know, is not a bacchanal in honor of Bacas, or even Dionysus. Tonight is in honor of the great god of the sea Poseidon and his taking of his lover Theophane. Tonight his union with the most beautiful mortal will be celebrated as he takes her on the dais, and claims her as his own, defeating anyone who thought to pursue her. He will prove to all mortals they are not worthy to claim a woman clearly made for the gods.”

The production was taking some liberties with the myth, but it was still entertaining. Olivia was sitting up now, watching him like she couldn’t wait to see the show start.

“Ready for your surprise, princess?” I whispered.

She nodded.

“I give you Poseidon and his Princess Theophane,” the announcer boomed, then he stepped away from the podium.

I stood and put her back on her feet as I guided her toward the middle of the room. “Tonight, princess, I am Poseidon, and you are my Theophane.”

CHAPTER 30



OLIVIA

Marksen grasped my hand and pulled me to the large golden platform in the middle of the room.

I tried to fight him, but his grip was too strong.

It was different when I was in a hidden alcove.

It was secretive. Seductive. Alluring. Illicit.

Yes, people could see me, and I could see them, but I was among them, hidden in a sea of writhing bodies. One of the many anonymous.

By putting me on that center platform in the middle of the room, highlighted by a spotlight, I would be the center of attention ... on display.

“Please don’t,” I whispered.

“This is happening, Olivia. Remember what happens if you are a bad girl.”

His threats were clear. This was happening, and I had to let it. I could stop it, but then everything I had ever worked for would be gone.

It would be fine, I promised myself. I would get through this like I had everything else. It wouldn’t be so bad. I still had my sheep’s mask on, and my identity was protected.

He stopped me in front of the dais, and I looked out into the crowd of faces. There were a lot more people here than I had originally thought.

At first, I'd guessed it to be maybe forty to fifty people, tops, not including the "cast." Now, viewed from the middle of the room, my guess was closer to one hundred and fifty. Everyone was in some state of undress; the only thing they all wore were the masks hiding their identities. Each of them had stopped what they were doing, or more bluntly who they were doing, to watch Theophane and Poseidon—as in, me and Marksens.

"I think the people deserve to see how beautiful you really are," Marksens whispered in my ear.

I was unable to move, petrified he was going to pull off my mask and show the entire room who I was.

Instead, he pulled on the thick straps of my dress, pushing them down my shoulders, uncovering my breasts. Then he pushed the dress over my hips and let it flutter to the floor in a pool of gold.

It was hot under the light. Still, I wanted to cover myself, hide from all the eyes taking me in. I didn't. I knew Marksens would be disappointed if I did that. I clenched my fists at my sides and waited for him to tell me what to do next.

The music changed, shifting from a beautiful, soothing melody to something darker, and more sinister. The spotlight softened.

Marksens ran his hands over my body slowly, then cupped my breasts, appearing to offer them to the audience.

"Can you feel it, princess?" He dropped a kiss on my shoulder.

"Feel what?"

"The power of having everyone's attention on you."

I didn't think power was the right word for drawing this attention.

Though maybe it was, because I was all but naked, wearing only the golden gladiator heels and the gilded sheep mask, while he was still impeccably dressed in his tuxedo.

They said the tuxedo made the man. Maybe Ralph Lauren made him feel powerful. I dismissed the thought as soon as I had it. Marksens power had nothing to do with any clothes he was or was not wearing. It was all just him. He radiated his power and the confidence that could only ever come from privilege. It was just who he was.

“I don’t feel powerful,” I admitted. “I feel exposed, vulnerable.”

He kissed my neck and then gently bit at the sensitive skin while pinching my nipples. “You are safe up here with me, princess. Everyone in this room can look their fill. They can watch the way I take you apart, claiming you in the most carnal way possible. But they cannot touch you. To them, you are mine.”

“I don’t feel safe. I feel judged. Like people are looking at me, finding me wanting, wondering why I am the one up here. I feel unworthy.”

“Then you are thinking about this wrong,” he said. “Look around. Every single man is staring at your body, salivating. Every man here wishes he were in my place, about to bend you over the dais and take you. Every single woman in this room wishes they were you. Many have spent their entire lives and endless amounts of money trying to be as beautiful as you are right now. Do you see the man sitting on the stone pulpit to your right?”

It took me a moment to look around and find him. I nodded when I did.

“He has a beautiful blonde on her knees sucking his cock like she needs it to breathe. She is deep throating like a champ. He isn’t watching her. He is watching you. He wishes that the woman kneeling in front of him, with his cock in her mouth, wasn’t some cheap model or actress who pretends to be a woman of worth. He wishes he had the real thing like I do.”

“Why? She’s pretty.”

“She is gorgeous. If she were standing alone, she would be a ten easily, but if you put a woman like that next to you, a

natural beauty, she goes from stunning to average, and that was while you were still dressed. Nude, you are breathtaking. Showing every person here what they will never be.”

“And what is that?”

His front was pressed to my back as his arms snaked around me, and he tilted my head back to kiss me again. “Mine.”

My knees went weak, my head spun when he growled his ownership over me.

I hated him for this.

He made me feel good.

He gave me the confidence to feel powerful while naked in front of strangers, and I knew it was all a lie.

A manipulation to get me to behave the way he wanted me to so he could get back at my brother. Everything he was saying was an act designed to take me apart for his audience. He knowingly played on my emotions.

Sadly, my awareness of his intentions didn't make his ploy any less effective.

“Let's give them a show they will never forget,” he said. “I think you should show the crowd how Theophane thanks her god for saving her from a horde of unworthy men.”

He placed his hand on my shoulder and pressed down, guiding me to my knees.

He took out his cock and stroked it in front of my face.

I shifted on my knees, wet and aching for him. “Show that man with the pretty blonde how much better you are at everything,” he whispered.

I leaned forward, and instead of taking him in my mouth, I licked his sack. I was nervous, but his guttural sound of approval urged me forward. I took his balls in my mouth one at a time, licking and sucking, each in turn, before moving back up to his shaft, just like he had taught me. I licked and

teased the head of his cock, tasting the saltiness of his precum before sliding him down my throat.

My head felt light, and a bit foggy.

I didn't want to think.

He said he wanted to show the people how Theophane would worship Poseidon while on her knees, so that was what I did.

I wasn't Olivia anymore.

I was Theophane, showing my gratitude to my god.

Licking and sucking with long, luxurious pulls, taking my time, moving slowly and moving my whole body with each stroke of my lips.

“Fuck,” he growled from above me. “Such a good girl.”

The way he said that, in a breathy moan, made me feel warm and fuzzy. It made me feel like everything he said, everything about how everyone in the room wanted me, was true.

His pleasure made me feel powerful, beautiful, and wanted.

Marksen pulled away from me, and I looked up to see his blue eyes staring at me from behind the dark mask. He didn't say anything, just offered his hand for me to stand.

I took it, and he lifted me up and kissed me with everything he had before making me climb onto the stone dais.

He guided me how he wanted me, positioned on my hands and knees. It was cold and hard and very uncomfortable. The stone dug into my skin, and he spread my knees wide, making sure every inch of me was exposed to anyone who cared to look. The dais started to slowly rotate, giving every single person there a very clear view of my most intimate places.

I was pulled out of the fantasy for a moment when I saw the people staring.

I closed my eyes and took a few deep breaths.

This wasn't me. Olivia Manwarring was not here.

She wasn't. She was at home somewhere, probably working and dreaming about a man who made her feel like Marksens did, but who actually wanted to be with her, not just to get back at her brother.

No, Olivia wasn't here.

At this moment, I was Theophane.

I was the embodiment of a woman who loved a god. Who knew her beauty and her worth. I looked out over the crowd and arched my back, giving those in front of me a better view of my tits hanging down and tilting my hips back to give Marksens more room.

His hand smoothed down my back and I arched into it, loving the sensuousness of his touch. By the time I heard his zipper go down, my pussy was dripping. Literally, I could feel my wetness seep down my thighs. He had me so close earlier that I needed this. I needed him to make me feel good and to keep me in this new Theophane headspace.

The dais stopped moving, and I looked up at the prettiest green eyes and silkiest black hair I had ever seen. There was a woman in front of me, only a few feet away. She was on her back, looking up at me while another woman was licking her. I couldn't see the other woman's mask or really anything other than a mess of red hair and a man behind her watching the show while fucking into her.

For a single surreal moment, our eyes met, and I knew we were both wondering what it was like in the other's shoes. She wanted to be where I was, about to be taken hard and fast with everyone watching. I wanted to know what it would feel like if another woman had her mouth on me while Marksens fucked her. Actually, no, I didn't want to know what it would be like in her place; I didn't like the idea of Marksens touching another woman. I wanted to know what it was like to taste another woman while Marksens fucked me.

Would I like it?

I had never been attracted to women before, and I still wasn't, but the energy in this room, the open acceptance, the unspoken rule of not having rules, was just so tempting.

It made me want things I had never even thought to want before. It gave me the courage I didn't know I lacked to want to feel good and experience new things that made me feel good.

I went with it. Just gave myself over to the experience fully.

Marksen pressed the head of his cock to my entrance, so I lowered my breasts to the dais, forcing my ass up higher for him, wordlessly begging him to take me hard and fast.

Marksen DuBois did not disappoint.

He slammed into me hard and fast, filling me instantly to the brim and stretching me in the most delicious way.

I couldn't help my cry of anguished pleasure as he pushed me just past my limits.

There was no pausing, no letting me adjust to his size or the position.

That first cry of pleasure seemed to break the spell a lot of people were under. The room was no longer still, with just a few people licking or stroking. It was now filled with movement and the sounds of moans and bodies slapping together.

Marksen and I were still the center of attention, many people getting into positions that allowed them to watch us as they fucked like the animals they pretended to be.

Marksen grabbed me by the throat, restricting my breath just enough to make me lightheaded.

He pulled me up so he could whisper in my ear as he drilled into me.

The way I was angled made his thrusts shallower, but it also let him push directly into my G-spot over and over.

“You like this.” It wasn’t a question, more an accusation, so I didn’t answer.

“You like being fucked on a stage while everyone watches you, don’t you. My little princess really is a dirty, kinky little whore deep down.”

“Yes,” I answered unashamedly. Olivia would deny it, but Theophane reveled in it.

He kept one hand around my throat and skated the other hand down my body, tweaking my nipples before caressing my flat stomach and then caressing my clit.

“Do you want me to let you come?”

“Yes, please.”

“I will let you come on my cock, but only if you promise to give the others a show. I want you to drench this platform like you did my sofa. Let every single person here see that a woman who is taken by me comes so hard they make a mess. Can you do that?”

“Yes.” I had no idea if I could do that again. I didn’t even know how I had done it last time. The only thing I knew was that I had to try. I would agree to anything right now as long as he kept fucking me, rubbing my clit, and bringing me close to going over the edge.

“Not yet,” he taunted.

“Please,” I begged, clenching my core as hard as I could so I didn’t come before he gave permission.

“Not yet,” he said.

He let me go back down to all fours, his hand pressed to my stomach and his fingers still drawing rapid circles over my clit as he bent over me and fucked me like an animal in heat. It was primal, passionate, and savage, and more than I could have ever hoped for.

A flash from somewhere in the back of the room caught my eye, then another. There were a few people not participating. Three of them had cameras and were taking photos. Not of anyone but me and Marksens on the dais.

They started moving closer, taking photo after photo of me bent over on all fours, getting fucked like a dog.

I started to panic and tried to get up, tried to push Marksen off of me.

His hand landed on the back of my neck and he held me there, not letting me move to hide my face or my shame.

“Come,” he demanded.

To my horror, I came with a shout, liquid heat flooding my core and sliding down my thighs.

His thrusts were erratic and more demanding until, with a guttural roar, he filled me with his come, and I collapsed onto the hard stone surface.

“Good girl,” he whispered, and then he untied my mask. It tumbled to the floor, the ceramic shattering. The photographers started snapping photos wildly.

“Ms. Manwarring. Over here,” one called.

“Ms. Manwarring, who is the man you are with?”

“Ms. Manwarring, do you go to parties like this often? How does your father feel about you going to orgies.”

The voices surrounded me. There were only three photographers, but it felt like so many more. The walls closed in on me. There was nothing I could do, nowhere to hide.

Suddenly I was freezing cold.

Marksen pulled out of me and moved back, letting the photographers surround me. I swear I could hear his cruel, mocking laugh taunting me, and it cut me to the bone.

The spell was completely shattered.

The mixture of our come seeped from me and dripped onto the table.

I wasn't Theophane anymore.

I wasn't sure I ever really was.

I was just Olivia, a cold, dirty, stupid girl who wanted to be admired by this man so badly that she forgot who he really

was and how he really saw her, how everyone saw her.

This was all part of his vile plan.

He called me a princess, but to him, all I'd ever been was a pawn.

CHAPTER 31



MARKSEN

Once I climbed off Olivia and stepped away, she ran from the dais into a back room.

The lights came on a moment later and several of the actors were walking toward us while the patrons fled the cameras.

I zipped my fly and followed, ready to run Olivia down and pull her back by her hair if I had to.

Thankfully, I didn't have to.

She was waiting for me just on the other side of one of the pillars that marked the entrance into the event space.

Tears streamed down her face, and she covered her breasts and pussy with her hands as best as she could. Even like this, a huddled, streaky mess, she was still beautiful.

Though the fact that I could see my come mixing with hers and dripping down her toned thighs probably helped.

I handed her the golden dress.

She took it without saying a word and stepped into it, pulling it on.

I took her by the arm and led her to the limo.

A black satin sash was waiting on the seat, just like I instructed.

There was no way I could trust the women who were at the hotel earlier to not come back or try something, so I had to take a calculated risk. I was taking Olivia back to one of my

penthouses. It was reckless to have her somewhere that I, rather than one of my shell corporations, owned.

But I doubted Luc would think I was brazen enough to bring Olivia back to the city, let alone keep her here.

Besides, I needed access to my office to launch the next segment of my plan.

I took the sash and tied it around Olivia's eyes.

She didn't even try to fight me.

It was like she had given up.

It was a little after ten, not as late as I had planned to be at the event, but everything had moved faster than I thought it would.

It was fine.

I would take her back to my penthouse, get her in a bath, and then into bed.

She would be back to herself in the morning.

Manwarrings were stubborn, thick-skinned, and tough as nails. If they weren't, I would have never had to involve Olivia in the feud in the first place. She would bounce back soon enough. They always did.

It didn't take too long for us to get to my penthouse in Soho. It was a secondary residence, though one I spent my weekends at. My primary penthouse was in the Financial District, close to the office. Too close to the office. It made it impossible to think of anything other than work while I was there.

Nothing like profit and loss sheets to make you lose focus when you have Victoria's Secret models in your bed.

I guided her from the car to the elevator, signaling my doorman to keep quiet with a finger to my lips. He had seen me bring plenty of women here.

I was sure he just assumed it was part of some kinky game.

Which wasn't wrong, strictly speaking.

It only took me a few more moments to get her upstairs and into the apartment. She didn't fight, she didn't struggle, she didn't say a single word.

It worried me.

I preferred it when she fought.

If she fought, then I knew I hadn't broken her.

