



A Man of Power

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Description: There's only one thing billionaire Congressman Sebastian North can't have, and her name is Alexis Martin.

In a city of kings and kingmakers, Sebastian made a deal with the devil. He vowed to abide by rules when he joined a secret society that promised him power beyond his wildest dreams. Only his new staff member has him wanting to break all the rules. When Alexis takes an opportunity to start her career as a staffer for Sebastian, she's well aware of his enticing dark side. From day one, she knows only one thing for sure, she can't fall for him. But in this city of power players, women are going missing and dirty money is exchanging hands. Piece by piece, Alexis begins to put the puzzle together, and the revelations have Sebastian questioning every choice he's made.

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Prologue

Sebastian

10 Years Earlier...

“I’m so fucking wasted!” Conner yells as he nearly collides with a tree, overcorrects, and begins to stumble into a bush before Aiden yanks him back up.

“Shit, Aid. Been working out?” I ask as I laugh and spill some of the liquor from my flask. “Fuck.”

I lick the clear liquid that is running down my hand.

“It’s fucking creepy back here,” Aiden states as he looks around.

We’ve decided to take the Rock Creek Park trail from the frat house back to our apartment. It’s the beginning of our junior year at one of the country’s most prestigious universities. We spent last semester living in the frat house but decided we wanted our own place. Of course, when you have rich mommies and daddies, you can get a pretty nice fucking apartment. So, we live farther from campus in a penthouse. The chicks fucking dig it. It’s a pussy magnet.

I laugh at Aiden’s unease. He’s the brilliant one of our tripod. Conner is the muscle who keeps us safe. And I’m the cruise director. Together, we are unstoppable. We’ve been that way since the very beginning of our friendship freshman year.

“What? It is. Did you hear about all those girls that have gone missing lately back on the park trails?” he asks.

I shrug. I have. My female friends are leery of coming back here alone. I can’t blame them.

I hear a branch crack and I look around, sobering up at the sound. Some birds squawk and fly overhead. The moonlight is dimmed by a cloud, but I can see their dark figures in the sky. Crows. The air suddenly feels heavy.

“Did you hear that?” Aiden asks. Conner is about five steps ahead of us pretending to dance as he walks.

“I don’t hear shit,” he says before spinning around and continuing to salsa.

I hear another twig snap and then a groan. “What the fuck?” I murmur.

“It’s probably just people having sex like last time,” Conner whispers, only he’s fucking drunk and his whisper is more like a yell.

I take two steps forward and glare at him. He rolls his eyes and continues swaying. I don’t even want to know how much alcohol he’s had to make his giant frame that inebriated.

I hear another moan, but not a moan of pleasure. Aiden stops and looks at me. I nod at him, telling him that I, too, hear it. He turns on a small flashlight key chain he has because his grandmother thinks he went to school in some crime-infested city; she’s not totally wrong.

We look around as the light slowly follows the sound. And then we see it, a body part.

Slowly, we start stepping forward. The body is revealed an inch at a time. A foot. A calf. A knee. A hip. A belly. A breast. A neck.

It's a young woman who looks to be our age. She's naked and moaning. I look around trying to find an injury, but I don't see one.

Want-to-be doctor Aiden falls to his knees. "Are you OK?" he asks the girl.

Her eyes are dilated and she's looking around and whimpers when she tries to focus on us.

"Fuck, call nine-one-one," he says to me.

I pull out my phone and make the call. The girl struggles to speak but it's like she's paralyzed or something.

She's awake but not responding as she should.

Conner comes up behind us. "Oh, fuck," he manages. He starts removing his flannel shirt because Conner wanted to look like a lumberjack tonight. Literally, that fuckface said he wanted to look like a lumberjack so the ladies would climb his wood. Asshat. But faced with a damsel in distress, he suddenly remembers his good manners. His shirt is quickly placed over the woman.

I can hear sirens in the background.

I hold the woman's hand. "If you can hear me, you're going to be OK. The police are on the way."

Aiden is meanwhile taking hold of her wrist and looking at his watch. "Her pulse is fast, but she's breathing. She must have either taken something or been drugged."

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Her eyes blink and we all look at her, but she still doesn't speak. Tears stream down her face. Fuck. She looks a hot mess, and I only hope she wasn't violated in any way. Thoughts of the little sister I lost only three years ago, play through my mind as I squeeze her hand.

I see the red and blue lights of a police car.

"Conner, go get them," I say as I look up toward the flashing lights. He nods and takes off running. I look back down at the eyes that are very much alive but also look not awake like she's sleepwalking. Kara used to sleepwalk.

"It's going to be OK," I murmur.

I hear Conner coming back and look over my shoulder to find two cops and two EMTs following him. We all step back as the medics start to do their job.

"Who found her?" a cop asks.

"We all did, sir," I answer as I start to explain what happened. When we show him our college IDs, I see recognition on his face. He takes our statements and sends us on our way as the woman is loaded into an ambulance that has now pulled down the trail.

"I hope she's going to be OK," Aiden says, running a hand through his hair.

"There's nothing more we can do," I state. Conner and Aiden nod. Any happy, post-party vibes are long gone. We somberly walk home, each in our thoughts. We've had

a lot of experiences together in the less than two years we've been friends, but I hope this is the only time we have to rescue someone.

Chapter 1

Sebastian

Present Day

This is the worst fucking idea that I've had this week. And that is saying something.

I straighten my tie and stand as Harriet knocks and opens the door at the same time. I groan. If it was anyone but her, I'd ream them out for entering before I responded. But not with Harriet. She runs this office. I know it, and she does, too.

"She's in the waiting room," Harriet states dryly as she walks toward me and reaches out to my tie, adjusting it to her liking. She brushes some invisible lint off my arms as she lowers her hands and looks up at me with a nod of approval. "I still don't know why you want to do the interview solo. At least let me sit in. I already know her. I can ask questions you might overlook."

I look down at the lady who runs my life. The same one who ran my father's life before he was a senator. She's not wrong, but for once, I want to do this by myself. I've had my guard up lately. I want all my staff cleared through me for the time being.

"First, I would never overlook a question. We both know that. And second, I want to see her reactions without you present. It's important that she can hold her own when speaking to me alone," I point out as I walk back around and sit in my chair. My fingers grip the carved cherrywood of the armrests. It was my grandfather's chair and one of my earliest memories was coming to this very building and climbing onto it,

so I could pretend to be powerful, just like him.

“I know, I know. I just...you have a lot going on and it doesn’t hurt to have me there.”

I study her for a long moment. Harriet is getting up in age. I rack my brain as I try to remember how old she is...seventy, seventy-five? She’s been a fixture in congressional offices longer than I’ve been alive. She would have made an amazing congresswoman, but she never had the desire to run for office. Instead, she worked her way up as a staffer and then a chief of staff for my father, and now one for me. She’s a tiny wisp of a woman, but she can stare down most imposing politician without batting an eye. She’s made of steel, and if she could, she would spit fire. She’s also incredibly kind to those that deserve it. And her loyalty is probably her best asset and her biggest weakness.

“Just, bring her in,” I demand. “I have a meeting in thirty minutes. I don’t have time to debate this.”

“As you wish,” she replies as she walks to the door. “You do remember her name, don’t you?”

I falter for a moment, trying to recall.

She sighs. “I know she was just an intern, but for fuck’s sake, Bastian, she worked in your office for a whole goddamn year.”

I give her a pointed look that says I don’t have time for this shit.

“Alexis Martin, you ass. Her name is Alexis Martin. She just finished college a few months ago. She interned for us two years ago. She’s bright, and I like her, so don’t fuck it up,” Harriet says as she looks over her shoulder at me with a stare that would

bring lesser men to their knees, but not me.

“Show her in.” I motion to the doorway where Harriet stands. She nods and closes the door behind her.

I try to remember this young woman. We’ve had so many interns over the past few years. I admit to not paying attention. I’ve seen too many of my colleagues fucking their interns, and it never ends well. It doesn’t help that I’m less than ten years older than most of them.

Clearly, she must have been a great intern if my staff want me to hire her. I turn my chair and gaze out the window at the Capitol building. It was part good fortune and part knowing the right people that landed me this office with the amazing view. I steeple my fingers and contemplate how I’ll be handling my meeting this afternoon. Harriet’s knock brings me out of my thoughts.

“Come in,” I answer as I swivel my chair. The door opens and in walks a young woman that could easily be mistaken for a model. She’s breathtaking. She’s taller than Harriet, but as I stand to greet her, I notice even in those ridiculously sexy heels she’s still a few inches shorter than me. She has long mahogany hair that has a slight wave to it. Her eyes seem to defy logic. They aren’t one color, instead the inner part of the iris is a caramel brown which blends into a vivid aquamarine blue with a dark gray rim around the edge. Had I even looked at her when she interned here? I would never forget a set of eyes like that.

“Congressman, thank you so much for taking the time to meet with me,” she says, her voice slightly raspier and deeper than I would have expected. Fuck, why does even her voice have to be sexy?

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“Sure,” I say as I shake her hand. Her fingers are long and elegant. My mother would comment that she had pianist hands if she were here.

“Please, have a seat,” I add, motioning to the chair in front of my desk.

She takes the seat and looks at me. Unlike many young people, she doesn’t look away as I stare intently at her. She’s either arrogant as fuck or curious. I’m hoping it’s the latter.

“You probably don’t recognize me,” she starts. When I don’t immediately answer, she continues. “I had shorter blonde hair, and I’m pretty sure I almost always wore my glasses because I ran out of contacts and couldn’t get home to get more until after spring semester.” She blushes slightly. I don’t bother telling her that even if her hair had been bright blue, I probably wouldn’t have noticed her because she was a peon, a mere worker bee in my office. She looks past me at my view.

I look back toward my window. “I never get tired of it,” I admit as my gaze follows hers to the historic building through the window.

“How could you? It’s a great view. To be able to see that every day is...well, you’re lucky.”

I turn back to her and watch her look of awe as she gazes upon the Capitol. Shit, have I misread her? I seldom misread people, but maybe she’s one of those idealistic young interns who thinks she can come in here and change the world. I don’t need another one of those. I need someone who is competent, who can research the hell out of a topic for me, and who writes on-point summaries that tell me everything I need

to know.

“What do you see when you look out my window?” I ask as I lean back in my chair.

She looks past me again. “History. Over two hundred years of American history. Did you know that the water used to come all the way up the Capitol building? When it was just the north wing, it housed Congress, the Supreme Court, the Library of Congress, and even the local courts.” She leans in and grins, her eyes sparkling with mischief. “Rumor has it that some of the congressmen used to go skinny-dipping right outside the building at night.”

Her comment is so unexpected, I laugh on reflex. “Is that so?”

Her face pinkens again, and she nods. She leans back in her chair and looks at me with those mesmerizing eyes. “But that’s not all I see.”

OK. Now, I’m intrigued. I motion for her to go on.

“Power. I see power everywhere.”

Well, maybe there is more to Ms. Martin than I realized.

“Go on.”

“I know what you need. I’ve seen your office at work. I know the staff. I know how things function. You can review my resume if you like”—she pulls out a piece of paper and sets it on my desk not looking away from me—“but what it won’t tell you is that I excel at research, writing, and figuring out people. I know for a fact that I’m the only former intern of yours that has applied for this position. I’m not here to win you over. I don’t need accolades for my achievements. I just want to be part of this.” She motions around us. “As ugly and brutal as things...and people...can be here,

there's a sort of chaotic beauty to it all. I thrive on that chaotic beauty."

I look down at her resume. She's smart. She double-majored in political science and communications at a local university. She's originally from the Midwest. And Harriet loves her.

"Harriet speaks highly of you," I state, deciding not to beat around the bush because why the fuck should I?

She shrugs. "She knows me. I mean, I wouldn't have even gotten the internship if it wasn't for her."

I raise an eyebrow.

"My college roommate grew up next door to her. She introduced us at a neighborhood party when we were visiting her parents for the weekend. Harriet mentioned that she needed an intern. I mentioned I wanted to intern. And...well, you can put the rest of it together."

"You're friends with Debbie and Mike's kid?" I ask.

I can see the look of surprise on her face. I'm guessing she is both surprised that I even know who Harriet's neighbors are, and also that I took the time to learn their names. But what she doesn't know is that learning and remembering names and faces has been ground into me since birth, which makes the fact that I couldn't remember her even more frustrating.

"Y-yes," she stammers. "Erin."

I nod. "I didn't realize Erin was all grown up." I pause and look back at her resume. "I take it that the fact you are attending law school at night is another factor in your

desire to work here?”

She frowns. “No, not really. Although, the law school is close by, so I could work until class each evening.”

“Law school is intense. Do you really think you can handle this job and school?”

Her glare more than answers my question. “Yes. I double-majored, worked part-time, and volunteered in college. So, maintaining a day job while I take a few night classes shouldn’t be a huge reach for me.”

She’s defensive. I wonder why. Does she think I’m insulting her intelligence?

“I had to ask. I need someone who can be here when I need them here. Days, nights, weekends.” I’m about to dismiss her when she opens her mouth to speak.

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“What you need is a staffer who can do their job well and make you look good. I am capable of both,” she states, her eyes narrowing on mine.

I fight the smirk that threatens to emerge. Something about her intrigues me, and I decide to take a chance on her. That decision shocks me a little because I don’t take many chances. “Very well, Ms. Martin. Consider this a probationary offer. Six months. We’ll reassess then.”

Her eyes that were fixed on my lips, fly to my eyes. “Really?” she squeaks.

I nod and stand, adjusting my tie. “Really.” I press a button on my phone. “Harriet, Ms. Martin will be joining our staff. Please come in here and see to it that she gets everything she needs.”

I hold out my hand to her once more and she accepts it. “Welcome aboard.”

“Thank you! Thank you so much!” she replies with a big smile on her face. I’m once again taken aback by her beauty.

“You’re—”

Fucking Harriet throws open my door. “Oh good. Glad that is settled. Alexis, honey, come with me. Let’s get you all set up.”

“Welcome,” I finish as I give Harriet a hard look.

Alexis waves at me as Harriet practically pulls her from my office, leaving me in

silence as the floral scent of her perfume fills my nostrils. She's gorgeous, and I should have sent her away. At least I was smart enough to give myself an out in six months. I've seen too many issues between staffers and their bosses. I don't have time for that shit. Hell, I don't have time for anything nowadays, especially not the tempting piece of ass that just left my office.

Chapter2

Alexis

I drop my bag onto the kitchen island. Whitney looks up from her computer, and Erin turns from where she's stirring something in a pot on the stove. Whitney Wellington and Erin Lowry have been my best friends since the first week of college. They couldn't be more different than me or each other. Erin is the strait-laced, full-time law school daughter of a lobbyist and professor. Whitney is from old money, yet she's currently getting her master's in anthropology, her thesis is on minority fisherman communities in the Chesapeake Bay. Her parents think she should be in law school with Erin and me. Her parents also never talk to her except on holidays and are never home. She was raised by a nanny. And then there's me, a normal middle-class, Midwestern suburban girl, who decided to pursue her obsession with politics and study in the nation's capital. On paper, we shouldn't even know each other, but in reality, we are the perfect trifecta.

"So?" Whitney asks as she pushes her glasses up her nose.

I look down at the floor.

"Oh no. Tell me that asshole didn't turn you down," Erin states as she sets down a spoon and starts to walk over to hug me because she's a hugger. Erin despises Sebastian North. I think she overheard a conversation at a party once and henceforth labeled him a player and an asshole.

I slowly lift my head up and grin. “Gotcha! He gave me the job on the spot!”

Erin’s eyes practically bug out of her head, while Whitney walks around the island and hugs me. “Seriously?” Erin asks.

I nod. “Harriet wasn’t sure what he was going to do. He insisted on interviewing me himself.”

Erin gives me a pointed look, and I roll my eyes. “Not like that, you perv. He actually interviewed me. It was...interesting.”

Whitney pulls away from me and cocks her head to one side while Erin’s hands go to her hips. I chuckle at my friends’ overprotectiveness. “Geez, ladies, back the fuck down. He didn’t look up my skirt, he didn’t say anything crude, and he didn’t make an ass of himself. I’ll admit, I have never been in a room with him alone before and it was...unnerving. He’s very...captivating.”

Erin sighs. “He’s just reeling you in so he can tap your ass.”

I playfully punch her arm. “He is not. I think he wanted to make sure he was getting a serious employee. I’ve heard rumors that he’s going to make a run for his father’s Senate seat.”

“Damn, really?” Whitney asks as she leans on the island and looks from Erin to me.

I shrug.

“I’ve heard those same rumors,” Erin says. She puts down the spoon that she’s still holding and steps toward me. “Just promise me that you’ll be careful.”

I put my hands on her shoulders. “I promise you that I know what I’m doing. Harriet

is not going to put me in a dangerous situation, and I won't put myself in one. It's all good." I glance over at some weird potato concoction she is cooking. "Let's go eat. I'll pay."

Whitney laughs. "You don't even have your first paycheck yet." She grabs her purse from behind her and pulls out a credit card. "Philip and Gertrude will pay." Erin and I can't help the laughs that escape us. Whitney always lets her parents pay for everything. I know this is her way of dealing with the years of neglect from them, so I let her.

"Fine, but we are going to La Casa," I state because I need my favorite Mexican food and a pitcher of margaritas.

"Duh, like we would go anywhere else," Erin replies as she moves her pan off the stovetop.

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“It’s fiesta time, bitches,” Whitney declares as she grabs her purse, and we follow her. I don’t know how I got so lucky in friendship, but I’m not even going to question it.

* * *

It takes two weeks for my security clearance to go through and all my paperwork to be finished. I stare at my reflection in the glass of the giant doors as I enter the building. I went through at least ten outfits before I found the perfect one. Pants. I need to wear pants. The last thing I need is for my boss to look at me like I’m a woman. I channel my anger at the fact that I even have to think about this. Shaking my head clear of negative thoughts, I decide to put myself in a positive mood. I look fierce in my tightly cut trousers, gold belt, and a flattering white button-down shirt with the chunky necklace Whitney lent me. My hair is pulled up in a slick bun. My earrings dangle as I walk. Even my makeup is on point. Whitney and Erin bought me a new leather bag and I’m loving it. I feel good and ready to slay.

I go through security in a breeze with my new ID card and make my way up to the office. I find myself adding an extra skip in my step. I want to pinch myself. I’m being paid to work here.

I step into the office. “Morning, Tory,” I say to the receptionist.