Like this, she wasn't a big bad Manwarring bitch, she was just a girl, and I wasn't defending my name, my legacy, or my family.

I was just the asshole who broke an innocent girl.

"Sit down here," I said, guiding her to sit on the sofa. "Do not move."

A few years ago, I'd had all the floor-to-ceiling windows treated with blackout shades that were embedded between the two panes of glass. It was perfect to make sure the early morning light didn't interrupt my rest after a long night of partying. The entire thing was on a timer and could also be controlled by an app. With a few quick taps on my phone, I closed all the shades, hiding the view of the Skyline and closing us off from the world. I also went ahead and locked each of the balcony doors with the same app.

To be sure she didn't sneak out to the balcony, I planned for us to stay in the guest room. I wasn't too worried about her being on the balcony. There were no other balconies nearby or even below us, and I didn't think she would do something as stupid as jump.

The bed in the master suite had been used primarily for sex with a lot of nameless and now faceless women.

I didn't want to think about why, but I didn't want Olivia in that bed.

Thankfully, there were two other bedrooms, and one of them had a giant soaking tub. I started a warm bath for her, even adding some Epsom salts to help her recover from the

night's events. I grabbed a large bottle of cold water from the fridge and went back to the living room.

She hadn't moved. Her hands were still folded in the exact same place on her lap.

I knelt down on the hardwood floor in front of her and removed the now tearstained blindfold.

She kept her eyes lowered, and tears flowed freely down her wet cheeks.

Nothing I could say would fix any of it, so I didn't say a word.

I took her hand and pulled her to her feet.

She followed obediently to the bathroom.

I sat her down on a bench near the now half-full tub and removed her sandals, throwing them out into the hallway.

On a whim, I picked up her feet one at a time and rubbed them, pressing my thumbs into her arches and soothing away any aches.

She still remained silent.

I stood her up and took off her dress, throwing it next to the shoes. Then I kicked off my shoes and stripped off my tuxedo, tossing each piece haphazardly into the same growing clothes pile.

The tub was getting close to full, and the steam was billowing from the hot water.

Olivia didn't move, so I took her hand and stepped into the water, pulling her in with me. I sat first, then pulled her onto my lap and started removing the bobby pins from her hair, letting it fall in soft, loose waves.

The ends dipped into the bathwater.

I knew most women would put their hair up in a bath, but once she calmed down, I was sure Olivia would want a proper shower and to wash it anyway.

When I was sure I had removed most of the bobby pins, I tossed them onto the floor.

I wrapped my arm across her chest from behind and tried to ease her back against my chest.

In that moment, something inside of her must have snapped.

An almost unholy wail was torn from her throat as she thrashed in my embrace.

It was like trying to restrain a wet, hurt, and angry cat.

Water sloshed over the edge of the tub as I struggled to restrain her.

Her fingernails raked down the center of my chest, drawing blood.

I hissed air through my clenched teeth, absorbing the sharp sting as the soapy water hit the open wounds.

“Olivia, stop!”

She struck out again, catching me in the jaw.

“Goddammit, woman. I don’t want to hurt you!”

Fuck, even I could appreciate the brutal and hurtful irony of my words in that moment.

Her eyes were wide and unfocused as she threw back her head and laughed without mirth.

I was becoming truly alarmed that I had pushed her over the edge.

Straddling my hips, she curled her tiny hands into fists and pounded on my chest. “Too late! Too late! You bastard! Why? Why? Why?”

Deserving every strike, I stopped trying to restrain her and took the body blows.

She continued to pound on my chest as she cried. At first it was incoherent but then I caught one desperate phrase being sobbed over and over again.

I could have loved you.

I could have loved you.

I could have loved you.

She might as well have had a dagger in her hand.

After several minutes, her strikes lessened and she leaned her forehead against my chest and just sobbed.

Olivia cried harder than I had even known was possible.

It was heart-wrenching to witness.

I crushed her to my chest, wrapping one arm around her back and cradling her head with the other.

She never said another word; just laid against my chest and let it all out.

At first, I clenched my jaw and refused to take any responsibility.

This was not on me.

This was on Luc.

Her brother did this.

He knew I had to strike back.

Honor demanded it.

Still, I had wanted to destroy Olivia's reputation, not her soul.

Fuck ... not even I believed the bullshit excuses I just made.

CHAPTER 32



OLIVIA

That euphoric, precious moment between sleep and awareness, where there was no reality, no pain, no heartache ... I was denied even that small respite.

From the very moment awareness crept into my consciousness, the unrelenting humiliation, betrayal, and anguish from last night crashed down on me.

There was also pain, both emotional and physical.

I stretched out my arm and felt the cool sheets on the other side of the bed.

Marksen had not slept in the bed.

After losing it in the bath, I had once more become detached, as if both my mind and body had cocooned into survival mode. I remembered him lifting me up in his arms and holding me tight as he dried us both off. He'd carried me into the bedroom where he'd wrapped me in a blanket and left.

Now, realizing he wasn't beside me, I wondered if he had left the building.

There was an immediate, empty ache in my chest at the thought, which was beyond twisted and wrong. I must be the worst kind of Stockholm masochist to want the comfort of my cruel captor.

And there was no mistaking it now, that was what Marksen was ... my captor.

All the stupid fantasies I may have created in my mind about what we were or could have been had burned to cinders

on that stone dais like an ancient sacrifice the moment he ripped off my mask.

In that moment, he ripped off his own mask too and I saw him for who he truly was, a cold-hearted, ruthless bastard who cared nothing for me ... and never had.

After all, who cared about a pawn?

Between the deep-seated ache in my thighs and my splitting headache, I just wanted to crawl under the covers and never come out, but my stomach growled, and my mouth tasted like I had swallowed rancid cotton, dry and foul.

With a huff, I threw the covers off. I needed to brush my teeth, drink my body weight in coffee, and probably take a questionable number of aspirin.

Not enough for a *Girl, Interrupted* moment, but enough to be a potential cause of an ulcer.

If the events of last night were any indication, maybe I did need a few weeks in an inpatient facility. How had I gone from sex goddess dissociating to the point of enjoying my own ravagement on a stone altar in front of hundreds of strangers to letting the man who had done that to me hold me while I cried about it?

How did a sane, intelligent, rational woman do that?

They didn't.

Clearly, I had lost my mind, my sanity was in question, and I needed to see my therapist and have her send me away to some therapeutic boot camp where I could learn how to value myself enough to make better life choices and not get dick-ma-tized by the first man to give me an orgasm.

I knew that wasn't why I had so many conflicting feelings. They had nothing, or at least very little, to do with the orgasms.

They had to do with the man I had thought Marksen was.

The one I fell for as a girl.

That teenager was still inside me and still wanted Marksens to be hers.

She needed to grow the fuck up and remind herself that she was a fucking Manwarring.

After hobbling my way into the way too bright bathroom, I stole some of Marksens's bougie French handmade, small-batch mouthwash in its expensive glass bottle. I hated that it had one of the best subtle mint flavors I had ever tasted. I made a mental note of the name, Buly's Eau De La Belle Haleine, and its distinctive label with a large snake.

Assuming I survived this convoluted kidnapping-extortion-blackmail plan of revenge or whatever this was, I would be coming back for this bottle and demanding, through lawyers, of course, to know where he got it. Or maybe I would just tell Luc to steal it when he and the thugs our father worked with came to settle a few scores.

Feeling almost human, I walked out of the bedroom and followed the intoxicating aroma of arabica beans and happiness.

Marksens was sitting at the breakfast table, a plate of pancakes half-eaten next to him.

They had far too much butter and were dripping in syrup.

They looked fantastic.

He looked so peaceful, sitting at the table like he was any other man on any other morning.

Like nothing from last night happened, not the good or the bad, the sweet or the cruel.

Except for the scratch marks from my claws peeking out from the top of his collar.

I let my hair cascade forward over my face to hide my satisfied smirk. At least I had gotten a little of my own back. It wasn't much, but it was enough for my pride to cling to. Taking a deep breath, I reminded myself of my purpose.

Survive and then thrive.

I would get through this and move on, but first I had to get through this. And to do that, I had to play nice. I had to be his *good girl*. Casting a side glance at his relaxed form, I wanted to say something, but I didn't know what.

Finishing school never covered this. Business school did, but I didn't know how to translate the language of leaked financial files, poaching of top talent, or scandalous op-eds in the *Wall Street Journal* to matters of the heart.

Did I leak photos of him naked?

He was a man who looked even better out of a suit than in one.

Did I steal his next conquest?

How would that even work?

Any scandalous op-eds would drag me down further, and being a woman, I would never recover. He would be as good as new in a month.

No, I just had to deal with it and take this torment until it ended. Then I would work on mitigating the damage and healing.

Next to the plate of heavenly carbs was his laptop.

Marksen didn't say anything.

He just motioned for me to sit opposite him, so I did.

He turned the laptop around.

The screen showed the very familiar pink and gold heading of my website.

For a moment, I thought maybe he was offering an olive branch after the despicable thing he had done last night, but the article was ... wrong.

The picture was of me at the party last night at a moment when everyone was still mostly dressed. Although I hadn't noticed any flashes, the photo must have been taken right when we got there. My hair wasn't disheveled, my makeup wasn't smudged, and my dress hadn't been ripped off yet.

It looked like any other fantastic party.

Marksen got up and took his plate into the kitchen while I looked at the article that had me listed as the author.

I hated taking credit for work I didn't do. The article itself was well-written, with a few cheeky innuendos that would make anyone who had attended Theophane laugh, but those not in the know would just gloss over.

It was surprisingly well done and strikingly similar to what I would have written if I had covered it. Had I shown up on my own to write a story on it as I'd planned, I didn't know what would have happened. I would like to say I would have stayed, enjoyed the spectacle, and written some amazing piece like this article, something witty and clever. In actuality, I would have run and pretended the entire thing had never happened.

"How?" I asked.

"How what?" Marksen asked, setting a fresh cup of coffee and a plate of pancakes in front of me. I took a bite of the buttery goodness to appease my growling stomach. This was just what I needed.

"How did you get access to post this? And who wrote it?"

"Money will get you access to most things, though you should vet your people better. Their asking price was far too low, not even in the six figures." He shook his head and clicked his tongue in disapproval as he retook his seat. "As for the article, I hired a ghostwriter. I think she did a good job, though I admit I prefer the other version."

"Other version?" I asked, dropping my fork and ignoring the syrup that dripped onto the glass tabletop.

Marksen reached over and hit a button on the keyboard, and the screen switched.

It still looked like my website, but the photo was of me naked on the dais. The side view showed a fully dressed Marksen behind me.

It was clear we were fucking.

There was another, smaller image in the corner that showed my face just as Marksens dropped my mask.

My eyes were half closed, my cheeks were rosy, and my lips slightly parted.

It looked like I loved what Marksens was doing to me.

Who was I kidding?

I had loved it.

Until he'd betrayed me, I'd loved every single moment of him thrusting into me, whispering dirty things in my ear, and even the feeling of other people watching me. It had by far been the most erotic moment of my life, which, granted, wasn't saying much, but at the time I couldn't have imagined anything else ever topping it.

The article with those pictures also had my name on it, but it was extremely different.

It described in graphic detail the events of the night.

It even went so far as to describe my "Poseidon" as being a cruel lover who stroked my clit but refused me release while I watched the others around me enjoy the pleasures of the flesh in ways only befitting nymphs and satyrs.

My stomach twisted until I covered my mouth with my hand, afraid I was about to vomit. "Is this published?" I asked, my words muffled.

"Not yet." Marksens had retaken his seat and was reading the paper as he casually sipped his coffee.

"Why?"

"Why isn't it published yet, or why are there two versions?"

"Both."

He put down his paper, folding it painfully slowly, and took another long sip of his coffee before focusing on me.

"Credibility." He shrugged. "Now, if the alternate version goes live, no one will believe it was faked. Not only is your

name on it but it was also published by you. The first article was sent to your team through your e-mail. You have already gotten a few e-mails from your team saying how much they love the article and your dress.”

“If the second article goes up, you will destroy me. I will be laughed out of every single business meeting.” Heat rose in my cheeks and tears filled my eyes. I was getting really tired of crying ... and even more tired of being his pawn, pushed around this sadistic chessboard.

“It’s just your reputation, dear. According to you, it’s not that important. It will mend, and soon all of this will be yesterday’s news.”

“No.” I stood from the table. “I said your reputation can heal, mine can’t. Your reputation was gifted to you by your family, it has stood strong for generations and can handle a little gossip.”

“Your family’s name is just as strong,” he scoffed.

“Yes, it is, and my brother benefits from that. I do not. I’m not sure if you noticed, but I am a woman—”

“I have spent enough time between your thighs to notice,” he quipped.

With a deep breath, I chose to ignore that comment. There was only so much rage one person could handle in a single moment. I wasn’t about to let him bait me into being angry for the wrong reason.

“Then you should know I have to work twice as hard to be thought of as half as good. I have to stand my ground and fight for my business every single day.”

“You think I don’t?” He stood, facing me.

“No, I don’t think you do. You walk into a meeting where men shake your hand and listen to you like the only source of oxygen left in the world is the hot air you are spewing. I get treated like a silly little girl who lost her way to the kitchen. Every move I make, every smart choice, the credit goes to my brother or my father, who are not involved. They assume the success I have was given to me, either because of my brother’s

influence or because I clearly must have slept my way to the top. I have to demand their attention without being too forceful, because if I am too forceful, then I am just a ‘crazy, unstable woman who needs a good fucking.’ But then, even if I work my ass off, even when I demand respect and earn it, I still have to deal with the misogyny when the men joke and ask whose dick I sucked my ideas out of, or wouldn’t I be happier at home raising babies. Or the assumptions some make that because I’m twenty-five and lack a husband I must be a lesbian.”

Marksen tried to interrupt me again, and I talked right over him, my voice growing louder.

“I may lead a privileged life, but that doesn’t mean that I don’t work my ass off, and it doesn’t mean that I don’t still have to deal with constant bullshit. So what do you do? You fuck me, not even stopping to wonder why a twenty-five-year-old is a virgin. You didn’t think about me as a person. You just saw what you wanted and took it. Then not only did you put me in situations that demeaned me as a human being, but you’re exposing me to every single asshole I have had to grin and bear in order to get shit done. You are telling them they were right about me. That I’m not a smart businesswoman, that I’m not a talented writer, that all I am is a silly little girl playing at having a job until a man comes along and fucks this rebellious nature and silly little hobby out of me.”

By this point I was screaming at him. Scalding tears were streaming down my face, my throat hurt from the screaming, and my head, which had been throbbing, was now aching with a constant sharp pain.

Marksen crossed his arms over his chest and looked at me for a moment before that stupid smile appeared on his lips. “So, you are saying a person’s reputation is important, and can be irrevocably damaged.”

“Oh my God, Marksen, would you listen to me?” I took a breath and spoke slowly, hoping he would finally understand what I was saying. “Mine can be, whereas yours will survive the embarrassment of being left at the altar. Sure, you were the laughingstock of society for what ... two days? Then they all

moved on. No one even brought it up at Luc and Amelia's wedding. No one sees you differently now. Your reputation is fine."