“Alexis! I heard today was your first day. Welcome back. I brought in some bagels and coffee to celebrate,” she says with a warm smile as she rises and hugs me. I grin back at her. I made friends with all the office staff when I interned here. The only one who never noticed me was Congressman North. Of course, he was seldom around

when I was. He practically walked through the room at my going-away party, shook my hand, posed for a photo, and then walked on out to attend a meeting. I shrugged it off at the time, but now I'm wondering if he sees anything or just what he's told to see.

"Alexis, you're here," Harriet says as she walks out of her office.

"Morning, Harriet. I'm all set and ready," I say as I hold up my ID card that is hanging around my neck.

"Great. You'll be in here." I follow Harriet into a shared office space that is down a short hallway past the congressman's office. I smile when I see that I'm sharing an office with Maria Vasquez.

"Hey, you!" she says happily as she hops out of her chair and comes to greet me. I had done several research projects for Maria when I was an intern. She's the youngest member of the staff, well, until I was hired. She's awesome and I can't wait to work with her. I look down and see an enormous engagement ring on her finger. I grab her hand.

"Oh my God! When did you get engaged?" I ask.

She laughs. "Alan finally popped the question last week."

"I'm so happy for you!" I exclaim.

She grins as she pulls her hand back and motions to what I assume is my desk.

"Strap yourself in, because shit is about to go down," she says.

I raise my eyebrows as Harriet looks between us.

“What’s up?” I ask.

“He’s going to announce his run for his father’s Senate seat tomorrow,” Harriet explains.

My eyes go wide. Well, damn, Maria is spot on about walking into a shitshow.

“Is Nolan still running communications?” I ask.

They both nod. “Sorry, I didn’t know until yesterday that we would for sure go live with the news tomorrow or I would have warned you. It’s been a little on the DL, if you know what I mean,” Harriet explains. I bite my lip to keep from laughing at her youthful slang. Harriet may be in her seventies but she’s way fucking cooler than all of us put together. I sort of want to be her when I grow up.

“OK, well, let me know how I can help,” I insist as I set my bag down.

“I emailed you a list of issues that need to be researched. We’ve fallen a bit behind on issue papers and briefing documents,” Harriet says. “He’ll need memos on all of it by next Tuesday.”

I turn on my computer and log in. As soon as I’m set up, Harriet leaves. I open her email and cringe. Thank God classes haven’t started yet because I’m going to be here all weekend doing research. I quickly send off an email of research requests to my contact over at the Congressional Research Service because there is no way I’m going to be able to get this all done by myself in less than a week. I’m grateful that I took the time to be friendly with a staff member over at the Library of Congress who supplies this research service to congressmen and their staff.

The staff divides up research topics. I’ve been assigned to health, education, and transportation. I’ll need to spend some time getting up to speed on what bills are

being heard on those topics and what the latest is from the departments that cover those topics for the president.

What my new boss doesn't know is that I've done my research on him. For one, an alum from his fraternity is now president. From what I can tell, they are friendly, so that could help us. The House majority member is also from this same fraternity, a coincidence? Nope. Not in this city. It's not what you know, it's who you know.

I get up to go and head over to the Library of Congress because I do my best research there. "Heading to the library," I say to Maria. She looks up and pulls an earbud out of her ear.

"Have fun."

I laugh. "Always."

I pick up my bag and start down the hall but pause as I try to remember if I grabbed my phone. I open the bag, making sure it's in the new pocket where I placed it. Closing my bag, I take a step forward when suddenly my body stumbles straight into a hard plane covered in a stark white button-down. A red and blue checked tie greets my vision as I focus. I realize that my hand is now firmly placed on the chest of my boss who is looking down at me. Oh fuck.

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I slowly remove my hand. I realize his hand is wrapped firmly around my arm to keep me from falling.

“You OK?” his deep gravelly voice asks. I want to groan. Why does my boss have to be so fucking gorgeous? Even his voice is gorgeous. Breeding. It’s the only explanation. I’ve seen his parents, and they are both beautiful.

“Fine. Sorry,” I mumble as I straighten.

“You all settled in?” he asks, motioning to my office.

I nod. “Yep. I’m heading to the library to start on research for you.”

“Good. I take it you’ve been warned that shit is about to get crazy around here?”

I lick my lips and watch his eyes move from mine to watch my tongue darting out. I blush. “Uh, yeah. I’ve been informed. Let me know if there is anything I can do to help.”

“I’m sure there will be, but for now, everyone has it covered. I’ll have a staff meeting later this afternoon, so everyone is prepped.”

“OK,” I squeak and then clear my throat. “Um, I’ll see you later, then.”

He nods. “Happy researching.”

I smile and step around him. His woodsy cologne hits my nostrils and I breathe in on

reflex. I look back over my shoulder to find him leaning on his doorjamb, watching me with a smirk on his face. Asshole.

Chapter 3

Sebastian

I lean back as my best friends, Conner and Aiden, watch the news coverage of my senatorial run announcement from my office. They joined me to celebrate for five minutes while I have time.

It's harder these days for all three of us to spend time together. Our college days are long gone and replaced by busy work schedules. Hell, Aiden spends most of his life in his office at the National Institute of Health, where he is the lead on an anesthesia research team that's running drug trials. Aiden is a damned genius. I'm proud as fuck of him. And Conner now runs a lobbying firm for big shipping companies. Always the rebel, he chose not to take over his father's shipping empire but didn't stray far from the family business. It was Conner's way of saying "fuck you" to his father while still carrying on the family legacy in some sort of capacity. Poor Conner has more baggage than a 747. He makes my past seem like a cakewalk.

Yet, even with their busy schedules, they managed to come by today to mark a momentous occasion in my career. They both helped me see that running for Congress and now the Senate wasn't the awful family requirement that I viewed it as, and I'm grateful for their friendship and their no-bullshit mentality when it comes to telling me how it is. They made me take my sister's death and turn it into something good. I don't think I would have done that had they not incessantly reminded me to use my family's name for good as a way to celebrate my sister and carry on her legacy.

And here we are now, at the tip of the iceberg, some have suggested a White House

run in another decade, but I'm not ready to even contemplate that. Right now, my eyes are set on taking over the Senate seat my father will be vacating. After his second heart attack, he finally decided last year that he would not run again. And that was my cue to step up and start my campaign, even though I'm barely thirty years old.

My phone pings and I glance down to see a text from one of my mentors, Charles Richards. He's a member of the brotherhood and has been like a father figure to all three of us.

Chuck: I'm proud of you. Well done.

I smile at his text and write back a "thank you."

"Well, there's no going back now," Aiden states as he sips his bourbon.

I look over at Conner. He's got his phone in his hand and is looking at something. I lean forward. Fucking titties.

"Can't you save the spank bank until later?" I ask, raising my eyebrow.

He glances over at me and glares. "Fuck off, North. I'm just previewing the fine set of tits I'll be fucking later tonight."

"Well, Pound, just remember to bag it up first. We don't need any little Conners running around this city," Aiden states as he looks over the rim of his glass at his friend.

Conner grunts. I grin at the use of Conner's fraternity nickname, which he got because his last name was Sterling, and he was also known to strike up a fight when drunk and bang a lot of girls. He's still known for his penchant for hot women. He's

the biggest player in our group. If I didn't know the giant heart lurking beneath the beast façade, I might not be willing to drop everything at a moment's notice to have his back.

My office door opens. Conner quickly flips his phone over while Aiden sits up straighter. I roll my eyes at Harriet. She's standing by the door looking very much like a principal who just caught the star players of the football team smoking pot in the janitor's closet.

"If you gentlemen are done with your...celebration...Congressman North is needed for a meeting."

Aiden sets his glass down. "I have to get over to the Beechwood for a keynote speech. I'll call you later."

Conner doesn't move. He looks at the antique clock on my desk. "I suppose I can grab a drink at the bar before she arrives."

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Once Aiden walks out of the office, Conner stands and turns to me, not paying an ounce of attention to Harriet who is still standing at the door with her arms crossed. “I hear senators get twice as much...love,” he says. He smirks at Harriet who narrows her eyes at him as he shakes my hand and pulls me in for a bro hug before he walks past my keeper. Harriet’s gaze doesn’t waver from me until he’s out of my office.

“Why you keep company with those two...well, at least with the larger one, I will never understand,” she huffs as I walk over to join her.

“Because...we share experiences no one else will ever understand,” I say solemnly as I follow her to our next meeting.

* * *

My life is a steady stream of meetings, and the sad part is I knew what I was getting into when I decided to run for office, yet here I am, sitting in a meeting with the head of a pharmaceutical company, Confervo Pharmaceuticals. They want to talk to me about a donation to my Senate campaign. It’s one of a dozen fundraising meetings I’ve taken in the last three days. Many of them are medical and pharmaceutical companies. I’ve run on a platform of getting experimental medicine trials to patients faster, knowing that one could have saved my sister had it been approved six months earlier. Kara’s battle with cancer lit a fire under me that still burns brightly.

I detest these fundraising meetings. Political fundraising is a tireless, nonstop, evil necessity to winning a campaign. Everyone wants something from someone around here. It’s one giant chess game and half the time your opponent is only two moves away from checkmate.

“We are really looking forward to supporting you,” Jared Pallin says as he stands to shake my hand. “We hope you’ll be able to support us at the hearing, and I’m sure we’ll be able to assist you.”

“Well, I have the information and will certainly look it over and give it fair consideration,” I state because I never fucking get told what to do, not by an arrogant prick running a billion-dollar corporation. I’m all for business, but no one tells me how to do my job. Some would say I’m being ignorant by not immediately caving to a potential windfall of campaign funding, but I’m smarter than that. You give any funder your word, then you better stand by it, or they will ruin you.

Jared nods and leaves the room. I look over at Alexis. She’s been sitting there staying quiet for the entire meeting. I watched Jared eye-fuck her when she came into the room. I can’t blame the guy; she does look edible today. In fact, she’s looking fuckable every day, and it’s starting to piss me off. I don’t need the distraction. One little slipup could cost me an election, and no pussy is good enough for that.

“What do you think?” I ask her once the door is shut.

She shrugs. “I need to do more research before you can commit to supporting them.”

“It’s just a hearing. There are bigger forces at play,” I state.

“I know that,” she answers, glaring at me. I turn my head to hide my smirk, pretending to glance out my window. Why does riling her up bring me so much joy? I should probably make that the topic of my next therapy appointment.

“Well, have a good weekend,” I say, not bothering to turn back toward her.

“I’m not leaving yet,” she replies as though I’ve accused her of a poor work ethic.

I slowly turn back around. She's standing by the door with her laptop under her arm.
"Why not? No weekend plans?"

"My weekend plans are doing research for you. I'll be in my office if you need me," she says as she leaves. I unashamedly watch her ass sway as she walks out of my office. I need to get laid.

Chapter4

Alexis

A desk lamp is the only source of light besides my computer screen. My routine has been to come back to the office after my night classes, which I managed to squeeze into only three nights a week. My mother keeps telling me that I'm burning the candle at both ends and I'm going to make myself sick, but I'll be damned if I fail at this job or school.

It's late, nearly midnight, and I've been knee-deep in research since our afternoon meeting with the pharmaceutical executive. I asked the Congressional Research Service to pull up a number of files for me relating to the company and its products. My gut instinct at that meeting was that something with the executive seemed...off. It might just be that he's a sketchy businessman. Or perhaps it was the crass way he basically said that he'd offer money for a vote. I'm no novice. I know perfectly well that these types of conversations happen every day around here but that doesn't mean that I like them. It's a cycle. Get elected. Then start trying to get re-elected.

Sighing, I take my glasses off and rub my eyes. I should go home, but I want to finish reading this article. It's from almost a decade ago. Apparently, Confervo was working on some new class of anesthesia medicine that was supposed to be cutting edge. The article describes how their scientists had stumbled upon a combination of drugs that could cause the person to not feel pain, lose the ability to speak or see, but

allowed them to move body parts if prompted, and the real clincher, the patients would not remember anything. However, they stumbled into some issues in patients that could see and had flashback memories of their time while under the drug. The research and development were cut off after a two-year study. The company claimed that their staff needed to rework some of the components of the cocktail before further studies could be completed.

I close the document and start reading another about a newer pain medicine that just got FDA approval last year.

“I didn’t know medical trial studies could keep someone so fascinated this late at night,” Sebastian’s voice calls out from my doorway.

I jump and clutch my chest. “Shit! You scared me!”

He laughs as I swivel my chair to face him, pushing my glasses back up as I do.

He’s silhouetted by the hallway light, and he looks dangerous. His biceps are bulging where his arms are crossed. His left quad muscle is outlined by the stretched fabric of his trousers. He has one foot crossed over the other and is leaning on the doorjamb. He has the start of a beard, his face no longer having the clean-cut shaven look it possessed two days ago. Something about that gives him an air of the arrogant and powerful man that he is.

He steps forward and comes over to me, leaning against my desk with his hands. I glance at those hands. They are large; his fingers thick. I follow the veins on his hands up his arms. Where the sleeves are rolled up, I can see a hint of a tattoo. He has a tattoo? I frown and blink, swearing that I’m seeing things, but there it is, black and dark green ink pokes out from below his impeccably pressed button-down shirt. And let’s not start on how good he smells. If fresh pine, sandalwood, and ocean breeze had a baby, it would be his cologne.

“What do you think?” he asks.

I swallow and look up at him. “About what?”

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He smirks at me. Shit. I've been caught ogling the boss, again. Fuck. Damn it.

He raises one of his hands and points to my screen. "The company. What do you think?"

I clear my throat. It feels like something is constricted around it. I look back at his hand and images of that hand wrapped around my throat play like an old movie in my mind. For fuck's sake, I need to pull it together. This man is known as the congressional playboy. I need to keep this completely professional. He could ruin me.

"I don't know. They have a new pain medicine on the market that seems to be doing well. Their bottom line looks good. Market shares are up. I'll have a report to you by Tuesday."

"Good. Now, go home. It's...after midnight."

I prop my elbow on my desk and lean my head against my hand. An involuntary yawn escapes me, and I quickly cover my mouth.

He smirks again. "Come on, I'll give you a lift. It's too late to take the metro."

I hesitate for a brief second. I shouldn't, but he has a point. It's late. And he has a car.

"OK," I mutter as I shut down my computer.

I collect my things and follow him down the hallway. He locks the door to our office suite, and we meander the empty corridors of the building. My shoes make a clickity-

clack sound as I walk. It echoes. I've been here late before, but it seems even eerier at this hour, like the ghosts of all our forefathers might come out and greet us.

"You seem to have settled in well," Sebastian states, breaking the silence. I hurry to catch up with him as his long legs walk briskly.

"Yes. I'm really enjoying my work so far."

"Good. I'm glad."

We continue walking in silence. When we reach his car, which I only know is his once he hits a key fob and the lights blink, he opens the passenger side door for me. I pause because as an adult no one has ever opened a car door for me.

"Is something wrong?" he asks as his perfect lips form a frown.

"Uh, no, nothing. I'm fine," I stammer as I climb into the seat. He shuts the door and walks around me. His car is expensive, but not flashy. I had him pegged as a flashy-car guy. It's a practical car with leather interior, and it smells new.

"New car?" I ask once he's settled.

"Sort of. I got it a few months ago," he states as he pulls out onto Pennsylvania Avenue. "Where am I going?" he asks, glancing toward me.

"Oh, I'm in the Grenadine complex off Connecticut," I offer, and he starts in that direction.

The streets are near empty at this late hour. The traffic lights turn green as though he has some sort of magic remote. I can't help peering over at his hand on the stick shift as he expertly moves it to a different gear.

I swallow as I wonder if the rumors about him are true. I tried to ignore the stories when I interned for him, but I couldn't resist searching the internet last week. I wanted to know. There was surprisingly little about his personal life. He seems to have a different girl on his arm at every event. I did find a poll on some underground congressional staffer website. He was ranked the "hottest fuck" of both chambers of Congress. Apparently, he has had his fair share of sleeping with other congressional members' staff. He appears to be quite the conquest. Women were commenting on the poll saying the lewdest things about his dick size, his penchant for raunchy, hard sex, and even the craziest places they had done it with him. If half of the stories are true, then this man has fucked women on just about every square inch of the nation's capital.

It was hard to juxtapose this with the man I had researched when I accepted my internship. A senator's kid. A privileged man in every way. He was student body president at both his high school and college. He was president of his fraternity for a year. He interned for one of the most famous senators of all time before landing a coveted internship at the White House. He continued working there until he ran for office at the ripe old age of twenty-six. He's one of the very youngest congressmen. And now, only a few years later, he's already running for his father's Senate seat. People say he has the Midas touch. There's very little bad press on him at all. I wonder how that is. Nolan is a great communications staffer, but he's not that great.

"I have a meeting at the White House on Friday. Care to join me?" he asks, breaking the silence in the car as he flies down side streets.

"Oh, uh, sure. Is that the meeting on the transportation bill?" I ask.

He nods. "It's in your bailiwick. I normally attend these alone, but I feel like your background knowledge here might be useful."

I roll my eyes. Why does that sound like a backhanded compliment?

“Might be?” I ask sarcastically.

I glance over at him, and he’s smirking. Asshole. He knows that I interned at a transportation lobbying firm. In fact, I’m pretty sure he’s good friends with the man who now runs that firm.

“We both know it will be. Do you want me to offer you a golden ticket on a silver platter?”

“Of course, I’ll come with you. You’re my boss and you just asked me to help you.”

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I see his lips twitch, but he doesn't smile.

"Too bad you had class tonight; there was a nice happy hour. I think most of the staff went."

I frown. Is he rubbing it in? Or maybe he's pointing out how I miss out on things related to work because of school?

"I heard everyone was going, but I can't miss my environmental law class. The professor is a stickler for attendance," I explain.

"How is school going?" he asks as he turns onto my street.

"Not bad. I've finished most of my core classes, so I'm starting to take some electives this semester, which has been nice."

"Environmental law?"

I roll my eyes as I stare out the window. "Yep."

"Is that what you're concentrating in?"

I shake my head. "No. The class just interested me. I'm debating on focusing on health care law or international law."

"Two very different fields."

I shrug. “Law is law.”

He chuckles. “Now that sounds like something a lawyer would say.”

I try not to grin, but my lips don’t listen to my brain and curve upward. He slows the car down and pulls into the circular drive at the front of my complex. Looking up, he whistles. “This is a nice place for a law student.”

“I have roommates,” I say. I’m not sure if I want to discuss Erin with him since he clearly has met her. And he doesn’t need to know that Whitney is my other roommate. He’d probably have me asking her parents for campaign money.

I see his jaw clench before he stops the car and gets out.

“What are you...” I trail off as he comes around and opens my door.