"Stop playing stupid. You know this was never about the church ..."

I looked at him for a few more minutes, really looked, and realized his mind was set.

The second he decided I was a pawn he was going to use to get revenge, I had stopped being a person.

I wasn't even convinced he'd ever seen me as a person.

Which meant he didn't put value in what I had to say.

I grabbed my coffee cup and left the room.

He didn't get to see me cry again.

CHAPTER 33



AMELIA

I lay in bed, hating the idea of getting up.

At that moment, I shouldn't have been alone in my bed.

I should've been in a bed in an oceanfront bungalow with my husband, both of us naked and basking in the glow of post-sex highs and newly married bliss.

Instead, we were still in the city, our honeymoon put on hold until Olivia was found. I wasn't mad at Olivia or even Luc for reacting the way he was. She needed to be found, and her safety absolutely took priority over a trip that could be postponed until ... a much later date.

That being said, I still felt a little down and depressed about my lack of a honeymoon. The problem was, between Luc's career being so demanding and the almost constant events I was hosting at the school, who knew when the next time we would be able to get away would be.

I was just very careful to not let Luc see it. So I was laying in bed, moping while doom-scrolling on my tablet and letting Luc think I was asleep while he continued to work on locating his sister. He hadn't come in yet to tell me he was going to the office, meaning he was probably still working here at home, something about broken glass making his office unsecured. He never gave me the full details on that one, and I wasn't sure I wanted to know.

With a reluctant sigh, I sat up, knowing I needed to be productive. I pulled up my e-mails to see if I had anything

from the school. Nope, everything was handled there. With Luc and Harrison's help, I had an amazing staff that handled the day-to-day perfectly, leaving me time to plan the fundraisers and other events to fund the scholarships, and to teach extra classes when I chose to. And they made sure that absolutely everything was well in hand for my trip. Which left me bored out of my mind. Still, I checked the rest of my inbox, and the first thing I saw of interest was an update from Olivia's website.

I assumed her staff was keeping the magazine going, but when I clicked on the link, a full-page picture of Olivia in a stunning dress with a masquerade mask that looked a little like a sheep was loaded on my screen. It only took a second for me to see her name under the title of the accompanying article.

She was safe.

She had to be safe. No one being held tied to a chair in a damp basement would be writing articles about a party. With my tablet in my hand, I jumped out of bed, almost losing my footing in the silk sheets, and went to find my husband. Maybe he or his security team could do some magical tech tracing thing and find where the article was posted, then go and get her. If they brought her back today, and we made sure she was safe and sound, we might still be able to make it to a few days of our honeymoon.

Immediately, I felt guilty for that thought.

Olivia's safety and well-being were more important than my honeymoon and I shouldn't have been thinking about that trip while she was in danger. That being said, if it turned out this was some kind of trick and she was off enjoying every moment of a stunt with Marksen DuBois, she was going to find out how ruthless her new sister-in-law could be. Just because I wasn't, and refused to become, my mother, it didn't mean I hadn't learned a few tricks from her.

Luc was sitting at the kitchen table drinking his coffee, staring at his phone.

"Have you seen this?" I handed him my tablet, bouncing on the balls of my feet with excitement. "She is okay! Have

you heard from her? When can we go pick her up, or have her picked up?”

He looked at my tablet for a moment, then, without a word, handed me his phone. The screen showed a similar website, but it was all wrong. Where I had seen a beautiful woman dressed in the finest gown enjoying a party, in its place was a picture that was pornographic and vulgar.

The headlines had changed too, and even the tone of the article.

“She isn’t safe. DuBois sent me this to taunt me. I already called her offices, and they think this article”—he handed me back my tablet and I swapped it with him for his phone—“was written by Olivia. And that she was the one to send it in. Marksens has made it impossible for us to say the woman in the photos isn’t her, that they were photoshopped or made by some AI.”

“Oh ...” My heart sank, and I felt so guilty for the thoughts I’d had, for even a moment, thinking this was some ploy on her part for attention. “I still don’t understand why he is doing this. We were never close, there was never any chemistry, I don’t ...”

Harrison walked into the breakfast room, already in a three-piece suit, ready for work. It made me feel a little underdressed in my white silk nightgown. At least it was one that went down to my knees and had a more modest top. It did have a matching robe that I forgot to grab in my excitement.

To be fair, I had told Luc that I would be spending our first few weeks of marriage completely nude while we were at home alone. But with Olivia’s kidnapping the mood had shifted a bit, and people had been coming and going. I knew Luc would prefer to see me naked, but he would lose his mind if another man saw me naked. I was fairly certain the only reason he didn’t have a violent reaction to Harrison seeing me in my nightgown was because we were related.

“You wanted to see me?” Harrison asked him, kissing my temple as he passed me to take a seat at the breakfast table. I slid my tablet onto the counter and moved to sit next to Luc,

reaching for the French press in front of him to pour myself and Harrison a cup of coffee.

“Yes.” Luc flicked his phone off and set it down on the table. “I wanted to know if you have anything to do with my sister’s disappearance.”

I almost dropped the French press as I turned to look wide-eyed at Luc. There was no way my brother was involved.

“Luc—” I started but was ignored.

“No.” Harrison’s answer was calm but authoritative. “I have nothing to do with any of it.”

Luc nodded for a moment, his lips pressed together like he was thinking. “Could someone else in your family have done this?”

“Possibly.” Harrison shrugged, took the French press from me, and poured a cup of coffee for himself and one for me, fixing mine the way I liked, sweet but not too much milk. “Can I ask what makes you think it was someone in my family?”

“Marksen said something in one of his taunts that got me thinking.” Luc took another sip of his coffee, like this was a normal breakfast conversation.

I supposed when your job so closely resembled world domination, it very well could be. “He accused me of destroying his livelihood and business,” Luc continued. “Nothing against my beautiful wife, but our marriage wouldn’t have done all of that.”

“There are several people that would consider you an enemy,” Harrison pointed out. “What makes you think it’s my family?”

“I started digging around in the DuBois’s financials.”

“That’s illegal,” Harrison interrupted with his signature raised eyebrow of disapproval.

Luc gave him a flat, bored look that was still handsome as hell. “So arrest me. But you’ll want to hear what I found first.”

“What did you find?” I asked, trying to be part of the conversation. I may not have gone to business school but gone were the days of me being an observer in my own life.

Luc reached over and interlaced his fingers with mine. Even married, it made me blush to show a sign of affection like that so openly in front of my brother.

“I found a lot of questionable moves, purchases of stocks in companies the DuBois’s have a vested interest in. Enough to make it look like those companies are primed for a hostile takeover. There are also a few temporary restraining orders and injunctions blocking purchases that the DuBois’s had been in the process of making on behalf of their own investments and the investments of their largest clients.”

“And, that is business. What does it have to do with my family or me?”

“It’s not just business. It’s business done in bad faith, and it makes DuBois, specifically Marksens, look like he doesn’t have his family’s cutting edge or business savvy. He appears incompetent, and as much as I hate to admit it, Marksens is many things but incompetent isn’t one of them. I think these moves are intentionally designed to make it look like the DuBois blood has run thin, and it’s time they cull the herd.”

“Like you did with the Montagues?”

CHAPTER 34



AMELIA

That caught my attention.

I had never really known what happened to that family.

One day they were throwing the best parties and considered the “it” family and the next they had vanished. Rumors swirled, of course, everything from embezzlement and prison, to just returning to their family estates in England. There was no telling what was and wasn’t true. The only thing people could agree on was that Ashley, the eldest son, had taken control of the family business which he then stripped down and sold for parts.

“Counselor, are you accusing me of something?” Luc asked, leveling a look at Harrison. The entire room became tense, and I had no idea what was happening.

“No, I am stating that what you did was illegal, unethical, and don’t fool yourself into thinking that I don’t know about it.” Harrison didn’t back down to Luc like most men did. He was just as intimidating and sitting at the same breakfast table with them made me feel small.

I was just a little girl sitting between two Titans ready to battle.

“Then arrest me, though you will never get those charges to stick. You don’t have any evidence.”

“I don’t have any evidence because I don’t need it.” Harrison narrowed his eyes. “The Montagues needed to be dealt with. One son, Rupert, was trafficking young women and

children from Eastern Europe. I allowed you to do what you did so I could finish the job. But make no mistake, I know who you are and what your family does. Do not think for a second you got away with bullshitting me or pinning your crimes on my family. My sister's love will only protect you from so much."

Luc's jaw clicked and his fingers flexed in mine. Those were the only outward signs of his frustration, and as quickly as they appeared they were gone.

"I am not the one going after Marksens. He hit me, I hit him back. As far as I was concerned, our feud was done."

"I'm still not hearing what that has to do with me or my family." Harrison's posture relaxed, seemingly satisfied with Luc's response as he grabbed a croissant from the basket on the table.

"The transactions are all done through shell companies that look like they are part of my holdings but aren't." Luc let go of my hand, picked up the plate in front of me, and started putting food on it. I was never a big breakfast person, but he liked to take care of me, and I liked to let him.

"What do you mean it looks like they are part of your holdings? Wouldn't it be easy to tell?"

"Not necessarily," responded Luc, placing the plate in front of me with a stern look as he handed me a silver fork.

Harrison sat back in the upholstered kitchen chair. "But again, none of this points to my family."

"I followed the money to the shell companies that look like they're part of Manwarring Enterprises, and they all lead back to shell companies in Tuxedo Park." Luc stared at Harrison while he spoke, like he was trying to read his expression.

"Fuck." Harrison ran his fingers through his hair, something I hadn't seen him do since he was a child. He only ever indulged in nervous tics when he was frustrated.

"Still, that isn't proof that this is someone in my family," I said. "Yes, the Astrid estate developed and owns a good deal

of Tuxedo Park but ...” I trailed off when I saw the look in Harrison’s eyes.

“It’s not just that, sweetheart.” Luc picked up my hand again and kissed it before lacing our fingers together and then picking up his coffee with his left hand.

“What is the rest of your evidence?” Harrison suddenly looked tired.

I had a feeling he was in the dark about what was happening, but he was starting to put it all together.

“I don’t have any other evidence, but I have theories. And I think you are coming to the same conclusions I am.”

“Well, can someone fill me in?” I asked.

“Why was your mother at our wedding breakfast?” Luc asked, facing me. “She said she wouldn’t celebrate our marriage and she wasn’t there for the wedding, but she still came to the breakfast?”

Luc was being kind. My mother had called me a few choice words when she said she wouldn’t attend our wedding.

“I assumed she had a change of heart when she realized her lack of attendance wasn’t going to stop anything.” The second those words came out of my mouth, I knew they weren’t true.

It would have been more like my mother to shun me for not needing her. If I hadn’t been her daughter, she would be spreading rumors and lies. The only reason I didn’t think she would resort to that wasn’t out of motherly love. It was because if there was a fault with my behavior, it could be attributed to her, and she would never allow it.

“When you came to get me because Olivia was missing, she insisted she come with me,” Harrison added, putting his head in his hands. “Then she wanted to call the police. She wanted a scene.” Harrison stared into his coffee.

“My current working theory is that she is making these moves against DuBois and making it look like it’s me, to antagonize him. She might even have fed him the idea to

abduct Olivia. I think she has this big plan to pit us all against each other and set it up so you find Olivia, Harrison. Then when you very publicly bring her home, I will be grateful enough to not reveal your secret.” Luc laid everything out.

It made my head spin and my stomach flip, but it made sense. Worse than that, it sounded just like her.

“Oh Harrison, you know we would never reveal that, or anything else that could hurt you or your career.”

“For fuck’s sake,” Harrison said. “It’s not my secret. I don’t give a fuck if the entire world knows that our dad isn’t my biological father. It won’t have any impact on my standing or my office. This is not 1742, my parentage is not my fault. It’s not me or my reputation she is trying to protect. It’s hers. If this gets out, then she will be the scandal of the season. It would be worse than when Marksens’s mother left. She is trying to save herself.”

I didn’t think I had ever heard Harrison swear. He was stressed and starting to fray a little at the edges. My brother was a kind, sweet man to those he loved.

He was reserved and steadfast. He lived by a code of conduct and never strayed, but I had heard the stories of him in court. Harrison had earned his place in the world, taken it on like a warrior in the courtroom. Every case was a battle, and he was vicious.

He was always the perfect gentleman until he wasn’t, then he was ruthless.

I hoped my mother knew what she was getting into. Harrison’s protection only went so far when he felt you were in the wrong. And if she did this, he would definitely hold her responsible.

The men talked for a few more minutes. I honestly stopped listening. It wasn’t that I didn’t care or wasn’t able to understand. My mind went to my mother and Harrison’s real father. She must have been married when she got pregnant. Did she ever love my father? I knew their marriage was arranged, but still, I believed that love grew between them.

Did she actually love Harrison's real father? Had Harrison ever met his real father? Had I met him and never known it? Harrison said that our father knew, and it didn't change anything. How was that possible?

Was I also a bastard? My sister? Benjamin? Were any of us really legitimate?

This raised so many questions and I understood why my mother was fighting so viciously to protect this secret. It would bring up every single question I had wondered and many more.

I was happily married, and Luc didn't care. I believed he loved me. Even if my father lost everything due to my mother's shame and scandal, Luc would love me.

Rose wasn't married yet. No doubt my mother was scrambling to make a match for her and even pressuring Benjamin and Harrison to take brides. Not for the safety or happiness of her children. No, Mary Quinn Astrid would never act out of any kind of maternal concern. She used people who had to fight for her or be dragged down alongside her, other families' money, and influence to shield her from scandal.

"Call me if you find anything else. I am going to have a few trusted people make some discreet inquiries and I'll call you when I have anything." Harrison stood, the scraping sound of the chair across the hardwood floor pulling me out of my thoughts, and I smiled up at him.

"Will do." Luc stood and offered his hand to my brother.

They shook then Harrison leaned down to place a kiss on my cheek. "Marriage suits you, but if he ever hurts you, call me. I am sure I can find a few skeletons and charge him with something."

I laughed and nodded.

"You will find nothing," Luc said.

Harrison looked back up at Luc with a shrug. "You assume I haven't already. Or maybe I will plant some. But do yourself a favor and save a fortune in legal fees and treat her right."

Luc looked down at me, really taking me in for the first time this morning. “Don’t worry, I will treat her like the goddess she is.”

A blush stained my cheeks as Harrison said something else and left for work.

Luc was still standing, and he pulled my chair around so I was facing him and he could cage me in with his arms.

“So, I guess Harrison really doesn’t care if the world knows we don’t have the same father,” I said. “Shame.”

“Why is that a shame?” Luc trailed his fingers from my shoulder up my neck to my hair.

“Because there really wasn’t any real reason for me to marry you,” I teased.

His eyes sparkled with mischief as he leaned down and whispered in my ear, his fingers tightening in my hair just this side of painful.

“Don’t think for a second that even though we are married, I won’t take you over my knee and spank your ass till it’s bright red.”

I placed my hand on his chest and pushed him back a little, then unwrapped my hair from his hand and pulled his palm to the side of my face. His thumb ran over my lips, and I couldn’t resist darting my tongue out to lick it. I pulled it into my mouth and sucked gently while looking into his eyes, the bright blue now only a sliver of a ring around his blown-wide pupils.