“It’s late, Alexis. I’ll make sure you get to your door safely.” He holds out a hand, and I accept his help in getting out of his car. His hand presses to my lower back as he opens the door to my complex and ushers me inside.

“Good evening, Ms. Martin,” Derek says as I enter. Derek is our nighttime security guard. He’s a nice guy. Sometimes, I bring him cookies when I’m up late baking.

“Evening, Derek.” Derek surveys Sebastian, giving him a once-over.

“Mr. North is my boss. He was just seeing that I got home safely,” I explain.

“Very good, miss. Good evening, Congressman,” he says as he sits back down at the desk.

Sebastian nods to him and escorts me to the elevator. He presses the up button and

enters it with me.

“I really am alright from here,” I state.

“What floor?” he asks, ignoring my statement. With a sigh, I reach for the seven button. My hand grazes his as I press it.

I pull my hand away as though I’ve been zapped by an electric current.

“No penthouse?” he asks with an amused look on his face.

I smirk. “The penthouse was already taken.” It’s the truth because Whitney had inquired about it when we looked at this apartment.

He raises an eyebrow at me, clearly wondering if I’m being serious or not. I decide not to say anything else. This man could use a good dose of mystery.

The elevator stops and I step into the hallway. “I’m just over here,” I explain as I point to my door while reaching in my bag to retrieve my keys.

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He leans on the wall and waits for me to unlock the door.

“Uh, do you want to come in?” I ask because politeness was drilled into my brain by my mother, probably starting before birth.

He shakes his head after pausing for a moment. “No. I should be getting home. I’m heading out to my house for the night.”

“Oh, you don’t live in the city?” I ask, confusion forcing my eyebrows to knit together.

He shakes his head. “I have a studio apartment near the office for late nights, but my main home is farther out.”

“Oh.”

“Goodnight, Alexis,” he says as he pushes off the wall. I can smell his cologne as a whoosh of air hits me.

“Goodnight, Sebastian,” I answer, my voice sounding breathier than normal.

I watch as he turns and walks back to the elevator, disappearing inside without saying another word. Going inside my apartment, I shut and lock the door. I lean back against it and stare up at my ceiling. Would he walk all his female employees up to their doors? Did I just cross a line? Did he just cross a line? Sighing, I toss my bag on a chair. I need to shower and go to bed, but mostly I need to stop thinking about Sebastian North.

Chapter 5

Sebastian

Kensington Place. My headlights illuminate the street sign as I make the turn. It was a no-brainer to build here when Conner bought the property. Every home on this street is owned by one of my fraternity brothers. Every person on this street has direct connections to the man in the White House because he, too, is a fraternity brother. The irony that we all are kingmakers isn't lost on me.

I pull into my driveway. The lots are large on our street. Aside from Conner, we each own two acres, which means I can barely see Conner's and Aiden's homes through the tree line. We took the last three lots at the end of the street, ensuring the cul-de-sac was all ours. I just wish we had more time to enjoy this private neighborhood we created.

Aaron Beacher, the current press secretary at the White House, lives in the first house on the left. Declan Kline, a federal judge who previously clerked at the Supreme Court, lives in the first house on the right. Then, there's Bradley Jenkins, a lobbyist, and Kevin LaCosta, an FBI agent, and of course, Paul and Paxton Young, who are prominent attorneys and actual brothers. They were all members of our pledge class. And we took our pledge very seriously, so seriously that the man who had been our fraternity president's older brother, a former frat president himself, now sits in the White House. Jason Lewis.

Aaron, Declan, Bradley, Kevin, Paul, Paxton, Conner, Aiden, and I were all pledge brothers in college. We formed a tight bond. It was never a question that when Conner bought this land, we'd all build our homes on it. The type of vows we took to protect each other are sacred. It helps that we do actually enjoy each other's company. There's seldom a month that goes by without a birthday party or a backyard barbecue. In some ways, our days of having a drink and hanging out in

college haven't changed that drastically. Only now, we drink better alcohol and watch sports games in state-of-the-art home theaters.

I glance over at the lit driveways leading to my best friends' homes. Conner most definitely is in the city tonight at his penthouse, likely entertaining a lady. Conner's little black book is something legends are made of. Aiden is probably already asleep. He's a morning bird, always has been. It used to drive Conner insane. I smirk at the memories of him trying to wake Conner to go for a morning run.

More memories of those times drift through my mind as I park my car in my four-car garage and walk into my silent house. The fact that I live here is absurd. It's five thousand square feet of space that I don't need. It's nowhere near the size of Conner's house and ever so slightly larger than Aiden's. I'm fucking Goldilocks.

Sighing, I open my beer fridge and pull out a lager as I glance toward the pile of mail that my cleaning lady left on my island. I toss some bills to the side, throw out junk mail, and look down at the Washington Tribune. I leaf through the political bullshit of the first few pages. I note some scores of games in the sports section. As I go to turn past the local news section, I frown, pausing as an article catches my eye.

MISSING COLLEGE STUDENT LAST SEEN IN ROCK CREEK PARK

I scan the article. Her parents are offering a reward for information. This was in broad daylight. She went for a jog. The details are so different from what I witnessed all those years ago, but it still makes my blood run cold.

I stare at the calendar on my desk. The approaching date seems ominous, the memories haunting. I walk out of the room. Tossing my beer away, I decide to do the only thing that calms me, working out. I throw on my gym clothes and start up the treadmill. I crank my music so loudly that no other thoughts can creep in my head as I sprint. I run until my legs burn until I feel nothing. When all the memories are

silenced, I finish my run, grab a shower, and crawl into my bed, hoping for a dreamless night.

* * *

Don Carrollton is standing outside my office door. Fucking great. This asshole is always breathing down my neck. He's a modern-day crusader, only his cause is unknown. He pretends to be a lobbyist for various clients, but I think his endgame is really just to razz opponents. He hates me because I once called him out at a party about incorrect data he was reciting. Now, I'm public enemy number one. His favorite game is to get in the face of those he hates, rile us, and try to get us to publicly fight him so he can post it all over social media.

"Congressman, do you have a second?" he asks. I already see his assistant pulling out his phone to film whatever interaction is about to take place. I glance through the glass in my office door and see a wide-eyed Alexis.

I hold up a hand. "Sorry, Don. I'm on a tight schedule today. Perhaps another time." I start to grab my door handle when he steps in front of me and holds up his phone. It's a picture of a mother weeping over a casket.

"Your policies are bad ones, dangerous ones. This child didn't have to die!" His voice rises slightly, and I see a few people talking down the hall turn to watch us.

I clench my jaw. He wants a rise out of me, but I can't let him get one. "As I was saying, I can't talk right now, Don."

"But, Congressman, your law caused her death. Don't you want to save young people, like Kara?"

My fist clenches as my eyes shoot daggers in his direction. I'm two seconds away

from losing my shit. He knows Kara is a weakness for me. He wants me to get physical, but why? What's his endgame? My rationale is starting to wane as he pushes the phone close to my face.

“Her death could have—”

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As I start to pull my arm back with an overwhelming need to pummel this asshole, my office door suddenly swings open and Alexis steps right in between us.

“Mr. Carrollton, a pleasure to see you,” she says with a smile that could melt a frozen heart. She turns and her backside presses against me. My gut reaction is to wrap an arm around her waist and pull her away from this prick, but I quickly remember where I’m at and drop my fist back to my side.

“Alexis! What are you doing here?” Don asks, completely taken aback by her presence. He sticks his phone in his pocket. His entire demeanor seems to morph as he looks down at her.

“Oh, just working for the congressman, here,” she says as her rear end presses harder against me, forcing me to step away. As angry as I am, the curve of her ass has my full attention as I step back.

Don’s eyes narrow. “The dark side, Alexis, I would have thought you’d choose more wisely.”

She leans in, and whispers in a low voice that I can barely hear, “Keep your friends close and your enemies...” She trails off with a grin.

Don laughs. “I like your style, kid.” I hate that he just called her a kid. I feel my fist clench involuntarily.

But before I can react, the assistant filming brings down the phone, sensing that an altercation is not going to happen. Don looks back at me.

“You are one lucky man to have this little lady in your office. You better rethink your policies, but maybe Alexis here can help you with that,” he says, giving her a wink that makes me want to break his face. He turns and walks off as if nothing just occurred.

I watch Alexis’s shoulders sag and her back expand with a deep breath before she opens the office door and steps inside. I follow her.

“What the fuck was that all about?” I growl as the door shuts behind me.

Alexis shrugs and picks up some papers before turning to walk down the hallway to her office. I reach out and grab her arm to stop her. She freezes at the contact but doesn’t turn to look at me.

“I asked you a question,” I demand. I shouldn’t touch my staff like this, but I don’t release her. The need to touch her, to mark, to show everyone that she’s mine is so strong that I can’t stop myself. What the fuck am I thinking?

“He was making a scene once at another office when I stopped over with paperwork when I was interning. I calmed him down. We talked. We...have a mutual respect now. Or at least a mutual understanding.” She slowly turns to face me, and I let my hand fall away from her arm. Her eyes are wide, but she’s completely calm, whereas, my body is pumping with adrenaline and testosterone.

“You’re a...little dove,” I muse, a grin threatening to spread across my face despite my anger.

She scrunches her nose and the face she makes is adorable in a way it shouldn’t be. “I’m a what?”

“A peacekeeper. A dove is a symbol of peace,” I explain.

She rolls her eyes. “Like an olive branch?”

“Yeah, but ‘little olive branch’ doesn’t have the same ring to it,” I answer with a smirk.

She shakes her head as her lips stretch into a smile.

“How did you learn to do that?”

“Do what?”

“De-escalate?”

She shrugs. “I took some classes in college.”

How is there so much more to this woman than I ever fathomed possible? I search her eyes, her mesmerizing eyes for answers to questions that I have yet to formulate in my brain. I’ve underestimated her. And I seldom ever underestimate anyone.

“Why are you looking at me like that?” she finally asks, breaking the silence that has stretched out between us like an open road.

“You surprised me, little dove,” I admit as I take another step back from her.

She quirks an eyebrow. “I surprised you?”

“Don’t worry, I doubt you’ll do it again,” I state, regaining my composure and heading into my office. I shut the door and lean against it. Shit, if Alexis hadn’t been there, I might have done something really stupid. I’ve been on edge lately. The stakes are high, higher than they’ve ever been. I need to stay on course. I have a job to do, a promise to keep, and a wish to fulfill.

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Alexis

“Did you see the look on that guy’s face?” I laugh as Maria and I turn the corner to the hallway by our office. We met at the metro this morning and watched as a vacationing toddler dumped grape juice all over her dad.

“He was way more chill than I would have been,” she teases. “That’s all the birth control I need for today, thank you very much.”

I giggle. “I don’t know. He looked like a DILF to me.” I watch as Maria’s eyes widen, and I follow her gaze.

“Who’s a DILF?” Sebastian asks as he approaches us from the other direction.

I can feel the heat creeping up my neck. I clear my throat. “Uh, no one.” I quickly turn toward the office door that’s only a few feet away and go to pull out my key from my bag when Sebastian’s arm comes out in front of me.

“Maria, go get the officer down by the entrance.”

Maria takes off running as I look at Sebastian with confusion. His eyes aren’t on me though. I turn back to the door and gasp.

“Oh my God!” I yell as I realize that the glass in our office door has been broken. It’s only when I step back that I hear the crunch of glass under my feet.

“Careful,” Sebastian says as he lifts me and sets me back down in the middle of the

hall as though I weigh nothing. I'm too shocked to contemplate his actions.

An officer approaches with Maria in tow. I watch as the officer leans down to the mic on his radio and speaks into it about a possible break-in. The rest of our staff begin to arrive and a crowd forms as three more officers arrive and secure the area.

Sebastian looks to all of his staff who have now congregated in the hallway over the few minutes it has taken for the police to arrive. "Let's wait over in Congresswoman Bailey's office," he directs. Nolan, David, Maria, Tory, and I follow him. I hear him on his cell phone.

"Harriet, it'll be fine. Yes. All the staff are with me right now. Yes." He hangs up and looks at all of us.

He opens his mouth to speak but an officer walks into the room. "Congressman North, a word, if you please."

Sebastian follows him into the hallway and returns a moment later as we all stand around a conference table, none of us speaking.

"The officers want to interview each of us. Congresswoman Bailey has volunteered her office. Maria, you can go first."

Maria nods and follows the officer into the adjoining room. Sebastian looks back at the rest of us, running a hand through his hair. "Let's all give statements and then we can work from home today. I'll get the door fixed and I'm sure there'll be some added security. I'll keep everyone abreast of what's going on as soon as I know more."

Folks nod their heads.

“This is crazy,” Nolan whispers to me and I nod.

An officer calls me into the room next. I feel Sebastian’s eyes on me as I cross the room and shut the door behind me.

“Hi, Ms. Martin, yes?” the officer asks.

I nod.

“I’m Sergeant Franks. We just need to get statements from everyone. Maria said it was you, the congressman, and her who found the door like that?”

I nod again. “Yes. I—I didn’t realize it was broken until Sebastian stepped in front of me.”

“What time was that?”

I look at the clock on the wall, trying to figure out how much time has passed. “I’m not sure. Maybe twenty minutes ago?”

He nods and makes a note. “And what did you see exactly?”

“Just the glass is broken. Sebas—I mean, Congressman North, he pulled me back from the door so I wouldn’t step on the glass. And then the officer and Maria were there. He had sent Maria to get an officer. It all happened rather quickly.”

“I understand. Did you notice anything else?”

I shake my head. “No. I’m sorry, I didn’t see anything else.”

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“No need to apologize. Here’s my card. If you think of anything else, please let me know,” he says as he motions for me to exit. I leave through a different door.

Becky, the reception for the congresswoman’s office, stops me. “What’s going on over there?”

I look through the glass door of her office where the crowd has dispersed and officers are milling around. A maintenance man is cleaning up the glass and has a new door set to the side. That was fast, I think to myself.

“Looks like vandalism,” I guess with a shrug as I head back to the conference room.

Nolan is missing when I return, probably getting interviewed. Maria is pulling a bag over her shoulder.

“You heading home to work?” I ask.

“Yeah, I’ll see you tomorrow.” She pauses. “I hope.”

“Right,” I reply as I glance over at David and Tory who are sitting in front of David’s laptop chatting about something related to a security bill that David was working on yesterday. My gaze travels past them to Sebastian. He’s standing in front of a window, staring out as he talks to someone on the phone. I can tell by his clenched jaw that he’s stressed. I hate seeing him like this. My last thought has me pausing. Do I really care that much about this man? He’s my boss for crying out loud. No, it’s fine. I can care about my boss. I mean, I should, right?

“Hey, you going to head home to work?” Nolan’s voice breaks through my strange stream of consciousness.

I give my head a little shake to clear my thoughts. “Uh, yeah. I guess I will. Looks like we are getting a new door installed. Hopefully things are back to normal tomorrow.”

Nolan nods as he picks up his computer bag. “I’ll see you guys tomorrow. I’ve got to go finish looking over these ads we did.”

“I’d love to see them,” I say as he heads to the door.

“For sure. I’ll share them once I finish,” he says with a grin as he leaves.

I put my hands on the conference table and look around the room. I was supposed to be prepping for the White House transportation meeting tomorrow. I look back toward Sebastian just as Harriet walks into the room.

“David and Tory, I’ve managed to get our line forwarded to my office, which the police have cleared. You can both work in there for now. Have Nolan and Maria left already?”

I nod. “Maria is going to work from home and so is Nolan. He wanted to finish the ads.”

“Great. I need to find a space for you and me to go over things for tomorrow’s meeting. I think everything is set, but always good to over-prepare for these things,” she says as she zeroes in on Sebastian. With her hands on her hips, she clears her throat. Sebastian slowly turns to face her.

“Yes. Will do. I have to go, but send me those documents and I’ll take a look,” he

says as he puts down his phone. “Yes, supreme leader?”

Harriet glares at him. “I told you we should have upped our security when you announced your run for the Senate. The crazies are bountiful here. But no worries, because I have now taken care of it. They are replacing our door and the police should be done within the hour.”

Sebastian walks around the long table and leans against it in front of Harriet. I lift my hands because his ass is dangerously close to one of them.

Standing back, I look from Harriet to Sebastian and back again.

“When will the security team be here?” he asks.

“Tomorrow. I’ll need to deal with the press on this door situation,” she says as she looks at me. “I hate to ask this of you, but can you handle your own at the White House meeting tomorrow. I think maybe I need to get this under control. I’ll email you what I was going to prep you on,” she adds as she motions back toward our door.

I nod. “O-of course. I was going to go over things today.”

Sebastian’s eyes are on me, watching me intently as I speak. I feel myself blush under his scrutiny. It’s hardly been a few weeks and I find myself fighting to not be attracted to this man. Maybe Erin was right. Maybe this job is a bad idea.

I’m about to say as much when Senator North walks into the office. I haven’t met him before, only seen him from afar. He’s the silver fox version of Sebastian. But right now, he looks scary as fuck. He’s already surveyed the room as he walks toward us.

In a hushed voice laced with anger, he whisper-yells, “What the fuck is going on?”

Theresa told me your office was broken into?”

I watch as Sebastian’s entire demeanor changes. I’ve not seen them interact before, not in the confines of a small audience of staff members, anyhow. Sebastian’s jaw clenches and he leans in toward his father.

“It’s under control,” he mutters with such spite that I feel like a voyeur and turn away toward Harriet. Harriet might as well be shooting daggers with her eyes. What don’t I know about Montgomery North? He’s always appeared as a friendly and caring person. If there’s a baby in the building, he’s likely already held it. He looks and acts like a politician from some sort of romantic-comedy film. But this, this isn’t anything like the persona I’ve seen on the Senate floor or in the halls of the Hart Senate Office Building. This man looks like he could kill with his icy stare.

Harriet steps forward. “Senator, it’s under control; Gallagher Security has been called.”

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Montgomery steps back and looks at Harriet.

“And will they be here today?”

She nods. “Press were alerted that some teenagers were pulling a prank by defiling some things around the building today. It’s all been handled.”

Sebastian gives Harriet a look that says, “back off.” She does with a nod and steps back toward me.

“As you can see, my staff and I have this situation under control, Father,” he hisses.

“Very good. Have Harriet debrief Theresa on any updates. I have a bill hearing now,” he says and steps toward the door, but not before turning around. “And, Sebastian, call your mother. She has someone for you to meet.”

Sebastian glares at his dad who joins a woman in the hallway and proceeds toward the Capitol building. I watch Sebastian’s nostrils flare before he turns to Harriet. “Do not step in between us again. He needs to know where I stand on things.”