“There is just one problem with that,” I said as I took his hand and moved it down my neck to my chest and between my breasts, which were only covered by a thin, but opaque layer of white silk.

“And what is that, wife?”

“You would have to catch me first.” I darted out from under his arm and ran through the penthouse back to our bedroom.

CHAPTER 35



OLIVIA

Marksen was in his home office reading stacks and stacks of papers.

They were everywhere, just piles of bright white paper grouped in manila folders or in leather portfolios. Several piles had even spilled onto the floor in messy heaps of what looked like contracts and bank statements.

I wanted to talk to him.

I needed to ask him about what I could do to keep him from releasing those photos to the public. I didn't know what he wanted from Luc or my father, or if it was something they would give or not. Luc would probably give almost anything to protect my reputation, he understood how hard I worked.

Luc knew what my magazine meant to me.

My father was more of an unknown.

In my life, at times, he had been an invaluable asset. Singing my praises, helping me land deals, or even shielding me from certain aspects of his business that I pretended to be in the dark about.

Lately, and especially when it came to my business, he was a liability. He would say I was acting out or that I needed to be wed and settle down to start producing male children. I had even heard him refer to my business as a "cute hobby" to a potential investor.

Later, of course, I found out that particular investor ended up working with my father and brother instead of with me. It

all boiled down to one simple truth: if I wanted something done, Luc would help if he could, but when all was said and done, my reputation, my business, were my responsibility.

There had to be something Marksen wanted that I could give. If he wanted money, I could arrange it. If he wanted revenge, he just needed to tell me how he wanted it, and I would see what I could do.

At the end of the day, this was business, which meant everything was always up for negotiation.

I just had to figure out how to talk to the man who kidnapped me, hurt me, ridiculed me, forced me to take damning pictures, fucked me in front of a crowd, and made me feel things I didn't think existed outside of books and Hallmark movies.

I took a deep breath, trying to summon my courage, and stepped into the room.

The second his blue eyes landed on me, all the courage fled from my body, and I practically deflated. When I didn't say anything for a moment, his attention went back to his work, highlighting a few lines in a contract. So I bent down to start picking up papers from the floor.

I was holding a bank statement with several lines highlighted.

Something about it was ... off.

I picked up another document and scanned it. Financial statements from DuBois Investments, as well as a few subsidiaries. Line after line was highlighted in neon yellow, blue, and pink.

My curiosity was piqued.

Something was off, and I needed to know what it was.

I knelt at the coffee table and pulled documents from the other piles, going over line after line.

Something was definitely wrong.

I could feel it. I just couldn't put my finger on what it was.

“Do you even know what you are reading?” Marksen asked.

“Quarterly and monthly statements showing someone is blocking your trades,” I muttered, not bothering to break my concentration by looking up.

“Not someone. Luc. You should go back to your room.”

“No, you are holding my reputation, my future, and my hard work over the flames. I deserve to know why.”

Marksen didn't say anything, and I glanced up at him. He was sitting back in his rich leather chair, studying me. Without saying a word, he gave me a nod, and I went back to the forms.

For over an hour, we quietly worked together in his office.

I knew there was something here that was wrong. Not because I didn't think Luc was capable of something so cutthroat. I knew he was. I had seen him take down empires just as massive as DuBois Investments without breaking a sweat. That was what didn't make sense to me.

If Luc was going after Marksen's business, this was how he would do it, but he wouldn't try to hide it. He would want Marksen to know it was him.

“Now do you understand why this has to happen? He started this.”

I shook my head without taking my eyes off the spreadsheet I was reviewing. “No, you started this when you went after the warehouse intended to expand the business that my family built its fortune on.” I glanced up at him. “You poked the bear. You shouldn't have done that.”

He leaned his elbow on the desk and rubbed his jaw as he looked down at me. “Maybe you're right, princess. But he struck back. He stole Amelia in a very public way, ended the deal that would have secured the warehouse. He took his pound of flesh. That should have been the end of it.”

He was right.

He'd tried to get one over on Luc, but Luc stopped it and struck back.

Tit for tat. Then it was over.

That was how business worked. It happened all the time.

Enemies one week. Business partners the next.

I leaned back on my hands. "How sure are you that this is Luc?"

He dropped another file on the table and ran his fingers through his hair as he leaned back in his chair.

Even after everything, he still looked as handsome as the devil, which was disturbingly on point.

I could see us like this on a weekend, going over our quarterly earnings and loss sheets. Each of us would get a little work done before spending the rest of the weekend together, pretending work didn't exist. Maybe we'd go to another event like Theophane or back to that house on the shore, hiding from the stress of our jobs and losing ourselves in each other's touch.

I closed my eyes for a moment and shut those thoughts down, shoving them into the back of my mind to daydream about later or, better yet, forget entirely.

That was not how this story ended.

He was not my dark prince, and I was not a weak damsel in distress that would show him the error of his ways. Disney would not be making this movie.

"Look at those forms. You aren't stupid. I know you know what holdings your family has, at least some of them—"

"I know all of them," I interrupted.

Then I saw it, what looked like a typo. The name of a shell was wrong, and the account number was one I didn't recognize. "I think someone is setting this up to make you think it's Luc."

Marksen stared at me for a moment like he was trying to read me. "He did this, Olivia. I need to respond and strike

back. It's unfortunate that you were the best avenue to do that, and I feel for you, but ..."

I raised up on my knees and grabbed the sheet. "No, you aren't hearing me. This isn't Luc."

"It has to be. This is exactly how he took down Robinson Investments, and the Montague gro—"

I stood up and raced to his side. Slamming the sheet down on his desk, I pointed my finger to the shell company with the typo. "Yes, this is how he would attack you, sort of. But this is a shell game. Luc would have no reason to do that. He wouldn't hide." I rolled my eyes. "Don't you see? This isn't him."

He grasped my wrist and turned me away from the desk to maneuver me to stand between his thighs. "Look, I understand you don't want it to be him, maybe you don't understand the shell companies and how they work."

My eyes narrowed as I pulled my wrist free and placed my hands on my hips. "Just because you have a dick doesn't make you smarter than me, Marks DuBois," I snapped. "I spent years learning everything I could about our family business. I wanted to be a second to Luc, to help him, but my father wouldn't hear of it. I still worked my ass off studying how my family ran their shell and shelf companies. I know what our holdings are, and these are not them."

I turned to storm off, but he grasped my hips and pulled me back to stand even closer.

He frowned as his fingers dug into my flesh. His voice took on a dark edge. "Just because you want your brother not to have done this doesn't mean he isn't the one doing it."

"No, it doesn't. These papers prove it isn't him." I crossed my arms over my chest. "Or are you too scared to be proven wrong by a girl?" I challenged as I raised one eyebrow.

His lips thinned at my open revolt.

I was taking an enormous risk.

Just moments ago my plan had been to appease him, to survive and thrive.

Fuck that plan.

Now I had a new plan.

Challenge, attack, and win.

After matching my glare, he rubbed his jaw, shifting his gaze between me and the spreadsheet on his desk and then back again. With a resigned sigh, he said, “Show me.”

I knew he didn’t believe me, not really. That was fine. I meant what I said. I could prove it. Snatching the document back along with his hand, I pulled him out of his chair and over to where I had organized his spreadsheets into neat piles.

I knelt on the floor.

He stood looking down at me. “Olivia ...”

I patted the thick Persian carpet. “Come on, DuBois, it’s time you got on your knees for once.”

He lowered to his knees and still loomed over me. Twisting his fist in my hair, he pulled my head back. His dark gaze focused on my mouth. “I’ll make you pay for that cheeky remark, later.”

The air in my lungs seized at the sensual threat even as my brain screamed all the rational reasons why my body shouldn’t be reacting to him.

Before I could respond, he released me and settled down on the carpet. “Show me.”

Clearing my throat as I gave myself a mental shake, I pointed to a few lines showing sales bought by Riona Holdings. “Here, this isn’t one of ours.”

“Yes, it is. Your father named a holding company after your mother.”

“No, he didn’t. First of all, my mother’s name was Fiona, with an F.”

“So it’s a typo,” he argued.

“My father is not a sentimental man. He would never name something after my mother.”

“Maybe he did it right after she died, when he was grieving.” He shrugged.

I started laughing at the absurdity.

“My father did not love his wife. He did not grieve her passing. If anything, he was annoyed at the inconvenience of having to hire a live-in nanny before Charlotte and I were old enough to be sent away for school. To my knowledge, Luc is the first Manwarring to ever know love.”

“Olivia, that can’t be true. You will find love.” He reached out like he was going to comfort me.

I pulled away.

“It’s okay, I still have shoes. Oh, and purses. Aren’t they the only things uptight, privileged bitches like me love?” I threw his words from several days ago back in his face.

“Olivia—”

With my head turned slightly so he couldn’t see my face, I continued. “There is a shell company in my family’s portfolio with my mother’s name, but this is not its account number.” I couldn’t bear to see the look of pity in his eyes, so I just moved on.

“How could you possibly know the account number by heart?”

“Because it’s mine. I started the company to add to the Manwarring family trust. Ten percent of the profits from my company go into that account and are then distributed as I see fit.”

“Why would—”

“Why would I add a shell to my family’s portfolio?” I finished for him. “Because being a silly little girl, I had the silly little notion that doing so would make my father proud of me. But that is not important now. What is important is that someone is manipulating you to go after my brother, and I, for one, want to know who.”

“No one is manipulating me,” Marksens said, crossing his arms over his chest.

“Would you like to place a wager on that?”

“Let me guess the terms. If you are right, you want me to let you go?”

“No. Whether I prove I’m right or not, you will let me go because you have no reason to hold me here anymore.”

Heat rushed through my veins. I was livid. Someone had not only gone after my family, but had also given Marksens the idea to kidnap me.

I had seen my brother and father on the warpath many times, but now I understood what fueled that determination. It wasn’t discipline or greed. It was rage.

“Then name your terms.” Marksens sat back and looked me in the eyes. Not down at me, not like he pitied me. He looked at me like I was his equal, and I knew I had one shot at this.

“If I am wrong, you release those photos. My father won’t give you a penny to save my reputation. He doesn’t give a fuck, and if Luc is behind this and hasn’t stopped by now, he won’t.”

“Agreed. And if you are right?”

“You delete all the photos and then you make whoever did this pay. You promise me right now that that person does not walk away from this unscathed. I want blood.”

Marksens’s eyes widened as I laid out my bloodthirsty terms.

He didn’t say anything, just offered his hand to shake on the deal.

I took it and gave him the same firm, manly handshake my brother would have.

Then I got to work.

Three hours, two Tylenol tablets, and a pot of coffee later, I had a paper trail. It was convoluted and required some less-than-legal hacking software, but Marksens and I unraveled a

fairly intricate and extremely convoluted shell game that sent us through bank statements and money trails in three different countries and several layers of shells and shelf companies.

It was impressive in sheer size but ultimately inelegant and a little sloppy in places, which was why I found where the money was really coming from and going to so quickly.

This was put together by someone who had a passing understanding of international finance but little practical application. They also didn't have a clue about international trade and finance laws, or they just didn't care. They basically had a lot of money to throw around, and they were either irresponsible with it and didn't need to see a return on the investment, or they were okay paying to fuel this feud.

Marksen had been pacing the room for the last twenty minutes, running his fingers through his dark brown hair.

I hoped, but doubted, it was because he was feeling guilty the closer we got to finding out who actually did this.

Finally, I sat back, and a feeling of relief washed over me as I looked at the results. It was so obvious who did this.

I was honestly mad at myself for not making the connections earlier.

"Marksen," I said, and he stopped to look at me. I got to my feet and stood in front of him. "When my brother struck back at you for putting in an offer on that warehouse, he was wrong to do it in such a public way. You were right. He damaged your reputation, and he did it intentionally to make you look like a fool. But he left it at that. He took his pound of flesh and then let it go. He didn't do this."

"He had to have. He is the only one who would come after me so personally."

"No, he isn't. The person who did this was also embarrassed by my brother's actions, and they are using you to strike back at him. He isn't the one who did this, but I know who did."

"Name them," he growled.

“Remember our wager. I prove this, and you drop the vendetta against my family. You delete the blackmail, and you make the right person pay. Either way, you release me.”

“Name them,” he repeated.

“Astrid.”

CHAPTER 36



MARKSEN

“Let me go. You have no reason to hold me here anymore. You never did.”

Olivia’s eyes were wide and burning with indignation and rage. Her arms stiff at her sides, her hands balled into fists.

She wasn’t hiding. She wasn’t shrinking back from me. She was done asking.

Her fire was almost as seductive as her submission.

“It wasn’t Luc or my father or any other Manwarring. It was the Astrids, and I have no doubt they put the idea of kidnapping me in your head. You’ve been played for a fool, and it’s past time for you to get your head out of your ass, take your power back, and make them pay.”

Olivia Manwarring was demanding that I honor our wager. It was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen, and I was floored. Not only was this creature standing in front of me stunning, witty, and the perfect lady, but she had a fire in her that shone through.

A determination that rivaled even her brother’s.

And I’d had the fucking audacity to think that I could break her.

I should let her go immediately. The right thing to do would be to call her brother and give him the address to come pick her up. Then delete every picture I had ever taken of her while she waited for the car.

But that was the last thing I was going to do.

I didn't want to let her go.

The idea of her walking out of this apartment sent a cold chill of panic racing down my spine.

It wasn't going to happen.

Not yet.

Maybe not ever.

I needed to make this right between us first, but I had no idea how to do that.

How the fuck did I undo so much pain and damage that she never deserved in the first place?

I took a step closer to her, and she backed up.

A feral growl rumbled low in my chest.

With just a few more steps, I had her pressed against the wall, caging her in with my body. The vein in her neck was pulsing as her heart raced, and a single bead of sweat started to fall between the curves of her breasts. She was scared of me.

Good.

Given the way I felt about her, the way my heart raced when she was near, the way my muscles tensed like I couldn't relax if we weren't in the same room together, the way I needed her within arm's reach at all times?

She should be scared.

I was a bad man and I did bad things to her, and I didn't want to stop.

"I can walk you through everything I found. Step by step, I can prove that—" She was rambling, but I didn't need her to explain anything.

As soon as she found the path and started pulling threads, I saw everything unravel.

I knew she was right.

"Olivia." I interrupted her endless babbling. "Shut up."

Her mouth snapped shut.

I cupped her jaw as I towered over her, pressing my hips into hers.

There was so much I needed to say to her, so much to apologize for. She deserved groveling. I should be begging for her forgiveness, but that wasn't who I was. I would never beg anyone for anything. So I did the only thing I could.

I kissed her.

This wasn't like all the other kisses we had shared.

This wasn't about me dominating her, controlling her, or showing her that I owned her body and soul.

I kissed her like I thought she was, at the very least, my equal, if not my better.

I kissed her to tell her how wrong I was and to try and show her how I felt.

Every ounce of feeling I had for her, all the admiration and adoration, the guilt and shame, all of it went into that kiss.

I hoped it told her the things I wasn't able to voice.

She instantly melted into me.

I was going to miss this. I would miss the way her frame fit in my arms, like a puzzle piece, almost as much as I'd miss the breathy way she moaned my name when I slid into her or the way she submitted to me so beautifully.

Her hands moved to my chest. I held my breath, waiting ...

She didn't push me away but pulled me closer. She was as hungry for my touch as I was for hers.

It was so tempting. I could pick her up and carry her to my bed. I could worship her the way I should have been this entire time. I would lay her down in the soft blankets and gently coax pleasure from her body instead of demanding it. In another life, I would have made sweet love to her until she was delirious with pleasure.

With my hands on her hips, I broke the kiss and raised my head. I had already taken so much from her. I wouldn't take more, not like this. Not while she was my captive.

Her eyes were still closed, her lips slightly parted when I pulled away.

Olivia Manwarring deserved a knight to protect her, not the monster who stole her.

Without another word, I left her in that room alone.

I unlocked the patio door and stepped out from the glass tower that rose over the sprawling city at my feet. The air was crisp and cool. I looked out over the river and a few parks. The trees were all in brilliant shades of reds and yellows, as the last of the green of summer faded.

The uncivilized beast inside of me wanted to clasp her to my chest and bite and claw anyone who dared try to take her away from me.

But I knew that wasn't possible.

That was the problem with a scorched earth revenge plan.

When the dust settled, there was nothing left but ashes.

I knew I had to let her go.

I couldn't undo what I had done, but I could at least get the revenge she demanded.

Then I would never see her again.

I would arrange to have my driver drop Olivia off at her brother's new penthouse. The one he and Amelia had bought to start their new lives was only a few short blocks from here.

It made my stomach twist with rage and guilt, but I knew I fucked up, and I knew what I had to do next.

I'd made a promise, and I intended to keep it.

With a deep breath, I made the call.

It only rang twice before it was answered.

There was no point in waiting for whatever they were going to say.

This conversation needed to happen in person.

“We need to talk,” I said. “Meet me in the usual place.
Come alone.”

CHAPTER 37



OLIVIA

*H*e left.

Marksen had grabbed me and kissed me in the way I always thought a first kiss should be, the heart-stopping, passionate kiss I saw as a girl watching movies.

He gave me the kiss I'd dreamed about for most of my life, before leaving the room.

I'd heard the door to the patio close, and had assumed when he came back in, we would go over the plan to get back at the Astrids.

Maybe he was calling Luc to loop him in, or he was calling someone to look over what I'd found and verify it. So, I'd sat down on the suede sofa in the living room and waited, still wearing his silk pajama pants rolled at my waist and ankles and one of his T-shirts that smelled like him.

Marksen had come back in a few moments later, stopping when he saw me.

For several moments, we just stared at one another, saying nothing.

Then he had turned and just ... left.

He hadn't said a single word.

He just left, and I sat there confused.

What was he doing? A deal was a deal.

I did what I said I would. I proved my family wasn't attacking him.

Why the hell was I still here? Then it occurred to me he said he would let me go, but he never said he would take me home. I went to the front door and tried it.

It was unlocked.

There was no reason why my heart should ache at *not* being locked in. Shaking off the twisted emotion, I opened the door and peeked out, half hoping/half dreading to see Marksen standing there as if this were yet another fucked-up game.

The door opened to a windowless entryway with a gold-plated elevator door.

And no Marksen.

I ran back into the apartment to find something for my feet. I had no idea where my phone, purse, or shoes were, and it didn't matter. All I had to do was get out of this building, then I could find someone who would let me make a call. I knew Luc's number by heart.

He'd made me memorize it so I had someone to call if I were ever in trouble. I was pretty sure this qualified as being in trouble.

If I could get clear of wherever Marksen had me, then I could get home.

I just hoped we were in a relatively safe part of the city.

The only thing I could find that even sort of fit was a pair of Valentino leather clog slippers. I stuck my feet in them. The wool lining was impossibly soft, making me think that he had never worn them.

Good, he wouldn't miss them, not that it would have stopped me if he did wear them.

I ran back to the front door and pressed my ear to it, listening for any sign that he had returned.

After a moment of hearing only my own heartbeat thundering in my ears, I stepped into the marble entryway. I

pressed the gleaming golden button for the elevator. It only took a moment for the elevator car to arrive and the doors to slide open to show it was completely empty. Inside there was just one button, marked with the letter “L” for the lobby, and a keyhole next to a gold plaque engraved with a stylized “P.”

I was in a penthouse with a private elevator. That really shouldn't have surprised me as much as it did. I was dealing with Marksens DuBois, after all. Of course, even his secret lair, where he held innocent women captive like some comic book supervillain, was a penthouse. Only the best would ever do for Marksens, as made apparent by the slippers I was currently wearing and had no plans of returning.

It was either a penthouse in a high-rise or one built inside a volcano, and that would have just been impractical in New York City.

I hit the button and stood for several minutes as the elevator moved down. Each floor that passed, I was more and more convinced that this was a bad idea. It was too easy. The doors were going to open and some big, beefy guy with tattoos and chains hanging from piercings would make me go back. He would then tell Marksens what I did, and Marksens would punish me.

Or maybe private security would be waiting, some random, ex-military for-hire guy who had been dishonorably discharged and was part of Marksens's private army of mercenaries. In the no more than five minutes it took to get from the penthouse to the lobby, several scenarios played out in my head. I was convinced that whatever the doors would open to would be far more dangerous than Marksens's penthouse.

I was kicking myself for not staying in that apartment and using the laptop to contact someone. It would have been so much safer to get a message to Luc and have him come get me.

When the doors finally slid open, it was to a beautiful marble lobby with a large wooden desk in the middle of the floor. The attendant at the desk gave me a quick once-over and

then averted his eyes. Clearly trying to afford me some privacy.

It was what I would have expected if I was a guest, not a hostage.

No doubt, this man still worked for Marksens, so I made a mad dash to the sets of glass exit doors. He didn't try to stop me. No one did. I looked behind me, and he was still writing something down in a ledger.

I pushed through the doors and stepped onto the busy sidewalk. New York City this time of year was cool but not freezing yet. Still, I wrapped my arms around my chest to try and hide the fact I was cold and not wearing a bra.

“Miss? Miss Manwarring?”

I turned to see a man dressed all in black emerging from a black sedan.

Without thinking twice, I ripped off the leather clogs and took off running.

“Miss Manwarring! Wait! Stop!”

Holding the clogs in my hands, I ran several blocks until a glance over my shoulder showed the man was no longer chasing me. Leaning against a lamppost, I put the clogs back on my feet, sucking air into my lungs as I looked around to get my bearings.

The street seemed familiar, so I moved to the side and then saw the cutest cafe, with the most distinct awnings in a brilliant lapis blue. That blue matched the color of their world-famous blue macrons, which were filled with cream cheese frosting and a dollop of homemade blueberry jam filling.

They were delightful. I knew they were delightful because Amelia and I had stopped here a few weeks ago when we were out shopping for her and Luc's new penthouse.

I knew exactly where I was. Soho, only a few blocks from Luc's new place. I just prayed someone was home. If I could get there before Marksens caught me, I was home free.

I took off running again, scrunching my toes in the clogs this time to keep them on. My lungs ached by the time I got to their building. I had almost tripped in the too-big slippers, and I had to hold my chest with one hand and the silk pajama pants with the other to keep them from falling, but I was here.

I was finally safe.

“Miss, who are you here to see?” The man standing at the front desk cast a scathing glance over my strange attire.

I had passed him maybe half a dozen times before and he never blinked an eye. But that was when I was dressed as “fashionista professional Barbie, Ms. Manwarring.” Now I was dressed as “kidnapped by a billionaire recent escapee, just plain Olivia.”

There was no way he was simply going to let me upstairs and he was just as likely to call the police as he was to call my brother if I tried to tell him who I was. After I was cleaned up and back to my usual look, I would apologize for my bad manners, but right now I needed to get upstairs.

I ran past him to the elevator that opened as I got there to let someone out. The front desk attendant shouted at me to stop as I slapped my hand on the “close door” button and pressed the button for the penthouse.

I slammed my hand on the door to Amelia and Luc’s new place a few times before it finally opened.

Amelia was standing there in a white nightgown and matching robe, the set I gave her during her wedding shower.

Her mouth dropped open for a moment as she took me in.

After everything, I must have looked terrifying, so I gave her a moment.

When she came back to her senses, she pulled me over the threshold into the safety and warmth of their home and her tight embrace.

“Oh my God, Olivia! We were so worried about you! Are you okay? Are you hurt?” She was firing questions back-to-back with no time for me to answer.

Finally, she had to take a breath, so I answered as best I could.

“I’m okay, but I need to talk to Luc.”

“He just left for some meeting. Are you hungry? What do you need? Food? A doctor, a bath? Anything. What do you need first?”

I put my hands on my sister-in-law’s shoulders to stop her from talking for a moment. She pulled me in for another hug, and I lost all my composure.

It finally sank in. I was home.

I was with my family. Safe.

Tears of relief spilled over my cheeks and were absorbed in her no longer pristine white robe.

Amelia’s arms tightened around me as she let me cry and get out all the emotions that had been pent up over the last several days.

“Let’s get you into a nice hot bath. We don’t need to worry about the police. Luc insisted on finding you himself.” I nodded, knowing that was exactly what he would do, and I appreciated it. The last thing I wanted was for all of this to end up on Page Six. “Or would you like to eat first? What do you need right now?”

I couldn’t help but think how lucky Luc was to have Amelia. She would be a fantastic mother to their children.

“What do you need first?” she asked again when I didn’t answer.

I looked into her eyes and told her the only thing I needed. She might not understand it, but she would tell Luc, and he would.

“Revenge. I need revenge.”

CHAPTER 38



MARKSEN

I sat in the leather seat I had claimed as my own since I was twenty and bought my membership to the club.

The executive lounge was rarely used during the day. Most of the patrons preferred the rooms near the billiards tables, where all the waitresses in the shorter skirts served top-shelf liquor. Members would meet and talk about who the fuck cared. Or they would be a few stories higher in the lounge that overlooked the water.

The older retired men preferred the higher view. I liked to think they pretended they were still on top of the world, as if they still commanded industries. They made choices that impacted not only hundreds of thousands of jobs but the economy as a whole. They sat and played pretend like children, but instead of imagining what they would be when they grew up, they pretended sitting presidents still took their calls and that they had more sway and leverage over the world than just threatening to take away their children's inheritance.

If I was being honest, it wasn't too long ago that Luc and I would meet here and play pretend as well, just looking forward to what could be instead of what was. This lounge was several stories up and had a fantastic view of the Hudson. It was mesmerizing watching the river. The ships docked and were ready to be unloaded, the men working.

Luc and I would sit here sipping his family's private reserve and talk strategy.

Who was ripe for a takeover, who was going to retire and leave their business to someone who couldn't hold it, what new ventures were worth our attention, and which were not.

He and I sat here and talked about the kind of men we would be, what lines we would hold, and which we would cross. We even planned our first attack here. He brought up a competitor that had gone too far, and together, we attacked from two separate angles. Not only did we make our first several million, but we also ran an entire legacy into the dirt.

Our first hostile takeover was done together.

It was supposed to be the first of hundreds. Of course, it didn't stay that way. Our fathers started aiming us in different directions. I doubted we could ever go back to where we were when we were just starting out.

Still, we could at least end this growing feud and team up to take down the conniving person who was trying to have us destroy each other.

And more importantly, who hurt our Olivia.

No. I swallowed. His sister Olivia.

She wasn't mine. I had no right or claim to her.

After all, I was one of the monsters who hurt her.

After everything, I wasn't bold enough to have ordered a bottle from his private stock. Instead, I had a bottle from my family's vault brought up. A Macallan double cask forty-year-old Scotch. Truth be told, I preferred the Manwarring labels, but that was neither here nor there. I had the bottle decanted and waited with three glasses.

I told Luc to come alone, but I just knew he wouldn't be the only one showing up.

It didn't take him long to get to the club.

He approached by himself, not even trying to hide the gun holstered under his arm. I didn't blame him. If someone were to do to my sister Alva what I did to Olivia, I would have a gun, too. Alva and I weren't even as close as Luc and Olivia.

Maybe that was something I should change.

I nodded toward the gun. “You won’t be needing that. Take a seat and have a drink,” I said, pouring the two glasses.

He ignored me. “Where is my sister?” he growled like some starved wolf.

I looked at my Cartier watch, pretending to look at the time when instead I looked at the gears, how they all turned so precisely. Much like I had. I had let the actions and influence of one person dictate my behavior.

They manipulated me into hurting a friend and an innocent woman.

And they would pay for it.

My thirst for revenge this time was nothing like what I had felt toward Luc.

Then, it had been about bruised pride and my stupid ego.

This time they’d hurt the woman I loved. Yes, loved. There was no point in denying it.

I loved her. Loved her sweet, intelligent mind. Loved the way she stuck out her cute little chin when she was feeling challenged. And how her beautiful eyes widened in wonder every time I touched her. I even loved how she was useless in the kitchen but an amazing mastermind in the boardroom. And like a fucking idiot, I had let my ego and rage blind me enough to be manipulated into almost destroying all that amazing fire and brilliance.

If my penance and punishment was to wander this earth being deprived of the warmth of the woman I loved, then it was more than I deserved.

At least now I would be the monster in the shadows, protecting her from any other future harm. Starting with the person who set us both up.

If the last time was a raging inferno, this time was a fucking nuclear bomb.

“If I timed this right, she should be walking in your door any moment.”

Luc pulled out his gun and cocked the hammer back, a clear threat, and opened his mouth to say something else when his phone vibrated in the inside pocket of his suit.

With the gun squarely pointed at my chest, he answered it.

“What?”

Someone was talking on the other end of the line. I assumed it was his new wife, Mrs. Manwarring. I had been gone for about twenty minutes. Even if Olivia ignored my driver and crawled to her brother’s home, she should be there by now.

Luc’s features softened the moment he heard Amelia’s voice. I wondered if this all hadn’t gone down like this, if I had been smart enough to see through the bullshit and not let my emotions blind me, it might have been Olivia calling me and maybe my face would have done the same.

“Okay, I will be home soon. I have some business to handle first. Call the doctor to come check her out.” He hung up the phone and put away his gun.

“I didn’t hurt her, not really,” I said.

The lie tasted bitter on my lips so I took a sip of liquor.

At least it was true physically. Sort of.

Emotionally, it was another story. I played with her head and her heart. I broke her trust over and over. I took what wasn’t mine. Who knew what kind of damage I had done to my babygirl.

“I should kill you anyway,” he said, almost echoing my guilt-laden thoughts.

“I wouldn’t blame you, but there is business to be done first.” I offered him the drink.

His eyes narrowed as he looked at me like it was some kind of trick. “Why am I here, Marksens?” Luc was back to his

growly, grumpy self. I motioned to one of the other chairs again and slid his glass over in front of it.

“You are here because we need to talk. I was under the impression that you were systematically destroying my empire.”

“I wasn’t,” he interrupted.

I waited for him to sit down before continuing.

He curled his lip in disdain at the snifter until he swirled it and smelled the aged-to-perfection Scotch. Then his eyebrows rose in surprise as if he didn’t think I would break out the good stuff for this meeting.