Harriet glowers as she puts her hands on her hips. “He needs to trust you to do the right thing.”

Sighing, Sebastian runs a hand through his hair. “Just...let it go. Understood?”

Harriet puts her arms down and looks at him. “Fine, but I don’t like this attitude.” I wonder how she worked for Montgomery for so long if she doesn’t like him. This

family is so strange.

Sebastian then turns to me. “Come on, you and I are going to work from my house today. I can’t focus with all of this.” He motions around us. “We need to have a solid game plan before that White House meeting.”

All I know is that the president’s office organized a meeting between opponents and a few co-sponsors on a transportation bill related to shipping routes, containers, and vessels. We are a co-sponsor, so naturally, Sebastian probably wants us to look well-versed on all the issues at the meeting in hopes of potentially changing a mind or two. And, I also think his friendship with Conner Sterling weighs heavily on his decision to sponsor the bill.

“We’ll be at my house working, if you need us, Harriet,” he says as he motions for me to follow him out of the conference room. I see Harriet studying him and then me. I’m not sure how to read the look on her face. Is she mad? Is she disapproving? Shit, is this not appropriate? Would she wring my neck if she found out he walked me to my door the other night?

My brain swirls with what-ifs as Sebastian leads me to his car.

As we drive out of the city, he’s quiet and I’m not sure how to read his silence, so I spend the drive watching the scenery change from the asphalt, concrete, and monuments in parks to a leafy suburban area. When he pulls up to a gated entrance at a street, Kensington Place, my eyebrows rise. But nothing prepares me for the opulent homes that are barely visible from the street as we drive down it. I know the Norths are well-to-do. I read an article once about Sebastian’s great-grandfather. He made millions in the railways in the early nineteen hundreds. That allowed his son to go to law school and later run for the U.S. Senate, and then his son, and now Sebastian. But his family is in no way as wealthy as Conner Sterling’s billionaire dad. I wonder if his other friends are this rich.

Sebastian pulls up to a house that looks like an English manor home. Its large stone and brick façade are beautiful. The yard, strike that, grounds are immaculately sculpted. Does he live here alone? Maybe I've misread Sebastian and he has a girlfriend? I haven't seen anything to indicate that he's dating anyone, but this is too much house for one person.

Sebastian beats me to the car door once again. He has it open before I can protest and holds out a hand to me. I accept it, relishing the feel of his large, warm hand against mine.

"Come on. Let's get some coffee and you can debrief me on the research that I know you have already done," he states as I follow him through a garage door, down a hallway, and into a magnificent kitchen.

As he makes us coffee, I look around, taking in the white cabinets and dark countertops, the copper vent over the stove, and the window with potted herbs sitting on the ledge. It doesn't feel like him, or maybe it does, and I really don't know this man at all.

"How long have you lived here?" I ask as I run a finger over the black granite countertop.

"Three years," he says. His back is to me, and I watch him. He's in control. He's always in control. Power surrounds him like an aura. He turns and hands me a mug. It's a beautiful mug, handmade.

"This mug is gorgeous," I state.

He just nods and walks toward an open door. I follow him inside. It's an office. He motions to a small conference table. "Have a seat. Let's figure out our strategy for tomorrow."

I sit and pull out my laptop. We spend the entire day working. Besides us, the only sound in the house is from a cuckoo clock that I can't see, but I can hear it chime every hour. It's a strange noise that I only recognize because my grandparents have one in their house. I want to ask about it. I want to ask about the mug and how he came to live here. But I refrain from becoming too personal. The less I know, the better. Or at least that's what I tell myself.

Chapter 7

Sebastian

I shakehands with Aaron Beacher as our meeting ends. He didn't need to be here, but I know he felt obligated as my pledge brother. Our bond is...well, he's following the vow we all agreed to many years ago.

"Also, I'd love to hear your thoughts on Confervo. I'm in some campaign fundraising talks with them," I say quietly.

"Sure, give me a call. I don't know much about them. They did give money to Jason's last campaign," he says.

I start to reply but I'm distracted for the eightieth time as Alexis brushes against me while turning to say goodbye to a fellow staffer. Her floral scent fills my nostrils. I have to stop thinking about her. She's quickly becoming a distraction. And now that I've had her at my home, I keep jerking off to visions of her naked on my island, my desk, my bed. I need to focus on my campaign, and instead, I've spent the last day dealing with vandalism and a woman so enticing she has me blowing my load in the shower like a teenager.

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My phone vibrates with a text, and I see it's a message from Harriet.

Harriet: Looks like the cameras in the hallways weren't working. But there were some teenagers on a field trip in the building earlier and they were on camera heading in the direction of your office. They will be questioned by the police. Looks like vandalism though. Having cameras installed everywhere. Better safe than sorry.

Aaron glances down at my phone. "Any news on the break-in?"

I clench my jaw. The fucking media has been calling it a break-in. "Turns out it was just some kids messing around."

"Well, that's good news."

I nod.

"Thanks again for pushing this bill. I think the meeting went well," he says in a low voice after looking around to make sure the other meeting participants aren't in earshot. "Jason wants this bill to pass, so let us know if you hear of any other issues. He thinks it will be good for your campaign."

"Will do," I say. Our fraternity likes to keep its brothers in high places, so it's not surprising that Jason is looking to boost my poll numbers with the passage of this bill. And I'm sure he has some campaign promises to fulfill.

I turn to grab my things and find Alexis standing in a corner with Leonard Fletcher, a staffer that I don't particularly like. He tends to overstep, and Maria has more than

once noted his forward and unwanted advances. I could easily end his career, but so far, I haven't.

I'm about to head out of the room when Leonard reaches out and pushes some hair off Alexis's face, and that's all it takes for me to see red. I storm across the room, grab Alexis by the arm, and lead her into the hallway while saying something about us needing to leave. She stumbles along beside me for about ten steps and then yanks her arm from my grip.

"What the hell was that about?" she whisper-yells while glaring at me.

"That," I say, pointing to the room, "was inappropriate."

"What was inappropriate?"

"Men should not be touching you like that at a work meeting," I hiss.

She rolls her eyes. "First, back the fuck off, Sebastian. Second, have you never once opened your eyes around here?" She motions around us. "Every man in power treats every woman that way. Does it bother me? Yes. Am I going to make a scene? No. Will I alert my fellow female staffers to stay clear of Leonard? Yes. Is it your job to act like a caveman? No. I was in no danger. Could you perhaps trust that I can handle myself? Now, I look even weaker in his eyes. I don't need that."

She turns on her heels and storms down the hallway. If I wasn't surrounded by priceless art, there would surely be a hole in the wall. She's lucky we are at the White House near people because the real caveman part of me wants to toss her over the nearest table and spank her ass. If she thinks for half a second that I would let a degenerate of a man touch her like that, then she has another thing coming. It's not just her, if Leonard put a hand on any of my female staff, I would most definitely step in and remove them from his presence. But the fact that it's Alexis...well, there's

something more to it that I'm not fully ready to admit to myself.

"Everything OK?" Aaron asks as he steps up beside me.

"Fine," I mutter.

He puts his hands up defensively. "Just making sure. I'll talk to you later."

I nod as I follow Alexis. I look around when I get out to the car that's pulled up for us, but she's nowhere to be seen.

"I believe she decided to walk," a man says as he opens the car door for me.

The car pulls forward, and about a block down, I see her. She walking so fast that it takes another block for us to catch up with her because of traffic. I roll down the window.

"Alexis, get in the fucking car," I demand.

"No," she says, not bothering to look my way.

"Alexis, I'm only going to ask nicely once more, and then we are going to have a problem."

This time, she turns and puts her hands on her hips. I know she means to look angry but damn it if her anger isn't a total fucking turn-on.

"I'm not getting in the car with you. In fact, I don't even know if I want to work for you."

That does it. "Stop the car," I say, my jaw clenched as the driver pulls over and I

open the door and leap out in front of her.

Her eyes widen at my sudden proximity.

“I will not say this again,” I state in a calm voice that wouldn’t sound at all threatening to passersby, but Alexis knows I’m not messing around. “Get. In. The. Car. Now.”

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I step up so that I'm glaring down at her.

"You are such an asshole. I should have listened to Erin and never taken this job," she says. Her eyes glaze over but I can tell these are angry tears.

"I might be an asshole, but I would step in between a prick like Leonard and a female staffer any day. And"—I pause as I step a fraction of an inch closer so that we are mere centimeters apart—"I most certainly would not ever let him touch you."

She goes from angry to confused with my last statement. "Why?"

Ignoring her question, I look around us. A few people have slowed their walking and are watching us. I grab her hand. "We are going back to the office," I declare as I practically drag her to the car. This time my hand comes up to the back of her neck as I guide her into a seat. I war between a need to protect her and a need to control her. She doesn't fight me, which surprises me. Once seated, the driver takes off down the street toward my office. Neither one of us speaks.

I watch her leg bounce and the warring in my head calms as I place a hand on her leg, gently pressing it to stop the movement. Her head whips in my direction.

"I'm not alright with men treating you like that," I say, even though my rational brain tells me I'm not acting so differently from Leonard, but my reasoning is different. At least that's what I'm telling myself.

She looks down at my hand and I slowly pull it away. "Sebastian," she starts, and the way she breathily says my name has blood pumping to my dick in ways it should not

be, “I can handle myself. I need you to know that. You know what’s worse than some power-hungry, asswipe acting like that toward me?”

I shake my head.

“You intervening.”

I grit my teeth before starting to say that I will always intervene because it’s wrong. But she holds up a hand.

I see her chest rise on a breath before she speaks. “I know you meant well with your actions. But do not do it again.”

The car comes to a stop, and before I can say a word, she’s out of the car. I can tell by the way she’s walking that she’s still pissed as hell. As I climb out, my phone buzzes with an incoming call, Conner. He’s probably wondering about the White House meeting since his firm is lobbying hard for this change. I glance once more at Alexis as she disappears inside the building. She and I need to talk, but that will have to wait till later.

Chapter8

Alexis

I dropmy bag next to my desk and Maria looks over at me.

“Wow, was the meeting that bad?” she asks as her eyebrows rise in surprise.

I sigh. “No, it was good, actually. I just...” I stop and look around but no one else is near us.

“Leonard was...touchy-feely.”

Her eyes narrow. “He’s such a creep. Seriously, he tried that shit with me once at happy hour and I almost throat punched him.”

I glance to the door, but I don’t hear Sebastian yet. “Sebastian might have dragged me out of the office to stop him from interacting with me.”

I groan and lean back in my chair.

“Sebastian did that? Damn, I mean, he’s spoken up once or twice for me and Tory, but he hasn’t dragged us away from someone.”

“So, he is protective of his staff?” I ask because that doesn’t jive with the playboy asshole façade that everyone talks about. Today he was like a caged lion, ready to strike. I feel my earlier notion to up and quit starting to fade as Maria speaks.

Maria rolls her chair closer to mine. “Listen, he exudes power. Hell, he was born with it running through his veins, but somewhere under that hard outer shell, I think he might actually be a softy. Now, don’t go telling anyone about my suspicions, I just saw him once with a sick little girl that was visiting here and...well, let’s just say my ovaries nearly exploded. Also, look at you.”

I frown and look down at what I think is a very classic-looking skirt suit.

“No, you look fine. I just mean you’re gorgeous. You’re his staffer. It sounds stupid, but these power-hungry men are really just like dogs marking their territory if you know what I mean. If anyone is going to get a piece of you, it’s him. And he wants everyone to know that. It’s stupid. I’ve seen it a million times with other men around here.”

I hear movement and Maria grabs my arm. “Come on, let's grab a coffee. We should chat.”

I'm still stewing over his behavior and contemplating whether I should keep working here as I follow her out of the office and down the street to a small café where she orders us two lattes. She finds an empty bench and we sit.

“You're drawn to him, aren't you?” she blurts out and my eyes go wide. Fuck, am I that obvious?

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“No, I mean, he’s attractive and he knows what he wants and that’s...” I trail off because I feel stupid for saying that out loud.

Maria laughs. “Girl, don’t sweat it. I’ve been attracted to men around here too. It’s hard not to be. There’s something about power that just...hell, it’s a turn-on, and trust me, I’ve had my fair share of twentysomething-year-old sex with some pretty awesome political fuck boys. Just, be careful, the ones involving a boss, typically never end well.”

“I would never...” I stop speaking and sip my coffee, because as much as I think I would never do it, part of me wants to, and that scares me.

“I’m sure you wouldn’t. I just wanted to give you my honest opinion. Because I was once younger, attractive, still am,” she says with a wink, “and without a boyfriend, and these men around here”—she motions to our surroundings—“are like sharks circling a carcass when they see that trifecta.”

We both sip our coffee.

“I couldn’t blame you if you did. I may have a boyfriend, but I’m not blind. Sebastian is hot as fuck and gives off ‘yes, daddy’ vibes.” Maria starts giggling as she’s speaking, and now, I’m giggling.

“Oh my God! You did not just say that out loud!” I manage in between laughter.

Shrugging, she stops laughing and looks at me with a more serious face. “Just be careful, OK. Don’t get yourself in over your head. I got your back but watch yourself.

You're smart and ambitious and have a great future ahead of you. This city is not forgiving, remember that."

"You're right. It's not."

"Good. Now that I had this big sisterly chat with you, I feel better."

I roll my eyes.

"Come on, you and I have work to do. That prick of peckerheads can't run itself," she says as she tilts her head toward the Capitol building.

"Prick of peckerheads?" I state, stifling more laughter.

She links arms with me as we walk back to the office. "Come on, I thought it was a good one."

I smile. "Not bad. I'll have to remember that."

"Just remember, I trademarked it first."

"Noted."

* * *

My brain spends the next hours trying to process the events of the day. I hear Sebastian in his office, but I don't see him again before he leaves for the day. Part of me is pissed about how he manhandled me. But his touch felt different than Leonard's, which is a weird thing to think. I need to talk to someone, but if I tell Erin, she'll flip out and say Sebastian is bad news and I should quit. If I tell Whitney, she'll drag me out on a double blind date so I can take my female hormonal needs out on an

unsuspecting random guy. Maybe I do just need to have sex. It's been way too long.

I force myself to go back to the documents I was looking at the other night. There's a lot to unpack about my obvious crush on Sebastian, his power-tripping over me, and the fact that I find that sexy. Damn, maybe I do need a therapist.

A knock at my door jars me from my thoughts.

"Check out the new ads," Nolan says as he turns to leave. "They're on the shared drive. I'm not sure which one we should go with. I heard he's hiring Jay McKnight as his campaign manager."

"Really?" I ask as I raise my eyebrows. Jay is notorious for being a badass on the campaign trail. I've seen him help a dozen candidates to victory.

"Yeah, guess Jay will be weighing in on the ads too, but still give them a look."

"I will. I just gotta get this last memo done," I reply, giving him a wave.

"You sure you don't want to come out for happy hour?" Maria asks. She grabs her purse and gives me a questioning look.

I shake my head. "Next time. I promise. I'm really behind on these because of the meetings and my classes, and I'll sleep better if I have them done."

Nolan shrugs. "Suit yourself. It's gonna be epic. It's karaoke night."

I giggle. "Right. I'll catch the headlines online later."

Maria laughs as she joins Nolan and I listen to them leave. I turn back to my laptop and finish my report. I get lost in the research and words. I don't even know what

time it is when I finally lean back in my chair and stretch.

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Looking down at the time on my screen, I see it's late, really late. It's almost two in the morning. I've gotta stop this working-all-night thing.

Sighing, I take another sip of coffee and decide to check out the ads that Nolan had mentioned. I click on the first one. It's a typical do-gooder ad. Sebastian is volunteering somewhere, kissing babies, you know the drill. The next one is similar. The third one though has me pausing the screen. He's just come out of a lake where he is clearly participating in some kind of race, maybe a triathlon?

There's a fraction of a second where his wet clothing clings to his lower half and I can make out an outline of his dick. I hit pause and rewind the video, sure that I'm seeing things, but there it is again. I pause it and stare at the monstrosity that I've heard so much about but haven't seen in the flesh. Holy founding fathers! It's like he was sculpted just for women.

I hit play again as he runs past the camera. Then there's a shot of him crossing the finish line. I decide to search the event. I pull up another screen and search his name and the race. The images begin to pop up, and by the third row, I freeze, my hand hovering over the toggle on my mouse. Holy shit! He's unzipped the top half of his triathlon outfit and it hangs down around his hips. I still can't make out the tattoo on his arm from this angle, but his body is insane. His chest looks like he bench-presses daily but it's his abdominal muscles that make me salivate. How can he look that good?

I click on the photo, and it takes me to a paparazzi site. Well, that explains everything. The next photo is of him and his father at their beach house. Both of them are shirtless, and clearly the apple doesn't fall far from the tree because even at sixty

years old, his father looks amazing. Hell, even his grandfather who is in his eighties looks good. These men are unreal.

I toggle back to the video and play the water scene again. I feel an ache between my legs, and I clench them and look around. It's nearly two thirty now, there is no one here.

I haven't even had time to masturbate, let alone go on a date. My lady parts are probably sealing over from cobweb growth.

I spread my legs, glad that I wore a skirt, but annoyed it's tight. I push it up to my hips and slide my underwear to the side before pushing a finger inside myself. Sighing as I watch his perfect cock strain against the quick-dry fabric of his outfit, I add a second finger. I close my eyes and envision what it would feel like to have him doing this to me as I pump my fingers faster. Fantasies of him taking me right on his desk play in my mind and I feel myself getting closer to release. What would it feel like to be shoved face down on his desk while one of his hands reaches down and grabs the back of my neck, holding me in place, while he unzips his pants and pushes my skirt up to reveal my ass? How good would it be when he rips off my panties and kicks my legs apart so that he can run his cock along my wetness? And how off the charts would my orgasm be when he slams into me from behind while squeezing my neck harder than he did when he urged me into the car after the meeting.

On that last thought, I climax, a small groan escaping my lips as my body trembles. I'm left lax and panting in my chair as I slowly pull my fingers out and grab a tissue from my desk.

Straightening my skirt as I pull it back down, I look around again. The blush spreading across my face feels like fire. The zoomed-in image of Sebastian's cock straining against the nylon fabric on my screen might as well be a flame. I am so very fucked. I can't have him. I need to stop this. I'm acting like a crazy person.

I take a long drink of water and finish my work before calling for a car to take me home. I need to get out of this office for a few hours. I need to stop thinking about my boss like this. But can I?

Chapter9

Sebastian

My phone lights up with a text as I walk into my kitchen. The mail is on the island as it is every day. I flip through it, my mind numb to the routine as I replay the events of the day. Fucking Leonard. I hate the bastard.

I probably shouldn't have overacted, but damn it if Alexis doesn't do something to me. I war with myself about making a phone call and ending his career.

Sighing, I glance down to see I have texts from Jay, my new campaign manager, and Conner.

I answer a question for Jay and then read Conner's text.

Conner: Drinking. Come over.

I glance toward the front hall of my home and out the windows flanking either side of my door. I can see lights on, through the trees. Fuck it. I need a drink anyhow.

I loosen my tie, pulling it off and leaving it next to my unopened mail. The night air is unseasonably chilly. The sky is clear. The evening is reminiscent of so many from my past. I suppress the memories as I walk through the trail we had built between our properties. I open the side porch door and walk into Conner's massive kitchen. He's sitting on a barstool, scrolling through his phone. I can tell he's swiping right on a dating app by the repetitive motion of his thumb. His other hand holds a glass of

amber liquid.

“Anyone good?” I inquire as I walk over to his bar and help myself to his top-shelf bourbon.

He shrugs. “No one worth dating, but definitely a few that seem fuckable.”

For as much as I’m described as the alpha playboy, and yes, I know what the women say about me, Conner is even more alpha, more playboy, and way more arrogant. If I exude power, he bleeds it. And I’m man enough to admit that.

If Conner had paid any attention in our psych class, he might have learned that his behaviors are a direct result of his fucked-up childhood. His life reads like a bad movie, a mother who was tragically killed and a tyrant father who neglected him on his best days. It’s amazing he’s as normal as he is.

He sets his phone down and stares at me. “What about you?”

I contemplate my answer as I take a sip of my drink. I’m always calculating what to say, even to my closest friends. It’s all part of being a North.

Conner leans back in his swivel chair. “Oh, this is going to be good.” His lips twitch into a smirk. I scowl at him.

“Fuck off,” I mutter while taking another sip.

“It’s that hot piece of ass you hired. Isn’t it?”

Damn, he’s good. Conner is like a bloodhound. He can smell a possible lay through all the pretentious bullshit.

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“She’s a non-starter. I don’t fuck my staff and you know it.”

“Oh, right, just everyone else’s.” Fuck Conner, calling me on my own shit.

“Well, those women don’t report to me.”

“What women?”

Aiden asks as he walks through the side door.

“Bastian wants to fuck his new hire,” Conner says with a laugh.

Aiden smirks. “Shocking.”

These motherfuckers are starting to piss me off a little.

“Chillax,” Conner states, sensing my annoyance. “We’re just fucking with you. Fuck whoever you want. I mean, if you don’t want her, maybe I’ll ask her for a drink. She interned for my firm a while back, and I never forget a perfect rack. In fact—”

I scowl at him. “If you so much as lay one of those meaty fingers on her, I will beat the ever-living shit out of you.”

Conner chuckles and sits up straighter, flexing his bicep that’s easily twice the size of mine. “I’d like to see that, Congressman.”

I glare at him as I feel my jaw clenching. I take another drink trying to calm myself.

Conner's fucking with me and I know it. He loves trying to get a rise out of me. He's like a cat toying with a mouse because he can.

"What's up, for real?" Aiden asks. He's always more sensitive than Conner and me. He can be a righteous, pompous ass, but he's not without his own baggage from his past.

"I just need to stop thinking about her. She's a distraction I don't need right now."

"Or maybe, she's the exact distraction you need," Conner states.

"What's going to happen when it ends? She's an amazing employee and she'll leave," I say dryly, knowing full well she'll likely leave once she gets her law degree. Alexis had an expiration date on her from the moment I offered her the job.

"So, she'll leave. Staffers aren't exactly hard to find," Aiden points out.

"Good ones are," I retort. As if she can sense we are talking about her, my phone pings with an incoming text.

Alexis: Just emailed you Confervo files.

I reply that I'll look at them. Conner asks Aiden a question and it takes me a half a second to realize what he asked.

I look up from my phone. "The missing girl?" I repeat the end of his question.

"Did you see the article in The Tribune?" he asks again.

I nod.

Aiden swallows. “It’s not like a girl hasn’t turned up in the woods before. That park isn’t exactly safe after dark.”

“It’s just interesting. The description of what happened...was eerily familiar,” Conner mutters before finishing his drink and reaching for the bottle to pour himself more. “But also written by that bitch of a woman.”

I smirk. Conner hates this reporter named Vivienne Westerly. I’ve never had an issue with her. Her grandfather was president when we were small children. Her parents own a horse farm in Kentucky. She was born with a silver spoon up her ass but chose to pursue journalism and leave the family business. None of that bothers Conner. What bothers Conner is an exposé she did on his family’s company. She did not write kindly about his mother. While his mother was a piece of work, she did have her charitable points. In any case, Conner loathes Vivienne. She may be the only sexy woman our age in the entire city that he hasn’t tried to fuck.

As I half listen to Aiden and Conner start comparing crimes, I pull up the email from Alexis, surveying the research she has compiled. It’s extensive. I’ll need to take a few hours and go through it all.

“What do you know about Confervo?” I interrupt, looking over at Aiden.

Aiden pauses mid-sentence. “Uh, why?”

Sighing, I lean back against the marble countertop behind me.

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“They want to give me campaign money. They are also trying to merge with another big pharma company. I’m just curious what you think about them, as a doctor and all.”

Aiden shrugs. “I mean, I guess they are fine. I know they have a lot in research and development right now. I had one of their reps telling me about some products that she thinks they’ll have on the market in a few years. Sounds cool, very cutting-edge stuff that manages pain for patients during surgery.”

He stops and frowns before continuing. “Just be careful, I know you want to work with these companies but not all of them are well-intentioned. It’s a business, after all.”

“I know,” I agree as I put my phone down.

“You want me to look into them some more?” he asks with a raised eyebrow.

“Maybe, just put out some feelers,” I say as I sip my drink. My entire life is about who I know and who people I know are acquainted with.

“There’s a gala coming up for that robotics company that Bradley is repping,” Conner grunts as he looks at his phone.

I chuckle. “Better swipe right on someone, then.”

I watch him swipe right and shake my head. There’s always something to do for the brotherhood. The ties are thicker than blood. When our brothers need us, we are

there. This means we have obligations nearly every week. In three weeks, Paul and Paxton's firm has their annual charity event. Kevin does a fundraiser for a program at the FBI each year for disadvantaged youths. Hell, I've sponsored at least a dozen kids at the camp every year.

"Have you asked Jason what he thinks?" Aiden inquires.

I shake my head. I do what I have to in order to support him and I certainly did my fair share to get him elected, but I wouldn't reach out to him directly. I'm surprised Aiden asked me that.

Aiden shrugs. "I mean, if he wants you to win the Senate seat, then he probably would make sure your donors are on the up-and-up."

Conner starts laughing and I soon follow. Aiden groans. "You know what I mean. He wouldn't want some scandal being leaked."

I know full well what Aiden meant, but I can't help teasing him a bit. No one is on the up-and-up in this city. Not even Aiden.

"Maybe you should bring Alexis to the gala," Conner interjects after our laughter dies down.

I turn away from him and stare out at his pool. Its lights are on, making it glow blue in the vast darkness of his yard. He's not wrong. It's a good place for Alexis to meet many elites. She could network with other staffers who might be attending. However, normally, I'd bring an actual date to the event. Of course, normally, I'm dating someone.

It's been a few months since I broke it off with Monique Princhard, a model who I met at a party in New York.

Her father is also a senator. I got tired of playing her games. She needs a man who will do what she wants, a boy to boss around. She didn't like my need to control and dominate.

"I guess I could bring her," I mumble as I finish my drink. "I should go. I have work to do."

"Seriously, you just got here," Conner argues. "We haven't even played yet."

Conner typically has a standing poker game in his game room. Our nights together usually end in there with each of us wagering more money than we should. Sometimes others join us, but many nights, it's just the three of us. In many ways, it's been just the three of us since the beginning.

"Not tonight. I have emails to read," I note as I shove my phone in my pocket. "But you two enjoy."

"Fucking asshat," Conner mutters under his breath.

"Takes ones to know one, Pound," I reply as I exit the way I came in and head back to my home. Time to dive into the research Alexis has pulled for me. Time to find out if Confervo is the right match for my campaign.

Chapter 10

Alexis

Working on a Friday night isn't for everyone, but I still haven't finished a project. So, after doing my law school homework, I head back to the office. I shut my door and start researching Confervo again. I've sent my initial research to Sebastian, yet I want to dig deeper. My intuition tells me something is off about Jared and Confervo, but

I'm not sure what.

A news alert pops up on my phone and I glance over at it.

Missing College Student's Body Found in Rock Creek Park

I click on the link, ignoring my work as I push back from my desk. This is the second woman under the age of twenty-five that has gone missing in Rock Creek Park over the last month. This woman was a year younger than me. She should be getting ready to graduate, not lying in a morgue.

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Giving my head a shake to clear my mind, I set my phone back down and begin to mill through the articles I've found. Confervo stopped their research and development on an anesthesia medicine a few years ago. They had been manufacturing samples of it in a laboratory in Geneva, but have stopped trying to get FDA approval. And why do they only have one drug that they are seeking approval on now? Do they have nothing else in their pipeline?

But now, this merger with Halfagher Pharmaceuticals is most perplexing. What does Confervo have to gain from merging with Halfagher? Halfagher is a slightly smaller company, so it shouldn't help them financially unless they can use Halfagher's microneedle for something beyond what they currently sell.

Halfagher's CEO is Adam Blake. The name seems familiar, so I look him up. His brother is a high-ranking Navy admiral, Vance. That's probably how I know the name. I go down the rabbit hole searching for things about Halfagher and Confervo.

When I look up from my computer, I'm shocked to see how late it is. I rub my eyes and decide to go get a drink from the staff kitchen. As I pass Sebastian's office, I hear something. I turn and walk toward it.

The door is nearly shut. Only a few millimeters of the room beyond are visible. I swore I heard him in here earlier but now the lights are out. I'm about to walk by when I see the dim light of a monitor screen. Glancing at Sebastian's chair, my eyes widen. He's sitting there. The chair is pushed back from the desk, exposing his upper body and...his lap. But it's not his lap that draws my attention. It's his rock-hard cock in his hand. His fingers are wrapped tightly around it as he moves his hand up and down. He's watching something on the screen of his laptop, but there's no volume, so

I can only guess it's porn.

I should look away. I should keep on walking down the hall, but I can't take my eyes off him. The rumors are true, at least the size rumors because shit, that's an impressive erection. I swallow as I watch his hand move faster. I shouldn't be here.

"Alexis, if you're going to watch me, you might as well come in here," he says, not looking away from the screen.

Oh fuck. "I...I'm sorry...I." I stumble over the words because what can I fucking say. Shit.

"Get your ass in here." His voice is strained and low and...well, sexy as fuck. Everything about this screams "wrong" but my mind keeps my body from running away. Somewhere, deep down, I want this. I've wanted this since the first day I laid eyes on him while interning. I've wanted it since his hand touched the small of my back weeks ago.

Biting my lower lip, I push the door open. His eyes finally meet my gaze. He's unashamed as he pushes back in his chair, his fist still gripping his cock.

"Like what you see?" he asks with a raised eyebrow.

Words fail me. I'm so incredibly fucked. If I say "yes," then I'm admitting that I want to fuck my boss. If I say "no," then I'm lying about wanting to fuck my boss and he'll see right through me.

"I—I thought you had left," I stammer as I swallow again.

"As you can plainly see, I'm right here." He gives his cock a long stroke as if to prove the point.

I nod, still at a loss for words.

“Why are you here?” I manage.

His eyes drift back to the screen. “I’m watching security footage.”

I frown.

“Remember when we had more cameras installed here after the office break-in issue,” he explains.

All of a sudden, a foreboding feeling comes over me. No. No. No. It’s not that.

He takes his free hand and slowly turns the computer toward me, and I gasp. It’s me at my desk, masturbating while watching him on my laptop. Oh, fuckity-fuck fuck.

Thank God there’s barely any light in here because if my face wasn’t red before, it most certainly is now.

“I didn’t know watching B-roll of my triathlon advertisement was so...stimulating,” he says, his eyes boring into mine.

“I...” I trail off because I don’t know how to respond. I’ve been caught red-handed.

“Come over here,” he commands. The authority in his voice is both alluring and slightly frightening.

I walk over to his desk and lean on the edge of it about a foot from his knee. I’m close enough to see a bead of pre-cum and I lick my lips.

“Jesus,” he whispers, letting out a breath of air that I can feel against my arm. “I...”

He trails off and releases his dick.

He stands. I suddenly feel very small next to him as he towers over me. I also feel a bit like a gazelle that just got trapped by a lion.

I don't back away as his eyes bore into mine. "Say you don't want it," he commands as his hand goes once more to his erection.

I hesitate answering him, once more. Because I do want it. And judging from the video playing on this computer right now, he knows that I want it.

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“Do you know what I think?” he asks.

I shake my head, not trusting my voice.

“I think you do want it. I think you ‘have’ wanted it. I think that smart brain of yours is warring with itself because it says not to be attracted to my power, yet you are.” His eyes momentarily glance at the screen, where an image of me showing him just how much his power attracts me is on display for both of us to clearly see.

“We...shouldn’t,” I stammer. Sleeping with the boss is frowned upon everywhere, but here it’s scandalous. Yet, I could easily name two dozen or more staffers that are currently having affairs with their bosses. It’s par for the course. It’s a part of the depraved reality of this powerful city.

His free hand comes up and grabs my chin. “You’re right about that. There are a million reasons why we shouldn’t.”

“Th-then...why should we?” I counter, as I lower my head and gaze up at him from beneath my lashes.

He sucks in a breath. “Don’t play games with me, Alexis.”

“So what if I’m playing games?” I retort, only I am, and he clearly knows it. Why am I flirting with him? Part of me wants to slap myself for behaving like a vixen and the other half is ready for him to throw me on this desk and fuck me.

His grip on my chin tightens. He pauses as his thumb strokes my bottom lip. “Once

we do this, there's no going back. If things don't work out..." He trails off.

I swallow because he's right. I can't fuck my boss and then, when it all falls apart, expect us to be able to work together, can I? Isn't this illegal? My law student brain starts thinking it through.

"Don't," he commands. "If this falls apart, you will report to Harriet and not me. Whether you'd want to stay, well, that's up to you. I won't fire you over...I won't fire you, not over this."

I nod as my practical side surfaces. "OK. So, let's say, for the sake of argument, that I am attracted to you, and you are to me. And let's say we want to act on that attraction. Let's agree that it's strictly...physical. No feelings."

He smirks and raises a singular eyebrow. "No feelings?"

"I mean, no emotional attachment."

"Fuck buddies?"

I shrug. "I suppose that's one way of putting it."

"And you think you're capable of that?" he asks.

I bite my lower lip as I consider his question. He tugs my lip out from my teeth with his thumb.

"I...don't know," I whisper as my honesty surfaces.

He smiles a genuine smile. "That's what I like about you, little dove. You don't lie to me. Everyone always lies to me. They want to please me, but you, you want to please

me in a different way.”

I tremble at his words. He’s not wrong. I do.

He leans in and whispers against my ear, “There aren’t any cameras on in this room.”

I glance down at his erection and lick my lips. I want to lick him.

He palms his cock and looks at me. “You can touch me however you like.”

I drop to my knees and take his erection in my hand. I stare up at him again and see his eyelids droop as I stroke his cock. “I want to lick you,” I state as I follow the course of my fingers with my tongue, eliciting a groan from him. “And then ... quid pro quo.” And with that, I take him in my mouth and suck hard.

“Fuck!” he cries out as his hands fly to my head and press until his cock hits the back of my throat. I gag. I try once more and his erection slips down my throat for a moment before I gag again. He pulls back slightly.

“Sorry, little dove. I got carried away.” He gently strokes the side of my face.

This time he fucks my face more gently and I go back to sucking him as hard as I can, the need to please him so overwhelming that it consumes me in an unnatural way. Eventually, I feel him increase his pace and his thrusts become harder. I reach for his balls and grip them as they tighten in my hands and then I feel his release in my mouth. I swallow as much as I can, but I feel it dripping down my chin.

He pulls out of my mouth and reaches under my arms, hauling me to my feet.

“Such a mess,” he scolds as he wipes his release from my chin and sticks his thumb in my mouth for me to clean it. I comply.

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His eyes trail over me and then to his desk. My gaze follows. It's clear of papers as it usually is except for his laptop. The man is so clean it's nearly unhuman. He's probably already gone through all his papers for the day electronically and anything that needed an actual signature was placed back in an outgoing box on his credenza. I look over to confirm my suspicions, but I don't have more time to consider the pile in the box as he leans around me and pushes his computer to the far corner of his giant desk. It's an old desk. The center has a leather insert surrounded by a braided inlaid pattern of two lighter tones of wood. The desk is clearly antique, but it's nearly impossible to tell because of the perfect condition of the mahogany and carving details.

I have no more time to think as he grips my hips and pulls me to the center of the desk.

"I've been dreaming about this for weeks," he murmurs as his right hand comes to my chest and pushes me down. The hardwood feels cool against my thin blouse. He tugs on me again and sits back on his chair. He looks regal as he surveys me.

"Never wear pants to work again," he demands as he reaches up and unbuttons my pants, pulling them down my legs with my underwear. I suddenly feel exposed in more than just a physical way as his hungry eyes rove over my naked skin. His power is as drawing as a flame on a cold, dark night. I'm afraid of it, yet I crave it, need it.

He doesn't ask, he just takes as he lifts both my legs by my ankles, setting my feet on the armrests on either side of him. He scoots forward, pushing my inner thighs apart with his hands as he zeroes in on my center. My skin dots with goose bumps as his hands lightly glide along the insides of my legs until they reach the apex. His fingers

part my folds and he begins to move them back and forth.

He picks up the pace. Every third swipe, his middle finger hits my clit and I arch with the touches, needing him to do that every time. He chuckles, the asshole, he knows what I want. His rough fingers pick up speed, changing from a swipe to a circular motion that has him hitting my clit with every revolution. His hooded eyes watch me as I start to shake with my impending climax.

My body coils tighter and tighter and erupts with pleasure that has me screaming his name.

His free hand flies to my mouth and I bite my lip mid-scream. Tremors take my body as my eyes close. He pulls his hand away from my mouth and his fingers of his other hand gently slow, going back to barely touching me.