“I am well aware of that now. Your sister was actually the one who was able to follow the paper trail that led to the person responsible.”

“That still doesn’t explain why I am here,” he said.

“Because although lately we’ve been divided, you and I used to work very well together. I think it’s time we come back together.”

“Do you remember what you did that severed our business arrangements?” He sat forward, leaning his elbows on his knees as he glared at me.

“Yeah, I fucked up, and I went after the wrong warehouse. Then you interrupted my wedding and very publicly stole my bride. If what Olivia says is true, you are happy, in love, and you pulled a grinch.”

He shot me a confused look, and I elaborated. “Your heart grew three times its size. Which, I might add, is impressive as fuck since no one thought any of the Manwarrings had a heart.”

“Olivia has a heart,” he countered.

I stared down at the amber liquid in my glass as I swallowed past the lump in my throat. I nodded. “She does. She also has a brain and is probably more business savvy and ruthless than both of us combined.”

Luc laughed and sat back in his chair.

“You’re probably right.”

“Do you know, she walked in on me going through all the documents when I thought I was looking at the damage you were doing. She found the pattern before I did, she saw the paper trail and the shell game clear as day. It only took her a few hours to untangle what my analysts didn’t even know was happening.” I was still in awe of that woman.

“You need better analysts,” he said.

“She is brilliant,” I countered.

“She is a Manwarring.”

“She is, more than you know. She and I had a bet. I thought she would bet her freedom or the blackmail photos, if she proved you weren’t behind it.”

“She didn’t?” he asked.

“No, she said I would be letting her go anyway.” I couldn’t help but laugh at the brazen way she had told me that, like it was a forgone fact. “She demanded that I drop the vendetta against your family and get revenge. Whoever was doing this to my family and making it look like yours, she wants them to suffer.”

Luc’s eyes widened. He was as surprised as I had been.

In our world, revenge was not something a lady should demand. Olivia wasn’t a lady, not really. She looked like a lady, she sounded like a lady, but she was a stone-cold businesswoman, and the sexiest woman I had ever seen.

It really was a pity I didn’t know that before I fucked everything up.

“So that is why I am here. You want to beg me not to kill you for touching Olivia before you can fulfill your promise to her.”

I sighed. Luc was always such a fucking drama queen.

“No, I struck at you. You struck back. That was business, and we are even on that front. You actually ended up ahead

because you found a woman you love. I am here because everything after that was orchestrated by someone else. I think we should strike back at them, together.”

The way Luc was staring, I knew he was working out scenarios in his head, always thinking several steps ahead. A useful skill, but too many variables to be accurate, in my opinion.

“I am assuming you have a plan?” he finally said.

“No, but I am about to.”

The heavy wooden door slid open behind Luc and closed with an audible click.

Harrison Astrid had arrived, and I poured the third snifter of Scotch.

CHAPTER 39



OLIVIA

“*I*t looks like Texas threw up in here,” I said behind my glass, just loud enough for Amelia to hear me.

She tried, very unsuccessfully, to stifle a laugh as we looked out over the sea of men wearing jeans with their blazers and women wearing denim skirts or jeans and bedazzled tops. More than a few of the guests were wearing ten-gallon cowboy hats.

It was the most ridiculous theme for an event I had ever seen.

One older woman came dressed in an all-denim ball gown that just looked heavy on her frail body, but she was smiling like she was having the time of her life, so who was I to judge. It was almost like being in denim instead of finery gave the guests an excuse to be less civilized and have a little fun.

“Seriously, who thought of this theme?” Amelia asked.

She looked stunning tonight in jeans that fit her like a glove and made her ass look fantastic. She wore a green silk halter top with them that was just fabulous. Luc apparently thought so, too. Every time I saw him, he was staring at her like a hungry wolf, ready to pounce.

“Charlotte,” I answered. “She is obsessed with this show called *Yellowstone*. The other day at breakfast, our father asked what she thought about a certain man as a suitor. She asked him if he could wrangle a stallion.”

“What does that even mean?” Amelia asked.

“I have no idea. He didn’t either. He just stared at her until she walked away, back to practicing her cello. Honestly, I think it was a way to end the conversation.”

“Has he said anything about finding you a husband?”

I shuddered at the thought of some loveless arranged marriage. It worked out for Amelia and Luc, but I was not counting on lightning striking twice.

“No, he still can’t look me in the eye.”

“Oh, while you were gone, did you see what happened with that model friend of yours?” Amelia asked.

“No. Which friend?”

She took her phone out of her back pocket. I hated to admit it, but as uncultured as I found the Denim and Diamonds Ball, having pockets was incredibly convenient. Why didn’t more women’s clothing have pockets? Probably because if my favorite dresses had pockets, I wouldn’t need the matching ten-thousand-dollar handbags to go with them.

Amelia pulled up an article from the *Huffington Post* on her phone and handed it over. Colin Krits wasn’t a friend. He was someone who was often at the same fashion events and had made it his mission to get me to go out with him. He was pretty, and I did have him do some work for the magazine, but something about him always rubbed me the wrong way.

According to this article, he was being blackballed from the industry for drugs, and he had been arrested for prostitution and possession. His boyfriend had thrown him over for another man and one of the Kardashians who had considered him a friend was now freezing him out. And the icing on the cake? All her fans had started attacking him on social media.

Honestly, I felt slightly bad he had been canceled so harshly. I didn’t condone the drug use, but if Marksens had released those pictures of me the same thing would have happened.

“This is so sad,” I said.

“Oh, no it’s not. Keep reading.”

I scrolled further and saw screenshots of his messages to women, berating and threatening them, and then messages to his boyfriend joking about how he was going to marry a bitch and get all her money for them. I didn’t know how I knew, but I knew he wasn’t talking about a West Coast glamazon.

He was talking about me.

Marksen must have done this.

It was the only explanation I could think of. He had my phone, and although he returned it via Luc, all of Colin’s messages had been deleted, and he hadn’t called or texted once since the wedding.

Marksen must have blocked him and then dealt with him.

That just made me feel even more confident of my plan.

A few days ago, Marksen may have been the biggest threat against me, but he also protected me. He’d ultimately listened to me, and when I proved I knew more than he did, he didn’t belittle me or take credit.

He had even told Luc that I was the one who figured it all out.

I wanted my revenge, but I also wanted him.

The DuBois clan were not the only ones who could take what they wanted.

Marksen wasn’t perfect. But he was going to be mine.

Speaking of men who couldn’t muster the strength to talk to me. “Have you seen Marksen yet?”

She nodded and pointed to the other end of the room. There he was in black jeans that made my mouth water and a Ralph Lauren jacket, looking a little bit like he was afraid someone was going to challenge him to a duel at high noon.

“He looks like he wants to run away.”

“He does,” Amelia agreed. “Luc insisted he come after I insisted that he insist.”

“You two are very insistent,” Luc said, coming to stand behind his wife.

He looked a little ridiculous and very uncomfortable in his jeans. I didn't miss the way his hand went around Amelia's hip and he pulled her into him. It wasn't inappropriate, but still, there was no denying it was a public display of affection that also was a show of dominance.

He was telling every man in this room that Amelia was his.

I wanted that.

I wanted someone to want to show me off but keep me close. There was a small chance that was something within my grasp.

I just had to fight for it.

No Manwarring had ever run from a fight, and I was not going to be the first.

I cleared my throat, and the lovebirds still stared into each other's eyes.

It would have been nauseating if they weren't so damn cute.

“Excuse me,” I said, tapping my brother on the shoulder. “If you could come back down to earth for just a moment. That would be super.”

He leveled an unimpressed look at me. “You have thirty seconds.”

“More than enough.” I rolled my eyes at him. “Is everything ready?”

“Yes, but I am going on record to say this is a bad idea.” Luc turned to face me, his arms crossed in a way that showed his big brother disapproval. It was a good thing I stopped caring long ago if he approved of what I did or didn't do.

My time with Marksden had shaken my worldview and realigned my priorities. I loved Luc and despite him not deserving it, my father. I just had no intentions of living my

life within the parameters they would find agreeable or even acceptable.

“Your concerns have been noted and discarded,” I said.

“Are you sure this is what you want to do? This could backfire in so many ways.”

I held up a hand to stop him.

“I am aware of the risks. I have weighed the pros and cons and have determined that the benefit outweighs the risk.”

Now it was his turn to roll his eyes at me while Amelia snickered behind his shoulder.

“Fine. It’s all done. You are good to go. But just so you know, I might understand why Marksen did what he did, but that does not mean I forgive him.”

I stuck out my chin. “He didn’t do a thing to you. Everything he did was to me, it’s my choice if he is forgiven or not.” I grabbed another glass of champagne and drank it in one long pull.

Marksen was at the back of the room, pretending to study a sculpture that was part of the silent auction.

It was a bronze piece of two figures lying side by side, their nude forms relaxed, their arms and legs intertwined as if they were relaxing after making love for hours.

It was created by the same artist who did the sculpture I had been admiring the night of Luc’s wedding.

It was a fitting piece. I made a mental note to ask Amelia to bid on it for me.

Marksen was so focused on the piece, he didn’t feel my eyes on him, watching his every move.

I made my way closer.

Making small talk for a few moments here and there to blend in with the crowd.

I didn’t want him to sense me closing in and try to escape before I got to him.

I was like a jungle cat stalking my prey, circling it, getting closer and closer without him realizing it.

A blonde woman in a pink sequined cowboy hat started talking to him.

Jealousy twisted in my stomach, but he didn't seem interested in her at all. It only took a few moments for the blonde to rejoin the party. Amelia grabbed the mic, pulling everyone's attention to the main stage on the other side of the room. She started making her speech about the foundation and where the money would be going, giving me a perfect distraction.

I rounded the table and stood behind my target.

In my purse I pulled out a plastic bag with a damp cloth in it.

I put one hand on Marksens's shoulder.

He turned to look at me; his eyes widened but before he could say anything I put the chloroform-soaked pocket square to his face.

It only took a second for his body to go limp and hit the floor at my feet.

CHAPTER 40



MARKSEN

*I*t took an effort to fight past the fog in my head to open my eyes.

I didn't remember drinking enough to pass out, but I must have. I tried to raise my arm to wipe the sleep from my eyes, but I couldn't move.

Everything was hazy and unfocused. My mouth tasted like it was full of pennies, so it took a moment to realize I had been tied up.

I pulled at the ropes that secured my hands and my feet to a wooden bed frame. My clothes had been taken, and I was lying naked on black silk sheets.

Searching the space, I recognized my own bedroom.

What the fuck? I was tied to my own goddamn bed.

I was in my room in my home in Rhode Island.

The one I took Olivia to that fateful night.

Luc must not have forgiven me after all.

My heart thundered as I pulled at the ropes. Sweat coated my back and the sheet stuck to my skin.

Luc had ties to the mafia. I thought he was working on severing those ties, not wanting his father's underworld connections to taint his businesses, but maybe I pushed him too far.

What if kidnapping Olivia and sending him those photos was what turned Luc into his father? Had agreeing to help me

exact revenge against the person who used us both just been a ruse?

The door opened.

I yanked harder on my restraints.

There was no telling what they were going to do to me. The Irish mob was known for their more creative forms of torture. They didn't just kill someone. They made sure the death sent a message.

"Shhh, sweet prince, you are going to hurt yourself if you don't calm down," a soft feminine voice cooed.

I knew that voice. I looked up to see Olivia dressed in black lace lingerie that screamed femme fatale. The bra lifted her tits, giving her mouth-watering cleavage and barely covering her pretty pink nipples. The matching thong and garter belt were mostly transparent with strips of black elastic crisscrossing her body. She held a riding crop in one hand and petted my head with the other, soothing me like some wild animal in a cage.

"Olivia, what the fuck is going on?"

"What is going on is simple. You took me captive. But, my dark prince, you didn't do it properly." She crawled onto the bed and straddled me, her barely covered pussy right on top of my hardening cock.

I bucked my hips as I growled through clenched teeth. "Let me go, Olivia."

"No. You held me here, and you kept threatening to tie me to the bed. If you had any real skill with kidnapping, you would have done it. So I thought I would show you how it's properly done."

"I'm warning you, Olivia," I hissed. "Let me go."

"I seem to recall asking you to do the same thing several times. What was it that you said?" She tapped her chin with the leather tongue of the riding crop. "Oh yeah." She leaned down, her lips hovering over mine. "No."

I could smell the sweet red wine on her breath. “Have you been in my wine cellar?” I asked, amused by her little game.

Now that I knew it wasn't Luc or his father's thugs here to kill me, or worse.

“Of course I did. I wanted it so I took it. Isn't that what people in power do?” She rocked her hips, and I stifled a groan. “Just like how I wanted you, so I took you. But really that isn't the point of all of this.”

This woman was going to be the death of me.

“Then what is the point?”

“The point, Mr. Dubois, is that you ruined me.”

“I deleted every single photo.” It wasn't a lie, not really.

They had been deleted from any place someone else could get to them.

The photos were secured and stored on a computer that had never connected to the internet. It was where I kept digital files containing the most sensitive information. I deleted the files from every other source and even burned the USB jump drive I used to transfer the photos to my computer.

“That isn't what I'm talking about.”

She hit my chest with the flogger and used it to tilt up my chin.

“Then what do you mean?”

“I was innocent before you stole me.”

She rocked her hips again, dragging her sweet pussy over my painfully hard cock.

“No one really expects their bride to be a virgin on their wedding night, and the pictures are gone. No one has to know,” I said, gritting my teeth.

“That isn't what I mean, and you know it. How am I supposed to be satisfied with some middle-aged tycoon who comes home and only fucks me once a week for three minutes

on Friday nights with the lights off, still smelling like his secretary's perfume?"

She punctuated each of her words with a roll of her hips.

Fuck, it felt good. She was hot and ready for me.

"I'm sure you'll manage," I gritted out. Two could play at this taunting game.

She leaned over, grabbing the headboard, putting her perfect tits at my eye level as she used the headboard for leverage to grind down harder.

My mouth watered, seeing those perfect, perky breasts on the edge of tumbling out of her bra.

"Maybe, but I don't want to manage. I don't want to spend the long, lonely nights with a vibrator thinking back to a savage god who claimed me in front of a few hundred other people."

Fisting my hands, I yanked on my restraints. "What do you want, Olivia?"

"I want you to tell me the truth," she said before licking her hand and grabbing my cock, stroking it with the perfect amount of pressure.

"I'd never lie to you. Never have, never will." I lifted my head enough to kiss the curve of her breast just above the lace of the bra.

"Then tell me you love me." Her words were barely a gasp, but it was enough.

"I can't." I dropped my head back to the bed.

"You don't love me?" she asked, her eyes wide like she had never even considered that was a possibility.

Smart girl.

"I didn't say that. But I can't say those words to you."

"Can't or won't?"

She let go of my cock and sat back. It was the sweetest torture.

“Won’t. Nothing good would come from admitting it.”

“Say it anyway.”

The look of determination in her eyes was so fucking sexy.

She wasn’t begging. She was demanding.

“No.” She may have been a formidable woman, but I was stronger, and I wouldn’t hurt her again.