I don't have time to think as his head dips down, his thumbs keeping my folds open to him. And then, all I feel is his tongue as it swipes along my clit.

I gasp from the intense pleasure he creates as he licks and flicks and sucks. I can hear my breathing filling the room as my second orgasm nears.

"Fuck, you taste even better than I fantasized," he whispers against my clit. His heated breath and his words push me over the edge as he plunges a single finger inside of me before pulling back out.

His fingers are touching me, so lightly now, it's as if a feather is brushing over my sensitized skin. But any thought of a feather evaporates as I feel two fingers swiping back and forth over my wet folds. I spread my legs farther, wanting more, needing more.

"So fucking greedy, little dove," he says, his voice a low sexy growl.

“Please, don’t stop,” I beg. I’m no longer feeling bashful, my desire is too great. Shit, this man might be the end of me.

Chapter 11

Sebastian

I’ve had women in here before, I’d be a fucking liar to deny that, but none as mesmerizing as Alexis. She looks like a goddess, sprawled across my desk. If I wasn’t such an asshole, I might admit to myself that what I’m doing is more fucked up than any of my previous conquests. She’s so young. I may only be thirty, but those eight years between us might as well be an ocean of time, an eternity of time. I feel like the devil himself, about to slay one of God’s angels.

Her eyes drift open as I stand and take her feet in my hands, pushing them to the edge of the desk while keeping her pussy right on the edge. I smirk to myself, youth has its perks because damn it if she’s not spread open for me in this odd yoga pose that I’ve arranged her in and yet she doesn’t complain, doesn’t say a word at all as she watches me, waiting. Her rising chest slows with her breaths as I line my cock up with her dripping wet pussy. It glistens against the streetlights outside. It’s seductive as hell. The room is bathed in only that dim light from the outside. Everything is awash with shades of gray and black as limited light casts shadows around us. But all I see is the gentle pink hue of the skin surrounding her entrance. My cock is so hard, I don’t even take it in my hand, I just lean forward and watch as it slides inside her, inch by glorious inch.

I groan at her tightness. I’m forced multiple times to withdraw and push back inside her to cover myself more with her slippery wetness. The third time is a fucking charm as I slide home, her juices dripping down my balls as I slam against her.

Her back arches off the table, her body seeking more. Her toes wrap around the edge

of the desk as she tries to gain leverage.

I take my thumb and reach between us, rubbing it over her clit. She throws her hand over her mouth to muffle a cry.

“Little dove, you aren’t an angel, are you? You’re a little devil,” I declare with another smirk.

I feel her tighten around me. She likes my words.

“Deeper,” she commands me with a groan.

I lean forward, so our faces are mere inches apart. “Oh, sweet girl, in here”—I look around at the opulence of my office and her gaze follows mine—“I’m in charge.”

My smirk fades as I pull out of her. Her body trembles, her ass coming straight off the desk as she attempts to keep me inside her.

“Say it,” I murmur.

“Say what?” she asks, her voice strained with desperation as she tries to scoot off the desk toward my cock as if her pussy has magnets in it.

“Tell me that I’m in charge. Say, ‘You are in charge, Congressman,’” I command.

Her eyes narrow on me, but I keep my cock out of her way, preventing her needy body from connecting with mine. My cock twitches, the fucker clearly not as controlled as I like to think.

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I watch as she releases a long slow breath. “You are in charge, Congressman,” she says. I sense the slightest tinge of sarcasm in the way she says “Congressman.” Her feistiness turns me on. I’ll show her who’s in control.

I don’t wait for her to speak again. In one fell swoop, I pull her feet apart off the desk and raise them, so she’s completely open to me as I slam inside of her. Her cry tells me she liked this intrusion. She attempts to move, but I keep her legs from rising. She’s stuck to the desk, just where I want her to be.

I continue to pull out and plunge back in. Over and over, I do this, bringing her to the brink each time, but then waiting for a second to enter her again. I can see the frustration building on her facial features. She wants her orgasm.

“Say it again,” I finally grunt as I slow my movement, entering her deliciously slowly.

Her whole body is trembling with need as she looks up at me. “You are in charge, Congressman,” she says, and this time, there isn’t a trace of sarcasm.

“Fucking right I am,” I state as I glance over my shoulder at the Capitol building. “And I’m going to make you come at each and every monument this city has to offer, but only if you are good, little dove,” I say.

“Please,” she begs. I raise an eyebrow. “Congressman,” she adds, and I smirk as I plunge inside her and begin moving at a punishing speed. Her body bounces with each thrust of my hips.

“Tell me you’re on birth control,” I state because, shit, I’m not even thinking about condoms at this moment.

“I am,” she manages to say as her body tightens around me.

“Oh, God!” Her muffled cry comes out through her hand that’s back over her mouth.

“Oh, sweet little dove, I am more than your god,” I retort. “I’m your everything.” And with that, I swivel my hips and lean forward so that my pubic bone grinds against her clit.

Her cries are hardly muffled this time as she comes hard around my cock, her tight little pussy clamping down so hard that it nearly pushes my dick out of her. I place her ankles on my shoulders and wrap my arms around her legs, allowing me better control as I pick up my pace and lose myself inside her, my mouth going slack as I feel my cock burst deep inside her wet heat.

Our eyes meet in the dimly lit room and I know that we are both feeling something we shouldn’t. I pull out of her and step back, gently letting her legs dangle back over the edge of the desk. I grab a tissue box and hand it to her. Her hand shakily takes it as I tuck myself back inside my pants. I want her smell on me when I jerk off in my shower later. And I will be doing that, with this image of her splayed on my desk filling every crevice of my imagination.

“I’ll be right back,” she says. The slight pink blush spreading across her cheeks is barely visible in the low light of the room, but I see it there and it hits me in a way that I’m not willing to explore at the moment. She turns and grabs her pants and puts them on before heading to the bathroom.

I pace while I wait. I shouldn’t have done that, but damn it, if it wasn’t everything I wanted and more.

Her presence at the door distracts me from my thoughts. Her shadow is cast across the floor, her silhouette illuminated by the hall light.

“We need to talk,” she says.

I sigh. I knew it was too good to be true. Does she want to talk already? What the fuck?

“Alexis, I thought we had an agreement...” I trail off as she shakes her head at me.

“No, I don’t mean about...” I can’t see the color in her cheeks, but I know it’s most definitely there.

“Then about what?”

“Come,” she says and walks in the direction of her office. I don’t move, waiting for her to turn. She pauses at the door and looks back at me. I raise an eyebrow. She rolls her eyes. “Please, Congressman.”

Smirking, I rise and follow her, enjoying the view the entire way down the dimly lit hallway.

Her computer is on. Each of her screens shows different things. One is a news article about a missing girl. I squint to see it from across the room as I start walking toward it, drawn to the words on the screen like a moth to a flame.

“Oh, not that,” she says as she turns her other screen to face me. “I have been doing more research on Confervo.”

I don’t answer her as I skim the article. This girl was a college student. She was found not far from the incident that changed our lives.

I clear my throat and turn away from the picture of a happy young woman wearing sorority letters.

“What did you find? And I thought you were finished with it. Didn’t you send me everything you had?”

She nods and shrugs. “Something doesn’t sit right with me. I wanted to do more research.”

“Alexis, you need to understand. You can’t be wasting your time digging up every little thing. We have too many topics and not enough time. You’ll need to learn where to draw the line,” I scold because it’s fucking true. I don’t have enough staff as it is, and we are barely treading water when it comes to covering all the issues I need to be involved with while running for the Senate.

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She shakes her head. “No, I’m not doing it on the clock. I...well, please read it.” She points to her screen. “I don’t understand their endgame. It’s like I’m missing a piece of the puzzle.”

I skim the information and begin to see her point. When Jared gave me the company portfolio to peruse, I saw that they were switching focus to more anesthesia drugs, but why is their manufacturing plant in Europe still making a drug that they are no longer interested in getting FDA approval for. It looks like they had gotten some provisional approval from the EU, but the current status remains unclear. The merger with Halfagher makes sense if they want a better delivery system, but it’s a beast eating another smaller beast. In fact, Confervo seems to be collecting companies. I need to know their endgame if I’m going to accept a large check from them. Are they making pain meds or anesthesia meds or something else? Do they have a solid plan? I don’t want to back a company that’s on the verge of collapse because they only have one active FDA request. I can see why Alexis is concerned. On their face, Confervo looks fine, but scratch beneath the surface, and there are some strange anomalies that don’t add up.

I look up at Alexis.

“Do you see why their moves are confusing me?” she asks.

“Yes, I agree. It’s peculiar.”

“At first, I thought they wanted to expand into two types of medicine. Then, they pulled back, well, publicly they did; now I don’t know if they want microneedles which Halfagher makes, for pain killers, anesthesia, or both? It just seems a little

convoluted. I mean, he presented this clear picture to you, yet when I do some digging, it's not clear at all."

I nod. "Keep researching this."

She glares at me. "I thought I should learn to draw the line," she quips.

Oh no, she fucking didn't. I stand to my full height and walk her toward the wall, caging her in as I lean forward. She shivers as I press her body firmly between the cool wood window frame and mine. "Do not fuck with me, little dove."

Her eyes grow large, but she doesn't shrink away from me. "Maybe learn to trust me a little, then. I may be young, Congressman, but I'm not stupid."

"Trust is earned," I reply as I step away. I glance over at her desk.

Next to her computers, Alexis has an article sitting on a pile of papers.

The headline reads "The Kingmakers of Kensington."

Her gaze follows mine and she steps away from the wall.

"What does it mean?" she asks as her finger goes to the headline, tracing across the letters. "Kingmakers bring people to power through their political influence," she mumbles as she reads the first line of the article. Fucking Vivienne Westerly. Damned journalist, as Conner would say.

Shit.

I grab the newspaper article from her. Now, I suddenly hate Vivienne Westerly as much as Conner. She's been digging around us for her entire journalism career. She

was particularly interested when a handful of the political elite who all were in the same fraternity bought up property and created a compound. Thank God she doesn't know the truth.

The irony of it all is that her grandfather is one of us.

But what I don't want is young, pure Alexis getting wrapped up in it or worse, figuring it out, figuring out that power and evil are more entangled than she thought possible.

I clear my throat. "It's just some journalist. I don't know why she wanted to write about our little community. It's D.C., neighborhoods with high-powered players are a dime a dozen around here. I think she must have once been wronged by a friend of ours or something. She's always trying to dig up dirt that just isn't there," I lie as I keep my focus on the article because, for whatever stupid reason, I don't want to lie to Alexis's face.

"Oh," she says. "She made it sound like you all control things. Like, you run this city. I thought that was interesting since none of you are over the age of thirty-five."

I shrug. "Connected people are a dime a dozen around here."

She slowly nods. "I suppose that's true."

I turn to face her and take her chin in my hand. "We're still in agreement about us."

"Yes...Congressman," she says. I can see her lips fighting to smirk. Little brat.

I need to talk with Conner and Aiden and perhaps the others. Vivienne is a conundrum. She's related to one of us, yet she doesn't know what she's doing. I'm surprised her grandfather hasn't clamped that down, but from what I hear, she's

largely estranged from her family. We may need to deal with that, sooner rather than later.

Chapter 12

Alexis

I sit at the table in our kitchen, staring at the wall. What did I do last night? What did Sebastian do?

“Uh, hello, Alexis?” Whitney waves a hand in front of my face. “That’s it. It’s official, she’s catatonic.”

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“What’s up?” Erin asks as she takes the seat across from me. I remove my gaze from the wall and look at her. I can’t tell them. I shouldn’t tell them. Should I?

“You didn’t!” Erin says as she glares at me. “You stupid ho-bag!”

I sigh and place my forehead on the table. I can’t look at her because she’s right.

“What am I missing?” Whitney asks as she sits down next to me.

I don’t know what Erin does but I hear Whitney laugh.

“No fucking way. You fucked your boss! Seriously, Alexis, after everything Erin said?”

I turn my head and look at her. “It’s bad, isn’t it?”

“Fuck yes, it’s bad,” Erin says.

I sigh. “I know...” I trail off because while I do know, I don’t care. With the flip of a switch, I became a Sebastian addict. I know now that I’ve had him, I won’t be able to stop, even if I try.

“Shit, please, please tell me you don’t have feelings for him,” Erin says, her voice now laced with concern.

I try to look her in the eyes as I answer. “No, it’s just fucking.”

Erin's glare intensifies. "Motherfucker. You can't feel anything for him."

I shrug. "I don't know if I do. I mean, the sex..." I trail off and Whitney turns to my face.

"Was it as big as everyone says it is?"

I bite my lip from laughing at her wide-eyed stare. "Let's just say this. There are reasons there are rumors."

"I knew it!" she says with a fist pump. "I fucking knew it."

Erin's glare goes from me to Whitney. "Whit, you cannot encourage her. This is bad, like she-could-lose-her-job bad, and she needs that job."

Whitney rolls her eyes. "There are a million jobs in this city. And she's smart as fuck. And she's in law school. She will definitely find a new job."

"Well, we agreed to keep it...just fucking, and when it's over, it's over," I explain.

Erin's sigh might as well be my mother's scolding. "Let's be real here. One, you have a thing for powerful men. Two, he does do a lot of charity work, which you like, hell, it's the reason you interned there. Three, we all know you have a tendency to fall and fall hard."

I push back from the table. "Listen, I do maybe have a type and it's nice he does charity work, but it's totally unrealistic. He's like eight years older than me. He's at a completely different place in life. He needs to find some sort of Stepford wife to marry. And I'm not young and naïve anymore. I'm not going to mistake our lust as some sort of marriage situation."

“Fine, but just don’t make me tell you that I told you so,” she retorts with a pointed look, which then softens. “For real, Lexie-poo, I don’t want to see you get hurt...or fired.”

I nod. “Neither do I. Listen, I appreciate the concern, but I need to go study.”

“Again? Law school is like so much work. What about our show?” Whitney prods in a whiney voice that is so her.

I roll my eyes. “Whit, we can watch it tomorrow. It’s not going anywhere.”

“Whatever, go grow that giant brain of yours,” she replies as I head back to my room.

I wasn’t lying when I said I had to study, but honestly, the idea of reading two classes’ worth of case law is the last thing I want to do.

I sit down at my desk and force myself to read. I’m immersed in my third case when my phone pings. I glance over to see a news update.

“All Three Missing Women Had Traces of Chemicals in Their Systems”

I pick my phone up and click on the link, slowly reading the information out of total curiosity. These “missing young women” stories have been a steady lull in the background of the city over the past few weeks. My parents made me swear not to go running alone in the parks. Even my little sister, Judy, told me to be careful, which was funny considering she’s a reckless teenager. I begrudgingly agreed with them all. Although all these women went missing at dusk, so I’m pretty sure I’d be fine going for a run in broad daylight.

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As I finish reading the article, the name of the chemicals found in their system has me pausing. The component names of them as described have small alarm bells going off in the back of my head. It takes me a full minute for my tired and overwhelmed brain cells to catch up with what my eyes are seeing.

I pull up my notes and the articles I had been reading over the past week. It takes a moment to find the buried information, but it's as I remembered it. It's a leaked document that someone posted on a website claiming to include components of a drug. Those chemicals are in the medicine that is being produced in the lab in Geneva by Confervo. Medicine that it stopped attempting to get FDA approval on nearly ten years ago. Is it a coincidence? How can it be? I start searching the information, wondering if all medicines in this category include this combination of chemicals. It takes me a full hour, but I find not one single similar drug.

I close my laptop and call Sebastian.

The phone only rings once before he answers. "Shooting for overtime?"

I roll my eyes. It might be Saturday, but that doesn't mean this city shuts down, hell, it never shuts down.

"There's something I just found, and it might be nothing, but it's strange and I wanted to debrief you."

"Well, that's very cryptic, care to elaborate?" I can hear people talking in the background, but as he speaks in his low gravelly voice all of that noise dissipates and all I can hear is Sebastian's voice. I feel an ache between my legs. How can he do that

with just the sound of his voice? He's not even talking dirty. What the fuck is wrong with me? I feel like I'm under his dark spell.

As I focus on his question, I realize I feel uneasy discussing this on my phone. Perhaps it's all the spy novels I've read, but this information, if there is anything there that's a reason for concern. It's best told in person.

"Can we meet?" I ask.

"I'm near the office. I can meet you there in two hours."

I look at my clock. It's nearly seven in the evening. Is he having dinner? Is he with another woman? I squeeze my eyes shut as if doing that will block out the jealousy that just popped into my mind. It doesn't matter if he's with another woman. What we have is purely...sex.

"Yes, I can meet you there in two hours."

"See you then." He hangs up, and I spend the next sixty minutes in a half-hearted attempt to study before heading over to the office. I decide to rent a bicycle as the traffic isn't bad. I make it to the office in fifteen minutes and head upstairs. I pass a handful of people on my way. The weekends are a lot less busy here. I feel slightly underdressed in my jeans and blouse.

I find our office door already unlocked and I hesitate, remembering the break-in. As I reach for the door handle, I feel warmth at my back and a breath on my ear. I jump, letting out a squeak. Strong hands grip my upper arms.

"Careful there," Sebastian's voice whispers against the shell of my ear, leaving my skin peppered in goose bumps.

“H-have you already been inside? It’s unlocked,” I stammer.

His hand reaches around me and grips mine, turning the doorknob. “Yes, I just had to do something. I promise you’re safe.”

And I do feel safe at the moment encased by his arms. He opens the door and presses the small of my back to guide me inside. He leads me to his office and motions for me to show him what I found. I pull my computer out of the bag I brought. Setting it down, I pull up the news story. He reads it. Then I click on an icon and the document I found pops on the screen. He leans in, his frown deepening when he gets to the part that had me frowning as well.

“The chemicals...” I trail off.

“Are the same,” he finishes.

I nod. “I looked up other similar classes of medication, but I can’t find them listed together anywhere. It could be a coincidence, but it could also be...” I stop speaking again, letting him add it up for himself.

“Have CRS run everything they can on this class of medication. I want to be sure. And don’t tell anyone why, only use your most trusted contact at CRS.”

“OK.”

I step back and find him staring at me. But he’s no longer frowning. He looks downright feral as he surveys me.

“You still not admitting to yourself that my power over you turns you on?” he says with a wicked smirk.

Asshole.

“I didn’t think so.”

Motherfucker. My legs involuntarily clench together. His gaze doesn’t move off my face, but I know he’s seen it. Stupid traitorous body.

He steps forward. “Feeling my power yet?” he asks, his body dangerously close to mine.

I straighten my back. My desire to be combative is as strong as the attraction between us. Why am I fighting this? “No,” I say, but my timid voice gives away my bluff.

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He wastes no time as he spins me around and slams my body against the wood encasing the window. His hand wraps around my neck, holding my head in place as he leans in so that his lips touch my ear.

“Do you feel the power now?” he asks, his voice low and menacing.

I swallow and nod as I stare out at the Capitol. It glows white against the dark sky.

His leg pushes between mine. “What did I say about pants?”

“No pants allowed,” I repeat his words from before as I feel his other hand come around to unbutton my jeans and push them down over one hip at a time. I want to protest that it’s the weekend, but for some reason, I don’t. He unbuttons my blouse and releases the front clasp of my bra, freeing my breasts from the confines of the material.

“That’s right. No. Pants. Allowed,” he states as he pushes my pants and underwear farther down until they fall to my ankles.

I blush because right now, anyone who looked up here could see me, even in the dark, they could see me.

“Who’s in control?” he growls as he bites my earlobe, and I shudder.

“You are,” I whisper. Everything about this is so very wrong, but it feels so right.

His hand tightens around my neck. “And what happens if you disobey me?”

He loosens his hand and I swallow again. “I...” I trail off because part of me wants to say that he’ll punish me, but part of me also wants to egg him on and tell him nothing will happen.

I feel his other hand move around to my front. He cups my sex, and I greedily push against his hand. “This is mine.”

Without warning, he slams two fingers into me, and I cry out against the sudden intrusion.

“And this is mine.”

His thumb presses hard against my clit, and I feel tears sting my eyes, not from the pain, but from the need. I need him so badly. I can’t fight it. I don’t want to fight it.

“All of you...is mine. Do you understand?” he says, his voice a whisper in my ear.

“Y-yes,” I stammer.

“Good. And I want what’s mine, whenever I want it. Like right now. So, when I tell you to wear a fucking skirt to the office, do it. And no panties. Understood?”

“Sebastian...it’s...inappropriate,” I argue.

“What’s inappropriate is what I say is inappropriate. And none of the asshats over in that building are going to know what’s under your skirt, so it doesn’t matter.”

He slowly pulls his fingers from me and thrusts them back in, making me jump.

“But...what if...” I trail off, too embarrassed to say my thoughts out loud.

His hand slides down my throat and grabs my breast, giving it a squeeze. “What if what?”

I take a breath, missing his hand around my neck. “What if...you know...I get wet?” I whisper the last part as I feel my cheeks heat.

A low chuckle rumbles in his chest. “I’ll tell you what. If you have to spend the day on the floor or in committee, then I’ll let you wear the panties, but if you are in here, no panties. Comprene?”

“Yes,” I answer as his hand slowly moves back to my neck. I don’t know how or why I feel safe right now, but I do, like nothing bad could happen to me with his hands clutching my body.

“Now, where were we?” he asks as he pulls his fingers out of me, leaving me feeling raw and needy. His fingers leave a trail of wetness along my thigh as he brings them to his lips and sucks. He moans his approval and grabs my hip. “Ah, yes...power.”

He pulls my hips back, while he keeps my head against the wood, and with no warning, he slams into me. I cry out as I feel all of him inside of me as my body tries to stretch to accommodate his girth.

His hand comes to cover my mouth. “Quiet, little dove. I’m not done with you yet.”

My whole body shudders from his words. He might have a reputation, but it doesn’t even come close to the reality. He’s better than my most wicked dreams. I just hope they don’t turn into nightmares.

Chapter13

Sebastian

Feeling my cock encased in her rippling wet pussy has my mind going blank. I've had enough women to have begun to forget the number and feel of each of them wrapped around my cock, but at this moment, I know I will never forget this woman. Our bodies are beyond synced, we are one body, mind, and soul as we move in perfect harmony with every wavelength and frequency between us in sync.

I feel her come before she lets out a silent cry, her muscles clenching down on my dick. She slumps forward, and I grasp her tightly around the waist, keeping her right where I want her. I slow my rhythm, savoring each ripple before chasing my own release. With a final thrust, I fill her, it feels primal, and I want nothing more than to take her home and do this over and over all night until her pussy is raw from the friction. As we both stand there panting, her body limp in my arms, my phone pings with a text.

I mutter a curse under my breath as I pull out of her, making sure she's steady on her feet as I step back to pick up my phone that I set on the desk. It's my date, Natalie.

Damn it. Yeah, I'm an asshole. Natalie is an old fuck buddy. She works in Nashville now but is in town this weekend. We had made plans prior to everything that happened between Alexis and me, and I didn't want to cancel because Natalie runs the home office for a congressman that I need to vote on my bill. This probably makes me a bigger asshole, but it's how the game is played. I have no intentions of fucking Natalie tonight. One, I don't want to complicate things with her at the

moment. I don't need any more complications in my life, well, aside from the one standing in front of me. Two, my body doesn't crave Natalie, in fact, right now, it's craving Alexis, again.

"Everything OK?"

I set my phone back down and turn to her. The moonlight illuminates around her, she looks ethereal, her hair highlighted in the silvery light, her white blouse open, exposing the curve of her breasts, her bare pussy on full display.

I stalk over to her and run my finger along the inner curve of her right breast. She shivers under my touch. Her responsiveness thrills me in ways it shouldn't.

"I need to go. Get that additional information. I'm going to talk with some people tomorrow about this," I state as I run my hand up the column of her neck, feeling her pulse along the way.

"OK," she says, her voice a whisper as she looks up at me from beneath those dark, thick lashes. I cup her cheek for a microsecond, but the feeling it gives me has me retracting my hand just as fast as it had moved there. I drop my arms and lean over to grab my phone as a text pops up from Natalie.

Natalie: How long are you going to be? I'm bored. Should I meet you at your place?

I go to pocket my phone, but as I do, I look back to Alexis and find her eyes narrowing. She's read the text.

"Who's Natalie?" she asks slowly.

"Just an old friend."

Her jaw clenches and she reaches down to pick up her jeans. Angrily, she begins to pull them on, turning away from me as she buttons her top.

“Please tell me that you did not just fuck me while on a goddamn date!” she whispers-yells.

For the love of fucking God, this is why I don’t like keeping women in my life.

I grip her arm to turn her toward me, but she yanks it away. “Don’t touch me,” she hisses.

“I’m not going to fuck her, if that’s what you’re thinking,” I state because it’s the truth.

“That’s not the point, you ignoramus. The point is you left a woman in the middle of a date and had sex with me! What the hell? I’m all for this casual relationship, but that ... is taking it too far,” she says, her voice laced with sarcasm. She opens her mouth to speak again but then shuts it. “I should go. I’ll send in the request for research when I get home.”

“How did you get here?”

This time she stands up to me, rising onto her tippy-toes, which still doesn’t put her at eye level. “None of your damn business, Congressman.” The last word comes out with saccharin sweetness.

I narrow my eyes and straighten my back, giving my height a boost. “Careful, little dove.”

“Or what? You going to spank me?” she says with an eye roll.

“Don’t tempt me.”

“Yeah, whatever. Have a nice night,” she replies as she walks toward the door. “I just remembered I have plans,” she adds as she walks out of my office.

Jesus Christ, this woman is infuriating. Yesterday she declared that she wanted this to be casual and now she’s pissed that it’s casual. Fucking hell, did I just make a huge mistake. And what damn plans does she have. I admit for a half a second that I don’t want her to have plans, but I have plans, so that would be a double standard. Fuck it, I think as I head out of my office and lock up, before texting Natalie back.

I grab a ride back to the posh bar where I left her.

“Hey, sorry about that,” I state as I take my previously vacated seat.

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“No problem,” she says as she sets her phone down. She launches into questions about my campaign. Our conversation eventually flows to talk of my transportation bill. Natalie is easy to talk to, but our desires in life couldn’t be more different.

As our talk fades, she looks over at me. “Nightcap?” she asks.

I grin at her old-school lingo. “Not tonight. I have some things I should take care of,” I state, one being sorting out Alexis and then talking with Conner and Aiden.

She gives me a fake smile. “Another time, then.”

“It was good to see you,” I say as I stand and lean in to kiss her cheek. “Let me call you a car.”

She waves a hand at me. “My hotel is a block away. The walk will do me good.”

“Then let me walk you there.”

She nods and we walk the short distance. It’s my goodbye to her. Whatever was between us is over. I have zero desire to fuck Natalie again. I’m not ready to explore why that is, but I’m one hundred percent sure that Alexis is the root of my reasoning.

“Safe travels tomorrow,” I state when we reach her hotel.

Natalie nods and turns to head inside but stops and looks over her shoulder. “Whoever she is, she must be something special.” She gives me a small smile and disappears through the doors. Leaving me a bit stunned, and I’m never fucking

stunned.

I begin walking back to get my car, my head swirling with the events of the day. I pull my phone out and call Aiden.

“What’s up?” he asks. I can tell by his breathing and the stomping sound in the background that he’s on his treadmill.

“I need you to find me all the information on this drug,” I start as I launch into a quick explanation. As I explain what Alexis found, I hear the treadmill stop.

“What?” I ask.

“Hold on,” he replies. There’s a long moment of silence. “That’s a really unique combination. It’s certainly not the norm,” he finally says.

“Can you send me info on what is the norm?” I ask.

“Yeah, sure. I can get that for you, but I thought you had Alexis getting info from CRS?”

“I do, but now it’s a race on who works faster.”

“You’re a fucking dick, you know that?” he asks, most definitely rhetorically.

“Takes one to know one.”

I know he’s shaking his head at me; I don’t need to see him to know this.

“Does this mean you aren’t going to take their money?”

“Well, technically as long as they are before my committee, I can’t ethically take their money, now, can I?” I say.

“But?”

Sighing, I run my hand over my face. They can still give money to my political action committee. It’s just, do I want it? I’ll give it to Alexis, she had an intuition that something shady was going on, and now I feel it too. It’s like there are all these puzzle pieces but I don’t know how they fit together.

“It’s a lot of money,” I admit. Yes, my family has a shit ton of money. Yes, I could probably bankroll most of my Senate race myself. But this money they are offering could be a game-changer for me. Yet, the research Alexis has done is concerning since they don’t have much coming down the pipeline as far as new drugs. Where are they getting this windfall of cash? And as many concerns as I have at the moment, there are positive aspects to Confervo on its face. They do a lot of charity work and programs to push out much-needed pain medicines to low-income people and children who can’t afford it but need it post-op or when dealing with long-term illnesses, and that I like.

“More than others?” he asks.

“I won’t need others.”

“Shit.”

“Yeah, shit.”

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“You gonna bankroll the rest?”

“I’d prefer to. I mean, I’m sure other smaller donations will roll in, but this could make my win an easy one.” Aiden knows that I’m not concerned about my in-party competition, but the other party’s likely candidate would give me a literal run for my money.

“Well, let me dig around after my workout,” he says.

“Thanks, man. I appreciate it.”

I get in my car and crank the music as I drive home, my brain still filtering the day’s information.

“Text from Alexis Martin,” comes blaring through my speakers as my sound system pauses my music.

“Thank you for the wonderful opportunity, but I don’t think this is going to work. I will send you my official resignation on Monday.”

My fingers grip the steering wheel so hard I’m surprised it doesn’t crush beneath them. What the fuck is she doing?

“Reply,” I say to the prompt at the end of the message. “Resignation not accepted. I’m sending a car for you right now. We will discuss this in person, immediately.”

“Text from Alexis Martin,” the woman’s voice states seconds after sending my

message. “There’s nothing to discuss, Sebastian.”

Against my better judgment, I pull a U-turn and head straight back to her apartment. Goddamn stubborn-headed woman is going to be the death of me.

I race through the streets at high speeds, risking a ticket, but not caring. I double-park in front of her building because my level of giving a fuck is at an all-time low. What has she done to me?

I’m up to her floor in record time and manage two loud knocks on her door before it flies open. A very stunned Alexis stands in front of me wearing only a t-shirt that barely covers her ass. Her eyes are wide and her mouth is gaping. I don’t say anything as I breeze past her, turn and shut the door. Walking forward, I trap her between me and the cold steel.

“We ‘will’ talk and we ‘will’ talk right the fuck now,” I command in a low voice, my jaw twitching with each word. I hear a sound behind her. Great, her roommates are home. “Now get dressed and we’re going to my house.”

I step to the side and turn to see a young blonde woman standing in the hallway looking quite amused. She’s in pajamas that look expensive, but her hair is a mess, and she looks like she just woke up.

“Hi there,” she says with a smirk as she leans against the wall and crosses her arms. “I’m Whitney and you must be Congressman North.”

My jaw clenches as I look from her to Alexis. There is zero doubt in my mind that Miss Whitney over here knows exactly what has transpired between Alexis and me, and I don’t like that one little bit.

“I’ll be right back,” Alexis mutters quickly and nearly runs down the hall past

Whitney who doesn't budge but does give Alexis a look as she flies by her.

"So, Mr. Congressman, what are your intentions with my roommate? Because she is hella pissed at you," she says, giving me a pointed look.

"Whitney, is it?" She gives me the slightest nod. "The only person that needs to know my intentions about Alexis, is Alexis."

She whistles and puts her hands up in defense. "Well, best of luck with that." She swivels as Alexis emerges from a doorway behind her. I see Alexis give her a look and then walk past her. She says nothing to me, but I open her door and she walks across the threshold. I place my hand on the small of her back as we walk down the hallway because apparently, I'm a magnet and she's a wall of metal.

She keeps trying to walk faster, but my legs are longer. If she thinks she's getting away from me, she's grossly mistaken. She presses the button for the elevator and stands with her arms crossed, a large purse over her shoulder, her foot tapping in anger.

Oh, little dove, I think you think you are angry. Except, you don't know what angry is.

The doors open and we walk inside, my finger pressing the first-floor button, neither of us speaking. The tension is so thick I don't think a knife could cut it.

The bell dings and the door opens. She walks out first, pushing open the front doors, and then pauses. There's a cop at my car.

I walk over to him.

"Congressman, is this your vehicle?" he asks as he glances at my plates.

“It is. I apologize, there’s a matter of national security and I needed to pick up my staffer to attend a security briefing.”

“O-oh,” he stammers. “Uh, just be careful where you park, Congressman,” he says as he scurries back to his car and leaves.

Alexis doesn’t move.

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I glare at her as I open her car door. “Get in the fucking car, now.”

She glares back.

“Little dove, do not press me right now. You will not like the outcome, I promise you that.”

She only hesitates for a moment before getting in the car. I close the door and walk around to the driver’s side. I get in and start my car, turning to her. “Not a word. We will discuss this when I am not operating a vehicle,” I hiss angrily as I take off down the road, anger radiating off me in waves stronger than the ocean after a storm. She doesn’t acknowledge me but turns away and looks out the window as we drive past the monuments surrounding the National Mall.

Trust is not something I easily give. In fact, the number of people I truly trust I can count on one hand. Do I trust my family? No. My mother lost my trust when she turned to my father’s best friend after Kara died. The only reason they aren’t divorced would be my father’s desire to keep up appearances for his political career and my mother’s desire to be dripping in diamonds and lavish vacations to tropical islands. My father, just like his father, would sell his soul to maintain the power bestowed upon him. Kara. I trusted my sister with my life. I would have gladly given mine for hers. But in the end, death stole her from me. The angry teenager that I was, I lost trust in the medical world. And then there are my friends. I never trusted any of my friends growing up. Going to a private boarding school filled with the nation’s elites’ children doesn’t exactly create an atmosphere of trust. Conner and Aiden. I trust them with my life. The rest of my brothers, that’s more complicated. Would they sacrifice for me? Yes. Would they turn around and stab me in the back if I fall out of line?

Yes. It's not exactly a relationship built on trust.

The only sound in the car is the tires on the road. The night is eerily still in the hours before a storm is scheduled to hit.

The gate opens after scanning my plate and I pull onto Kensington Place. Alexis tenses her legs as though bracing for what's about to come. I'll admit, there's a part of me that's deeply curious about what she's thinking, about whether I will change her mind. But first, she is going to get my full wrath because saying I'm angry, well, it's an understatement of epic proportions.

Chapter 14

Alexis

Saying I'm afraid of Sebastian North at the moment isn't completely true, but that's only because he has me seeing red. It's hard to be afraid of someone when you are ready to claw their eyes out. How can he be so infuriating? He's a walking hypocrite. He wants his cake and to eat it too. He has zero regard for how anyone else feels besides himself. I'm not going to be a pawn in his power play. If that's what he thinks I am, he is so very wrong.

We pull up to his house and he parks the car in the garage next to two others. Why does one man have three cars? Oh wait, because he's a pretentious, pompous asshole, that's why. I get out of the car before he can come around to open the door. Fuck his chivalry. I walk up to a door and realize it's locked. I feel him come up behind me, his arm reaches around to a thumbprint scanner above a keycode board, and he presses his thumb to it. The door's lock opens and I turn the doorknob. Once inside, I walk into his kitchen.

He doesn't stop there. He walks past me into a large great room and then straight

outside. I take a deep breath. Could he possibly be more obtuse?

When I came home and told Whitney what had happened, she backed my decision to dump his ass and quit my job. Erin's out of town visiting a cousin, but I don't doubt she would have backed my plan as well. Whitney was less than shocked when Mr. Pompous Prick showed up at our door.

"He likes the chase, but...maybe, just maybe, there's something more there," she had said with a shrug. "However, if he even so much as steps over the line, hell, looks like he might, I will gladly rip his balls off for you."

I walk outside. He's turned on a large firepit surrounded by what looks like very comfortable single-bed-sized lounging sofas. The flames dance in the dark night sky.

"Sit," he commands as he motions to the sofa closest to the flame.

I tentatively sit as far from him as possible; I need to keep my wits about me. I can't have him clouding my judgment. Whatever I wanted out of this thing between us is not likely going to happen, heck, it shouldn't happen. I need to remove myself from this equation. It's the only way to preserve my heart.

"What happens between you and me is not up for discussion with others? Do you understand? Or shall I have a new NDA drawn up?" His words are sharp and cut me. He thinks I told Whitney everything. Damn it, Whitney. I had seen his jaw clench in anger when she spoke. And he seriously thinks the NDA I signed as part of my employment status should cover us fucking?

"I did not breach the NDA and I didn't tell Whitney everything if that's what has you so wrapped around the axle."

If looks could kill, I'd be dead already.

“Fine,” he says, but the way he says it means he doesn’t trust me, not one little bit. “You are not quitting.”

I cock my head to one side. “I’m sorry, but I don’t believe you can make that decision for me. You don’t own me, Mr. Congressman.”