“Say it,” she demanded, using the riding crop to smack my leg.

The sharp pain helped focus me.

“No, untie me immediately.”

“Not until you say it.” Tears started to fill her eyes.

It made my heart ache.

“No. Now untie me this instant or so help me God, I’ll ...”

“What?” she yelled. “What will you do, Marksens? You will lay on that bed doing nothing?”

“Olivia ...” I warned.

“No, I want to hear this.”

She dropped the riding crop and crossed her arms as her weight shifted on my still-hard cock. “What will you do? You have already shamed me and humiliated me in front of my family. My father and brother can’t even look me in the eye. You have taken my virginity and showed me what sex and passion could be like, ensuring that you are the only man I will ever want again. Because even being as innocent as I was, I knew that sex isn’t like that with other men. So what are you going to do? Stand on the sidelines and watch me marry another man?”

“Fuck!” I lost my temper and shouted at her as I pulled at the ropes.

“What the fuck do you want from me, Olivia? Do you want to hear how I can’t stand the idea of you marrying someone else? The thought of another man touching you makes me want to rip their throat out with my bare hands. Do

you want me to admit that I love you? Fine, I love you. You are the first thing I think of when I wake up, and I go to sleep every night wishing you were in my bed. It doesn't fucking matter."

"Of course, it matters," she yelled back.

She pulled her lingerie aside and slid down my cock, taking every single inch of me in her delectable heat in one smooth stroke that had me gasping for breath. "Because I love you too, and I don't want anyone else."

I couldn't take any more.

My resolve to stay away from her snapped along with my control ... and the ropes binding my wrists.

I grabbed her and pulled her down, thrusting up into her over and over.

"I want to marry you. I want you to be mine, always, but we can't," I said, letting the desperation I felt in my soul power my thrusts.

"Yes, yes," she panted as she came around me, and I followed after her quickly.

It was over too soon, but it didn't matter.

I wasn't done with her.

She wasn't going to be leaving this bed again until I had my fill of her.

I slid her to the side before sitting up and untying the ropes holding my feet, then lay next to her, the frayed ropes still surrounding us.

"Olivia ..." I started, realizing I couldn't keep her.

In fact, I needed to get her home before Luc thought I stole her again.

"Why can't we?" Her voice was quiet.

"Why can't we what?" I asked.

"Luc has his happily ever after. Why can't I have mine? Why can't I have you?" The way her bright eyes shone with

tears made my chest ache.

I wanted to fix everything for her always. It was too late. I had already ruined our chances.

“Because your family hates me,” I said, turning onto my side and cupping her cheek, brushing away her tears with my thumb. “How would that even work? I would go up to your father and say, ‘Hey, remember me? I am the man who kidnapped and defiled your daughter and then sent you pictures of it, but now I want to marry her.’”

She played with my chest hair as she sighed. “I am my own woman. You don’t need to ask my father for permission. What’s your next excuse?”

“Olivia, your family hates me.”

“Marksen, do you truly love me?” She grabbed my hand, holding it to her face as she nuzzled it.

“With everything I have,” I answered honestly. “I didn’t even know it was possible to feel like this.”

“Do you want to marry me? Tell the world that I belong to you and give me your last name?”

“Yes.”

“Do you want to fuck me every day for the rest of your life, make me your princess, or your dirty slut, and your good girl? Do you want to eventually have children with me?”

“Yes,” I growled out. Just the thought of her pregnant with my child made my dick harder.

“And what stands between a DuBois and what they want?” She smiled, knowing she’d made her point.

“Not a damn thing,” I answered with a growl before kissing her and rolling to my back, pulling her on top of me.

She didn’t know what she was getting into.

We would have a constant fight to be accepted by her family.

Luc and I were already getting ready to go to war.

We were supposed to be on the same side, but taking Olivia again, even with her consent, might change that.

She was worth the risk.

She was mine.

“Good.” She unhooked the bra she was wearing, exposing her tits to the cold air and my heated gaze. “Let me deal with my family. You just take what you want. And so will I.”

EPILOGUE



HARRISON

Slamming the taxi door shut, I loosened the ridiculous bolo tie with its ostentatious black diamond in the center I wore to avoid an argument with my mother. As if suffering through the Denim and Diamonds-themed event hadn't been enough.

With a nod to the overnight guard, I swiped my ID through the card reader and pushed the handle on the ballistic-rated glass door to enter the darkened labyrinth of cubicles and offices. Even without the muted security lighting I would know my way blindfolded. The dubious badge of honor of a workaholic who spent countless nights eating dinner out of a Chinese take-out box and sleeping on an expensive but hard-as-fuck leather office sofa.

The irony that I was worth billions, had a luxurious penthouse, and my own floor in my family's mansion on Seventieth Street all at my disposal was not lost on me every time I ruined a bespoke Italian jacket by rolling it up and using it as a pillow.

Money didn't matter to me.

This city. My work as a district attorney.

Having a purpose, protecting the weak, upholding the rule of law, were what mattered to me.

Until recently, that meant focusing on the scum of the earth, the lowlife criminal element.

Now it meant my own mother.

While her behaving like a cold-blooded reptile capable of eating her young was not a surprise, the psychopathic disregard she displayed for instigating a rivalry between the Manwarrings and DuBois that could have burned the fucking city down was alarming.

As was her still unknown ties to the Irish mob.

Shouldering through the final oak-paneled door which led to the executive corridor to my office, I considered my options.

Anything remotely public was obviously out. As was assuming she would cooperate with my investigation into the mob's activities. If being the cause of traumatizing an innocent woman in a dangerous kidnapping plot hadn't swayed her, nothing would. She had almost ruined Amelia's life. Had come damn near close to destroying poor Olivia's. If I didn't act fast to stop her, my baby sister Rose would be next.

Which left deception.

Fortunately, I was my mother's son.

And I knew just how to get her attention.

It meant temporarily suspending everything I believed in and sacrificing my soul to the demons of greed, pride, lust, and gluttony—otherwise known as the various matrons of New York high society.

I reached for my phone and dialed my mother's number.

The moment she answered, without preamble, I said, "I want you to find me a wife."

TO BE CONTINUED...

[My Only Hate](#)

[Gilded Decadence Series, Book Three](#)

ABOUT BLAKE HENSLEY

**The sinfully decadent dream project
of best friends and USA TODAY Bestselling authors,
Zoe Blake and Alta Hensley.**

Alta Hensley, renowned for her hot, dark, and dirty romances, showcases her distinctive blend of alpha heroes, captivating love stories, and scorching eroticism.

Meanwhile, Zoe Blake brings a touch of darkness and glamour to the series, featuring her signature style of possessive billionaires, taboo scenes, and unexpected twists.

Together, as Blake Hensley, they combine their storytelling prowess to deliver “Twice the Darkness,” promising sordid scandals, hidden secrets, and forbidden desires of New York’s jaded high society in their new series,

Gilded Decadence.

ALSO BY BLAKE HENSLEY

THE GILDED DECADENCE SERIES

A Dark Enemies to Lovers Romance

The More I Hate

Gilded Decadence Series, Book One

His family dared to challenge mine, so I am going to ruin them... starting with stealing his bride.

Only a cold-hearted villain would destroy an innocent bride's special day over a business deal gone bad...

Which is why I choose this precise moment to disrupt New York High Society's most anticipated wedding of the season.

As I am Luc Manwarring, II, billionaire heir to one of the most powerful families in the country, no one is brave enough to stop me.

My revenge plan is deceptively simple: humiliate the groom, then blackmail the bride's family into coercing the bride into marrying me instead.

My ruthless calculations do not anticipate my reluctant bride having so much fight and fire in her.

At every opportunity, she resists my dominance and control, even going so far as trying to escape my dark plans for her.

She is only supposed to be a means to an end, an unwilling player in my game of revenge.

But the more she challenges me, the more I begin to wonder... who is playing who?

Then Hate Me

Gilded Decadence Series, Book Two

He dared to steal my bride, so it's only fair I respond by kidnapping his innocent sister.

Only a monster with no morals would kidnap a woman from her brother's wedding...

Which was precisely what I've become, a monster bent on revenge.

After all, as the billionaire Marksen DuBois, renowned for being a jilted groom, my reputation and business were in tatters.

There was nothing more dangerous than a man possessing power, boundless resources, and a vendetta.

I would torment him with increasingly degrading photos of his precious sister as I held her captive and under my complete control.

She'd have no option but to yield to my every command if she wished to shield herself and her family from further disgrace.

She was just a captured pawn to be dominated, exploited, and discarded.

Yet the more ensnared we become in my twisted game of revenge, the more my suspicions grow.

As she fiercely counters my every move, I begin to question whether I'm the true pawn... ensnared by my queen.

My Only Hate

Gilded Decadence Series, Book Three

From our very first fiery encounter, I was tempted to fire my beautiful new assistant.

Right after I punished her for that defiant slap she delivered in response to my undeniably inappropriate kiss.

As Harrison Astrid, New York's formidable District Attorney, distractions were a luxury I couldn't afford.

Forming a shaky alliance with the Manwarrings and the Dubois, I was ensnared in a dangerous cat-and-mouse game.

As I strive to thwart my mother's cunning manipulations and her deadly alliance with the Irish mob.

Yet, every time I cross paths with my assistant, our mutual animosity surges into a near-savage need to control and dominate her.

I am a man who demands obedience, especially from subordinates.

Her stubbornness fuels my urge to assert my dominance, my need to show her I'm not just her boss—I'm her master.

Unfortunately the fiancé I'm to accept to play high society's charade, complicates things.

So I rein in my desire and resist the attraction between us.

Until the Irish mob targets my pretty little assistant... targets what's mine.

Now there isn't a force on earth that will keep me from tearing the city apart to find her.

Fair Love of Hate

Gilded Decadence Series, Book Four

First rule of being a bodyguard, don't f*ck the woman you're protecting.

And I want to break that rule so damn bad I can practically taste her.

She's innocent, sheltered, and spoiled.

As Reid Taylor, former Army sergeant and head of security for the Manwarrings, the last thing I should be doing is babysitting my boss's little sister.

I definitely shouldn't be fantasizing about pinning her down, spreading her thighs and...

It should help that she fights my protection at every turn.

Disobeying my rules. Running away from me. Talking back with that sexy, smart mouth of hers.

But it doesn't. It just makes me want her more.

I want to bend her over and claim her, hard and rough, until she begs for mercy.

That is a dangerous line I cannot cross.

She is an heiress, the precious daughter of one of the most powerful, multi-billionaire families in New York.

And I'm just her bodyguard, an employee. It would be the ultimate societal taboo.

But now her family is forcing her into an arranged marriage, and I'm not sure I'll be able to contain my rising rage at the idea of another man touching her.

A Hate at First

Gilded Decadence Series, Book Five

The moment she slapped me, I knew I'd chosen the right bride.

To be fair, I had just stolen her entire inheritance.

As Lucian Manwarring, billionaire patriarch of the powerful Manwarring family, my word is law.

She's a beautiful and innocent heiress, raised to be the perfect society trophy wife.

Although far too young for me, that won't stop me from claiming her as my new prized possession.

What I hadn't planned on was her open defiance of me.

Far from submissive and obedient; she is stubborn, outspoken and headstrong.

She tries to escape my control and fights my plan to force her down the aisle.

I am not accustomed to being disobeyed.

While finding it mildly amusing at first, it is past time she accepts her fate.

She will be my bride even if I have to ruthlessly dominate and punish her to get what I want.

ABOUT ZOE BLAKE

Zoe Blake is the USA Today Bestselling Author of the romantic suspense saga *The Cavaliere Billionaire Legacy* inspired by her own heritage as well as her obsession with jewelry, travel, and the salacious gossip of history's most infamous families.

She delights in writing Dark Romance books filled with overly possessive billionaires, taboo scenes, and unexpected twists. She usually spends her ill-gotten gains on martinis, travels, and red lipstick. Since she can barely boil water, she's lucky enough to be married to a sexy Chef.



ALSO BY ZOE BLAKE

CAVALIERI BILLIONAIRE LEGACY

A Dark Enemies to Lovers Romance

Scandals of the Father

Cavalieri Billionaire Legacy, Book One

Being attracted to her wasn't wrong... but acting on it would be.

As the patriarch of the powerful and wealthy Cavalieri family, my choices came with consequences for everyone around me.

The roots of my ancestral, billionaire-dollar winery stretch deep into the rich, Italian soil, as does our legacy for ruthlessness and scandal.

It wasn't the fact she was half my age that made her off limits.

Nothing was off limits for me.

A wounded bird, caught in a trap not of her own making, she posed no risk to me.

My obsessive desire to possess her was the real problem.

For both of us.

But now that I've seen her, tasted her lips, I can't let her go.

Whether she likes it or not, she needs my protection.

I'm doing this for her own good, yet, she fights me at every turn.

Refusing the luxury I offer, desperately trying to escape my grasp.

I need to teach her to obey before the dark rumors of my past reach her.

Ruin her.

She cannot find out what I've done, not before I make her mine.

Sins of the Son

Cavalieri Billionaire Legacy, Book Two

She's hated me for years... now it's past time to give her a reason to.

When you are a son, and one of the heirs, to the legacy of the Cavalieri name, you need to be more vicious than your enemies.

And sometimes, the lines get blurred.

Years ago, they tried to use her as a pawn in a revenge scheme against me.

Even though I cared about her, I let them treat her as if she were nothing.

I was too arrogant and self-involved to protect her then.

But I'm here now. Ready to risk my life tracking down every single one of them.

They'll pay for what they've done as surely as I'll pay for my sins against her.

Too bad it won't be enough for her to let go of her hatred of me,

To get her to stop fighting me.

Because whether she likes it or not, I have the power, wealth, and connections to keep her by my side

And every intention of ruthlessly using all three to make her mine.

Secrets of the Brother

Cavalieri Billionaire Legacy, Book Three

We were not meant to be together... then a dark twist of fate stepped in, and we're the ones who will pay for it.

As the eldest son and heir of the Cavalieri name, I inherit a great deal more than a billion dollar empire.

I receive a legacy of secrets, lies, and scandal.

After enduring a childhood filled with malicious rumors about my father, I have fallen prey to his very same sin.

I married a woman I didn't love out of a false sense of family honor.

Now she has died under mysterious circumstances.

And I am left to play the widowed groom.

For no one can know the truth about my wife...

Especially her sister.

The only way to protect her from danger is to keep her close, and yet, her very nearness tortures me.

She is my sister in name only, but I have no right to desire her.

Not after what I have done.

It's too much to hope she would understand that it was all for her.

It's always been about her.

Only her.

I am, after all, my father's son.

And there is nothing on this earth more ruthless than a Cavalieri man in love.

Seduction of the Patriarch

Cavalieri Billionaire Legacy, Book Four

With a single gunshot, she brings the violent secrets of my buried past into the present.

She may not have pulled the trigger, but she still has blood on her hands.

And I know some very creative ways to make her pay for it.

I am as ruthless as my Cavalieri ancestors, who forged our powerful family legacy.

But no fortune is built without spilling blood.

I earn a reputation as a dangerous man to cross... and make enemies along the way.

So to protect those I love, I hand over the mantle of patriarch to my brother and move to northern Italy.

For years, I stay in the shadows...

Then a vengeful mafia syndicate attacks my family.

Now nothing will prevent me from seeking vengeance on those responsible.

And I don't give a damn who I hurt in the process... including her.

Whether it takes seduction, punishment, or both, I intend to manipulate her as a means to an end.

Yet, the more my little kitten shows her claws, the more I want to make her purr.
My plan is to coerce her into helping me topple the mafia syndicate, and then
retreat into the shadows.

But if she keeps fighting me... I might just have to take her with me.

Scorn of the Betrothed

Cavalieri Billionaire Legacy, Book Five

**A union forged in vengeance, bound by hate... and beneath it all, a twisted
game of desire and deception.**

In the heart of the Cavalieri family, I am the son destined for a loveless marriage.

The true legacy of my family, my birthright ties me to a woman I despise.

The daughter of the mafia boss who nearly ended my family.

She is my future wife, and I am her unwelcome groom.

The looming wedding is a beacon of hope for our families.

A promise of peace in a world fraught with danger and deception.

We were meant to be the bridge between two powerful legacies.

The only thing we share is a mutual hatred.

She is a prisoner to her families' ambitions, desperate for a way out.

My duty is to guard her, to ensure she doesn't escape her gilded cage.

But every moment spent with her, every spark of anger, adds fuel to the growing
fire of desire between us.

We're trapped in a dangerous duel of passion and fury.

The more I try to tame her, the more she ignites me.

Hatred and desire become blurred.

Our impending marriage becomes a twisted game.

But as the wedding draws near, my suspicions grow.

My bride is not who she claims to be.

IVANOV CRIME FAMILY TRILOGY

A Dark Mafia Romance

Savage Vow

Ivanov Crime Family, Book One

Gregor & Samara's story

I took her innocence as payment.

She was far too young and naïve to be betrothed to a monster like me.

I would bring only pain and darkness into her sheltered world.

That's why she ran.

I should've just let her go...

She never asked to marry into a powerful Russian mafia family.

None of this was her choice.

Unfortunately for her, I don't care.

I own her... and after three years of searching... I've found her.
My runaway bride was about to learn disobedience has consequences... punishing
ones.

Having her in my arms and under my control had become an obsession.
Nothing was going to keep me from claiming her before the eyes of God and man.
She's finally mine... and I'm never letting her go.

Vicious Oath

Ivanov Crime Family, Book One

Damien & Yelena's story

When I give an order, I expect it to be obeyed.

She's too smart for her own good, and it's going to get her killed.
Against my better judgement, I put her under the protection of my powerful
Russian mafia family.

So imagine my anger when the little minx ran.
For three long years I've been on her trail, always one step behind.
Finding and claiming her had become an obsession.
It was getting harder to rein in my driving need to possess her... to own her.

But now the chase is over.

I've found her.

Soon she will be mine.

And I plan to make it official, even if I have to drag her kicking and screaming to
the altar.

This time... there will be no escape from me.

Betrayed Honor

Ivanov Crime Family, Book One

Mikhail & Nadia's story

Her innocence was going to get her killed.

That was if I didn't get to her first.
She's the protected little sister of the powerful Ivanov Russian mafia family - the
very definition of forbidden.
It's always been my job, as their Head of Security, to watch over her but never to
touch.

That ends today.

She disobeyed me and put herself in danger.

It was time to take her in hand.

I'm the only one who can save her and I will fight anyone who tries to stop me,
including her brothers.

Honor and loyalty be damned.

She's mine now.

[RUTHLESS OBSESSION SERIES](#)

A Dark Mafia Romance

Sweet Cruelty

Ruthless Obsession Series, Book One

Dimitri & Emma's story

It was an innocent mistake.

She knocked on the wrong door.

Mine.

If I were a better man, I would've just let her go.

But I'm not.

I'm a cruel bastard.

I ruthlessly claimed her virtue for my own.

It should have been enough.

But it wasn't.

I needed more.

Craved it.

She became my obsession.

Her sweetness and purity taunted my dark soul.

The need to possess her nearly drove me mad.

A Russian arms dealer had no business pursuing a naive librarian student.

She didn't belong in my world.

I would bring her only pain.

But it was too late...

She was mine and I was keeping her.

Sweet Depravity

Ruthless Obsession Series, Book Two

Vaska & Mary's story

The moment she opened those gorgeous red lips to tell me no, she was mine.

I was a powerful Russian arms dealer and she was an innocent schoolteacher.

If she had a choice, she'd run as far away from me as possible.

Unfortunately for her, I wasn't giving her one.

I wasn't just going to take her; I was going to take over her entire world.

Where she lived.

What she ate.

Where she worked.

All would be under my control.

Call it obsession.

Call it depravity.

I don't give a damn... as long as you call her mine.

Sweet Savagery

Ruthless Obsession Series, Book Three

Ivan & Dylan's Story

I was a savage bent on claiming her as punishment for her family's mistakes.

As a powerful Russian Arms dealer, no one steals from me and gets away with it.

She was an innocent pawn in a dangerous game.

She had no idea the package her uncle sent her from Russia contained my stolen money.

If I were a good man, I would let her return the money and leave.

If I were a gentleman, I might even let her keep some of it just for frightening her.

As I stared down at the beautiful living doll stretched out before me like a virgin sacrifice,

I thanked God for every sin and misdeed that had blackened my cold heart.

I was not a good man.

I sure as hell wasn't a gentleman... and I had no intention of letting her go.

She was mine now.

And no one takes what's mine.

Sweet Brutality

Ruthless Obsession Series, Book Four

Maxim & Carinna's story

The more she fights me, the more I want her.

It's that beautiful, sassy mouth of hers.

It makes me want to push her to her knees and dominate her, like the brutal savage I am.

As a Russian Arms dealer, I should not be ruthlessly pursuing an innocent college student like her, but that would not stop me.

A twist of fate may have brought us together, but it is my twisted obsession that will hold her captive as my own treasured possession.

She is mine now.

I dare you to try and take her from me.

Sweet Ferocity

Ruthless Obsession Series, Book Five

Luka & Katie's Story

I was a mafia mercenary only hired to find her, but now I'm going to keep her.

She is a Russian mafia princess, kidnapped to be used as a pawn in a dangerous territory war.

Saving her was my job. Keeping her safe had become my obsession.

Every move she makes, I am in the shadows, watching.

I was like a feral animal: cruel, violent, and selfishly out for my own needs. Until her.

Now, I will make her mine by any means necessary.
I am her protector, but no one is going to protect her from me.

Sweet Intensity

Ruthless Obsession Series, Book Six

Antonius & Brynn's Story

She couldn't possibly have known the danger she would be in the moment she innocently accepted the job.

She was too young for a man my age, barely in her twenties. Far too pure and untouched.

Too bad that wasn't going to stop me.

The moment I laid eyes on her, I claimed her.

She would be mine... by any means necessary.

I owned the most elite Gambling Club in Chicago, which was a secret front for my true business as a powerful crime boss for the Russian Mafia.

And she was a fragile little bird, who had just flown straight into my open jaws.

Naïve and sweet, she was a tasty morsel I couldn't resist biting.

My intense drive to dominate and control her had become an obsession.

I would ruthlessly use my superior strength and connections to take over her life.

The harder she resisted, the more feral and savage I would become.

She needed to understand... she was mine now.

Mine.

Sweet Severity

Ruthless Obsession Series, Book Seven

Macarius & Phoebe's Story

Had she crashed into any other man's car, she could have walked away—but she hit mine.

Upon seeing the bruises on her wrist, I struggled to contain my rage.

Despite her objections, I refused to allow her to leave.

Whoever hurt this innocent beauty would pay dearly.

As a Russian Mafia crime boss who owns Chicago's most elite gambling club, I have very creative and painful methods of exacting revenge.

She seems too young and naive to be out on her own in such a dangerous world.

Needing a nanny, I decided to claim her for the role.

She might resist my severe, domineering discipline, but I won't give her a choice in the matter.

She needs a protector, and I'd be damned if it were anyone but me.

Resisting the urge to claim her will test all my restraint.

It's a battle I'm bound to lose.

With each day, my obsession and jealousy intensify.

It's only a matter of time before my control snaps...and I make her mine.

Mine.

Sweet Animosity

Ruthless Obsession, Book Eight

Varlaam & Amber's Story

I never asked for an assistant, and if I had, I sure as hell wouldn't have chosen her.

With her sharp tongue and lack of discipline, what she needs is a firm hand, not a job.

The more she tests my limits, the more tempted I am to bend her over my knee. As a Russian Mafia boss and owner of Chicago's most elite gambling club, I can't afford distractions from her antics.

Or her secrets.

For I suspect, my innocent new assistant is hiding something.

And I know just how to get to the truth.

It's high time she understands who holds the power in our relationship.

To ensure I get what I desire, I'll keep her close, controlling her every move.

Except I am no longer after information—I want her mind, body and soul.

She underestimated the stakes of our dangerous game and now owes a heavy price.

As payment I will take her freedom.

She's mine now.

Mine.

ABOUT ALTA HENSLEY

Alta Hensley is a USA TODAY Bestselling author of hot, dark and dirty romance. She is also an Amazon Top 10 bestselling author. Being a multi-published author in the romance genre, Alta is known for her dark, gritty alpha heroes, captivating love stories, hot eroticism, and engaging tales of the constant struggle between dominance and submission.

She lives in Astoria, Oregon with her husband, two daughters, and an Australian Shepherd. When she isn't walking the coastline, and drinking beer in her favorite breweries, she is writing about villains who always get their love story and happily ever after.



ALSO BY ALTA HENSLEY

HEATHENS HOLLOW SERIES

A Dark Stalker Billionaire Romance

Heathens

She invited the darkness in, so she'll have no one else to blame when I come for her.

The Hunt.

It is a sinister game of submission. She'll run. I'll chase.

And when I catch her, it will be savage. Untamed. Primal.

I will be the beast from her darkest fantasies.

I should be protecting her, but instead I've been watching her. Stalking her.

She's innocent. Forbidden. The daughter of my best friend.

But she chose this.

And even if she made a mistake, even if she wants to run, to escape, it's far too late.

She's mine now.

GODS AMONG MEN SERIES

A Dark Billionaire Romance

Villains Are Made

I know how villains are made.

I've watched their secrets rise from the ashes and emerge from the shadows.

As part of a family tree with roots so twisted, I'm strangled by their vine.

Imprisoned in a world of decadence and sin, I've seen Gods among men.

And he is one of them.

He is the villain.

He is the enemy who demands to be the lover.

He is the monster who has shown me pleasure but gives so much pain.

But something has changed...

He's different.

Darker.

Wildly possessive as his obsession with me grows to an inferno that can't be controlled.

Yes... he is the villain.

And he is the end of my beginning.

Monsters Are Hidden

The problem with secrets is they create powerful monsters.

And even more dangerous enemies.

He's the keeper of all his family's secrets, the watcher of all.

He knows what I've done, what I've risked... the deadly choice I made.

The tangled vines of his mighty family tree are strangling me.

There is no escape.

I am locked away, captive to his twisted obsession and demands.

If I run, my hell will never end.

If I stay, he will devour me.

My only choice is to dare the monster to come out into the light,
before his darkness destroys us both.

Yes... he is the monster in hiding.

And he is the end of my beginning.

Vipers Are Forbidden

It's impossible to enter a pit full of snakes and not get bit.

Until you meet me, that is.

My venom is far more toxic than the four men who have declared me their enemy.

They seek vengeance and launch a twisted game of give and take.

I'll play in their dark world, because it's where I thrive.

I'll dance with their debauchery, for I surely know the steps.

But then I discover just how wrong I am. Their four, not only matches, but beats,
my one.

With each wicked move they make, they become my obsession.

I crave them until they consume all thought.

The temptation to give them everything they desire becomes too much.

I'm entering their world, and there is no light to guide my way. My blindness full of
lust will be my defeat.

Yes... I am the viper and am forbidden.

But they are the end of my beginning.

SPIKED ROSES BILLIONAIRE'S CLUB SERIES

A Dark Billionaires Romance

Bastards & Whiskey

I sit amongst the Presidents, Royalty, the Captains of Industry, and the wealthiest
men in the world.

We own Spiked Roses—an exclusive, membership only establishment in New
Orleans where money or lineage is the only way in. It is for the gentlemen who own
everything and never hear the word no.

Sipping on whiskey, smoking cigars, and conducting multi-million dollar deals in
our own personal playground of indulgence, there isn't anything I can't have... and
that includes HER. I can also have HER if I want.

And I want.

Villains & Vodka

My life is one long fevered dream, balancing between being killed or killing.

The name Harley Crow is one to be feared.

I am an assassin.

A killer.

The villain.

I own it. I choose this life. Hell, I crave it. I hunger for it. The smell of fear makes me hard and is the very reason the blood runs through my veins.

Until I meet her...

Marlowe Masters.

Her darkness matches my own.

In my twisted world of dancing along the jagged edge of the blade...

She changes everything.

No weapon can protect me from the kind of death she will ultimately deliver.

Scoundrels & Scotch

I'll stop at nothing to own her.

I'm a collector of dolls.

All kinds of dolls.

So beautiful and sexy, they become my art.

So perfect and flawless, my art galleries are flooded by the wealthy to gaze upon my possessions with envy.

So fragile and delicate, I keep them tucked away for safety.

The dark and torrid tales of Drayton's Dolls run rampant through the rich and famous, and all but a few are true.

Normally I share my dolls for others to play with or watch on display.

But not my special doll.

No, not her.

Ivy is the most precious doll of all.

She's mine. All mine.

Devils & Rye

Forbidden fruit tastes the sweetest.

It had been years since I had seen her.

Years since I last saw those eyes with pure, raw innocence.

So much time had passed since I lusted after what I knew I should resist.

But she was so right.

And I was so wrong.

To claim her as mine was breaking the rules. Boundaries should not be broken. But temptation weakens my resolve.

With the pull of my dark desires...

I know that I can't hide from my sinful thoughts—and actions—forever.

Beasts & Bourbon

My royal blood flows black with twisted secrets.

I am a beast who wears a crown.
Heir to a modern kingdom cloaked in corruption and depravities.
The time has come to claim my princess.
An innocent hidden away from my dark world.
Till now.
Her initiation will require sacrifice and submission.
There is no escaping the chains which bind her to me.
Surrendering to my torment, as well as my protection, is her only path to survival.
In the end...

She will be forever mine.

Sinners & Gin

My power is absolute. My rules are law.
Structure.
Obedience.
Discipline.
I am in charge, and what I say goes. Black and white with no gray.
No one dares break the rules in my dark and twisted world... until her. Until she
makes me cross my own jagged lines.
She's untouched. Perfection. Pure.
Forbidden.
She tests my limits in all ways.
There is only one option left.
I will claim her as mine no matter how many rules are broken.

THANK YOU

Stormy Night Publications would like to thank you for your interest in our books.

If you liked this book (or even if you didn't), we would really appreciate you leaving a review on the site where you purchased it. Reviews provide useful feedback for us and our authors, and this feedback (both positive comments and constructive criticism) allows us to work even harder to make sure we provide the content our customers want to read.