He walks toward me and sits, leaning back against the side of the sofa. I can see his chest rise and deflate with a deep breath. Do I affect him that greatly? I don’t have time to ponder that further because he opens his mouth to speak.

“First, you are my best staff member. I need you to stay. You have become an instrumental part of my team. And second, we both know you are no quitter. We are in the middle of figuring out something that may in fact be very important. You aren’t going to give up on it; we both know that.”

I’m not sure what infuriates me more, the fact that he thinks he knows me so well already, or that he thinks he can keep me on staff with his lame ploy that I’m his greatest staff member. Fuck him. I’ve listened and I’m done.

I stand and clench my hands into fists. “I’m done here. You had your opportunity to speak. I’m not sure why you had to drive me all the way out to bumblefuck Virginia to do it, but you did, and now, you listen to me.”

He doesn’t speak, but his jaw tightens, and I know I’ve already struck a nerve before I even speak again.

“I am not your pawn. I’m not some woman you can get your needs filled by while on what I can only assume was an unsatisfactory date. Maybe this thing between us is just a fuck fest between two adults attracted to each other, but that doesn’t mean you can treat me like your damn prostitute. If you want an escort, go hire one, Sebastian.” I throw my hands up and twirl, motioning to our opulent surroundings. “You clearly

have the funds to have one on staff, at your beck and call.

“Now, if you’ll excuse me. I will get you your research on Monday because you asked me to do that prior to my resignation. Goodbye, Congressman.” I turn and begin heading toward his house, picking up my bag and reaching inside to grab my phone to call a car.

I make it not more than ten steps before I’m stopped by two strong hands on my forearms, yanking me back against him.

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I try to elbow him, but he wraps his arms around me, locking my arms at my sides. He leans in, his breath tickling the shell of my ear. “Little dove, oh, little dove, what am I going to do with you? You are an enigma. You can start a war just as quickly as you can end one. That’s quite an impressive skill set. But what that smart little mind of yours didn’t calculate is that you aren’t dealing with your run-of-the-mill man. Did you forget that? You’re dealing with me. And I always get what I want.”

“Well, color me surprised that I’m the first one to not cave to the will of the great Sebastian North,” I hiss.

“Oh, Alexis, when will you learn that you aren’t a pawn in my game, you’re the fucking queen,” he growls.

I stop fighting his grasp at the sound of his last words. I don’t have any more time to process what he’s said as he spins me and grips my face, kissing me with such force that I stumble backward. His left hand goes to my ass, keeping me from falling as his mouth devours mine, and takes ownership in ways I shouldn’t let, yet I am. I want it. I want every angry, punishing kiss he’s doling out. Why? Why do I want this still? The answer scares me; it’s not what I want it to be. Because I’m his queen, and he knows it, which makes him my king. And that scares me more than losing my job, more than getting my feelings hurt; that’s a passion stronger than sex, stronger than friendship. It’s fucking carnal.

His kiss is beyond rough, its intent is to show he owns me. I’m not sure what switch was just flipped, but in a matter of milliseconds, we go from fighting to clawing at each other’s clothes, tearing them away from the other’s bodies and leaving a trail of material on the patio. He mutters something about my pants and smacks my ass. If

that's going to be my punishment for wearing pants, then it may become a rule that I regularly break.

The heat of the flames licks at our skin. He wastes no time in pushing me down on the lounge chair part of the sofa and spreading my legs. He pulls me to the edge and kneels before me, his body the only thing between me and the fire. The heat is intense against my skin as he leans down and blows on my clit. I waste no time in grasping the back of his head and pushing it right where I want it. He's strong enough to stop me, but he doesn't. He goes in for the kill, sucking and licking me with fervor. His fingers finding my entrance and pumping in and out at a rapid pace. He's driving me to my release fast and hard. Then he does something I don't expect. He pulls back and gets up, before I can protest, he's pushed the entire sofa against the brick perimeter of the long rectangular firepit. He climbs over me, his thick cock in my face as he places my feet on the ledge of the pit. The flames are so close to the apex of my thighs that it's almost too much. Then he reaches over to a side table and opens a small refrigerator, grabbing a cold bottle of water. I watch, completely transfixed as he opens it and pours a little over my clit. I cry out from the feeling of cold against my overheated pussy.

He wastes no time as he leans down and devours the water from my folds. Oh, fucking hell, that was hot.

I grasp his cock, and he moves so that his legs are on either side of my head. I take him in my mouth, both of us are transfixed by the other's body and bringing it to climax. I reach mine first, my cries stifled by his erection in my mouth. He comes a moment later.

I don't have time to register anything as he quickly turns and picks me up in his arms, carrying me inside.

"Our clothes," I whisper as I look back at the firepit.

“Will be there tomorrow,” he mutters as he leans down and kisses me again. This time it’s slower, a little softer, and he doesn’t relent as he carries me up to what I presume is his bedroom.

He sets me down on a king-sized bed. He presses a single button on a remote sitting on the nightstand and dim lights that must be inside his crown molding illuminate the room in a soft blue glow.

His room isn’t at all what I thought it would be like. His furniture is made of intricately carved cherrywood. His walls are a pale blue.

I don’t have time to assess much else as he crawls onto the bed over me and looks down at the length of my body, his tongue running over his lower lip. It’s almost like he’s deciding which part of me to sample first and the thought has me squeezing my thighs together.

“Lie back, little dove,” he commands, and my body complies without my brain even contemplating what he says as if his voice alone controls my movements.

He’s over me, looking at me as his hands slowly spread my legs apart. I watch his hand cup my sex. His smirk tells me he likes what he finds.

“I think you like my firepit,” he states.

I open my mouth to answer him, but he flips me over before I can say a word. His hands grip my hips and pull them up, my knees dig into the firm mattress.

He gives no warning as he slams into me. It’s a delicious mixture of pain and ecstasy. He doesn’t relent as he takes what he needs, drawing out one last orgasm from me before coming and rolling us to the side.

We lie panting in the dim light of the room. He eventually gets up and goes into his bathroom. He comes back with a warm wet towel. I clean myself and he tosses the towel on the floor and peels back the covers, lying down and pulling me against him. I am satiated and tired and confused, but mostly tired because as he turns off the lights, I close my eyes and fall fast asleep.

* * *

The strum of a guitar wake me. I sit up and realize it's late or very early. I rub my sleepy eyes and focus. Glancing to my left, the bed is empty. I grab Sebastian's white shirt and put it on as I walk out of the room and down the hallway. The only light is coming from a doorway at the end of the hall and so is the sound. I'm drawn to it like a lemming. I'm not sure I should go, but I can't stop myself as I place one foot in front of the other. I pass photos on the wall. They are giant portraits of Kara. They are the only ones I've seen other than the photo of Kara and Sebastian that sits on his desk.

I walk up to the door and lean against the cool wood, listening to the melody beyond it. It is a slow version of "Yesterday" by the Beatles, so painfully slow that it makes my heart ache. Tentatively, I reach for the door handle and slowly turn it. The door is mercifully silent as I open it. Inside, I find him sitting on the edge of a chair, an acoustic guitar in his arms. His voice is so low as he sings, that I hadn't even heard it in the hallway, but there it is. A deep rumbling verse, low and sorrowful, just like the slow beat of the song. He doesn't look up as I lean against the doorframe and watch. His eyes remain closed. I am transfixed by him. The powerful man I see every day is a ghost in this room. In his place is a boy so filled with pain that his words bring tears to my eyes. I barely note the acoustic tiles on the walls, the blackout curtains over the windows, and the carpet covering the hardwood floors. This room is meant to be soundproof. But why? Why block out this beautiful music from the world beyond?

The song finishes, and his eyes open. They remain unfocused for just a second before

shooting toward me and widening.

“I’m sorry,” I whisper. “I woke and...you weren’t there. I heard music.” I bite my lip nervously as I wait for him to speak.

His only response is to strum the guitar before setting it back on the stand next to the chair.

“Don’t stop on my account. You’re very good,” I encourage as I nod toward the instrument.

He looks back my way. “I’m mediocre at best.”

“I didn’t know you played,” I reply as I take in the remainder of the room. There’s a piano, a violin, an electric guitar, and a second acoustic guitar. Why didn’t I know he had such a love of music? I’ve seen his athletic side. I did see a photo of him at a piano recital as a child, but nothing about all these other instruments. Not one article, not one photograph of him strumming his guitar.

With a shrug, he leans back into the chair, placing his hands on his knees. His shirtless torso’s muscles ripple as he moves. It takes me a minute to realize my mouth is hanging open, and I quickly shut it.

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“Do Conner and Aiden know?” I ask, assuming if anyone else knows, then it would be his closest friends. Sebastian doesn’t seem particularly close to his parents. I want to know why, but that topic is definitely off-limits, at least for now.

“They know I mess around with instruments when I’m deep in thought or stressed out, but I don’t play for them. I don’t play for anyone,” he explains as his eyes penetrate me.

I swallow. “I didn’t mean to interrupt.”

“It’s fine. I’m sorry I woke you. I was trying to be quiet.”

Looking around again, I find an old picture of Conner, Aiden, and Sebastian on the wall. I walk over to it and study them. The three of them are so very different.

“How did you all become friends?” I ask without turning around.

I hear him move and feel the heat of his body behind mine. I can smell his cologne as his chest presses to my back. “We pledged the same fraternity.”

His answer is so short that I know there is more to it. One doesn’t have a bond that tight unless they’ve experienced things with the other people. Were they hazed? Did they vacation together? Did they spend endless nights at bars picking up girls? What made them go from pledge brothers to real brothers? I have so many questions, but I don’t vocalize any of them. The time doesn’t feel right.

Sebastian’s hands come to my arms, gripping them lightly. His lips press to my

shoulder and then my neck. I bend my head to give him more access as he trails kisses up to my ear.

“Let’s get you back to bed,” he murmurs as he guides me through the door and back to his room.

Chapter 15

Sebastian

After another round of mind-blowing sex, she gets up and walks to my bathroom. I smirk when I see she has no clue how to turn on the shower. She hesitates, her hand on a knob. It’s adorable. I reach over and hit a button on the remote. The rain showerhead comes to life, and she jumps back as though she’s broken it. I can’t help the chuckle that escapes my mouth.

She turns and looks at me, wide-eyed. “How...I mean...I...” She trails off as she looks back at the water and then at me. Finally taking pity on her, I get out of bed and stalk across the room. She backs up until her body makes contact with the glass shower door.

“Now, now, you mustn’t touch things without permission. You could break something,” I scold. She puts her little hands on her hips and glares at me. “This is hardly broken. I didn’t even touch anything.”

I smirk. “Or did you? I better test it out to make sure,” I state as I pull her to me and open the door before walking both of us inside and under the water. I reach over her and press a few buttons on the wall. The eight other jets turn on, giving us the full effect of the shower. Two massage showerheads, a rainfall showerhead, a waterfall showerhead, and four jet showerheads complete the experience. I feel her body relax against mine.

“Oh my God, how do you get anything done? I don’t think I can ever leave this shower,” she murmurs as she leans her head back, letting the rainfall water pour down over her face. I watch beads of water slide down her neck and in between her breasts. Shit, I could watch this all day long.

“Maybe I’ll keep you captive here,” I whisper as I lean down and nip at her earlobe. She shudders under my touch, and I’d be lying if I said I didn’t love her reaction.

There’s a long bench in my shower and I walk around her and sit down. “Come sit,” I say as I pat my leg. She bites her lip and looks at the space next to me. I spread my thighs farther, telling her that those seats aren’t available. There’s only one place she can sit, and as I palm my dick, I watch her eyes follow my movements. She knows where to sit. The sheepish look from a moment ago is gone and in its place is the Alexis that turns me on the most—it’s seductress Alexis. She slowly takes the last three steps to me, stepping confidently between my thighs. Her eyes watch me as I stroke my cock. No words are exchanged between us as she puts one knee on either side of my hips. She hovers over the tip of my cock for a long second before pressing down just enough to have the head slide into her velvety softness.

I close my eyes and wait but she doesn’t move. I practically growl as I open my eyes and find her watching me intently. “Are you going to play nice, or will I have to do it for you?” I ask.

She smirks, and in one fluid movement, she slams herself down on me.

“Fuck!” I yell from the shock of her body’s grasp on my erection. It’s almost too intense.

I glare at her, telling her that she is playing a little too close to the sun. She doesn’t look apologetic or sheepish this time; she just places her forehead against mine and begins to move in painfully slow thrusts. She might be young, but this woman knows

exactly how to move her body, no instructions are needed.

She leans her body forward, forcing my cock against the front wall of her hot channel and I know when I hit the spot she desires because she gives the smallest tremble, just enough to tell me she's close. I grip her hips and take control, thrusting up in fast, short movements against the spot I know drives her crazy. Her breathing becomes ragged, and her hands grip my shoulders tighter. I watch her as she comes undone on me. I let her body relax and then I lift her almost off me before slamming her back down one last time. That's all it takes between the force of her body gliding down over mine and her inner muscles undulating around me, I lose my control and come deep inside her. I keep her pinned in place, as my dick jerks, again and again, releasing every last drop.

* * *

After we finish cleaning up, I take her hand, leading her into my closet where I find her a shirt to put on before leading her to my office.

"We need to make heads or tails of all this research," I announce as I sit down and pull over a seat so she can view my monitor.

She sits and I open the files, one by one. We begin to go through them. It's nothing new. The same information about the drugs they make and the medical devices that Halfagher makes. After an hour, I lean back in my chair.

"Alexis, I know you had this gut feeling, and to be fair, I wouldn't trust Jared Pallin with a dog let alone a human, but there's nothing here. They must be making a killing with the drug they just put on the market," I state as I point to the screen.

Alexis frowns and leans forward. "Maybe we aren't looking in the right places?"

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I look at Alexis. I want to agree with her, but there's nothing here. It's just...business. I've made a fortune by trusting people who trust their intuition; hell, I've made my whole career by doing it. Maybe we are missing something. A part of me wants her to be right because I feel like she needs this win, she needs to solve a mystery. But the politician in me doesn't want to waste any more time. I take a breath and lean over the arm of my chair toward her.

“What do you think we are missing?”

She taps her cheek while looking at all of the open documents that span across two monitors on my desk. She studies them closely, her nose nearly against the screen.

I wait patiently, I'll give her tonight. But if we can't find anything after this, then we're moving on.

I get up and pour us drinks. It sounds crazy, but sometimes a little bit of alcohol loosens up your mind enough to see clearly. I know, this seems counterintuitive, but it works. Conner taught me this trick in college. When I would be stuck writing a paper or studying for an exam, he'd make me do a shot or drink a beer, just enough to calm me down, and then, I'd always figure it out.

Alexis takes the glass without looking. I watch her as she sips the bourbon. Her lips...I shouldn't be thinking about fucking her again. Not right now. I haven't spent so much time fixated by a woman since I was in high school.

I adjust myself and sink back into my seat.

“Bastian?” she asks. A nickname? Few people call me that, but I like how it sounds on her lips.

“What?”

She pulls her face away from the screens. I can see the confusion painted on her features.

“Do Jared Pallin and Adam Blake know each other?”

I shrug. “I’m assuming so. I mean they are both CEOs of pharmaceutical companies.”

“Yeah, but do they ‘know’ each other?” she says, emphasizing the word in question.

I frown. “I don’t know. Why?”

“What if...it’s not about the companies?”

I shake my head. Now, I’m the confused one. “What do you mean?”

“What if this merger...the work they want to do together...what if it’s beyond the companies? I mean, yes, the companies might get benefits from it. But what if there’s more to it than that?”

“What more do you think there is?” I ask.

She sighs and leans back, taking a long sip of her drink before answering. “What do we know about Jared and Adam?”

I grab the mouse and toggle around documents until I find their biographies. She swats my hand away and grabs the mouse, taking control. I let her, pushing back and

watching her as she reads. Why do I want her to figure this out so badly? I shake my head, telling myself it's merely a mentor thing. She is my employee after all.

"I think they were in a fraternity together," she says. I freeze at her words, willing it not to be mine. "Theta Omega Delta."

Fuck.

"Are you sure?" I ask, pushing my chair up next to hers and reading what she has on the screen. It's definitely my fraternity, not my chapter, a different university, but it's not good.

"Yes. They both went to the same university and they were in that fraternity together. Looks like different years, Jared is two years older than Adam. Do you think there's something there? I mean if they have been friends for that long..." She trails off as she bites her lower lip and studies the Theta Omega Delta website.

Now, it could mean nothing at all. But I also know it could mean everything. I can't tell her. I want to, I want to tell her everything. Something about Alexis makes me want to confide in her. I haven't felt this way about another person since Kara was alive. There are so many things about Alexis that remind me of her. Sometimes, it's borderline painful to be near Alexis because she's so damned similar to Kara.

"Isn't that your fraternity?" she asks. I nod but don't trust myself to speak.

"I'm going to look more into both of them," she states confidentially as she cracks her knuckles and settles herself in front of the keyboard.

Sighing, I get up. "I'll make coffee. It sounds like this is an all-nighter."

She looks up at me and grins and damn it if that doesn't pierce my dead heart.

“OK.” She giggles. “Are you sure you know how to use the coffee maker?”

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I glare at her, but it's a farce. I can't be mad at this woman. "I think I can manage," I grit out as I leave the room, the sound of her giggles following me like a soothing cloud of joy around my bitterness.

I lean against my island, waiting for the coffee. A minute later, I hear the soft pitter-patter of Alexis's feet. "Do you think it's like one of those secret society things?" she asks, her eyes wide with conspiracy.

I want to tell her that her notion is ridiculous. I want to, but I can't. I weigh my words carefully. "I'm not sure it's a secret society, Alexis, if you found it online."

She puts her hands on her hips and glares at me. "You know what I mean. Like, what if there is some secret pact. When I was in college, I was in a sorority; we did some crazy shit."

I give her a pointed look. "Yeah, I get it."

She throws her hands up in the air. "See, exactly."

I put a hand to my forehead. "Alexis, aside from being friends, I don't think that the fraternity angle is going to produce much here." Lies. I'm straight-up lying now. It totally might. I need to call Conner and Aiden about this development.

"But..." She trails off and frowns. "What if there's more to it than a friendship? I mean, I wouldn't go into business with Erin or Whitney, especially not Whitney, she's terrible at business stuff. She just lives off a trust fund."

I hand her a coffee. “OK, go research. See what you find. But if you don’t come up with anything by tomorrow, we’re going to have to let this go. Right now, there’s no reason to not take their money and there’s nothing strange going on with the merger.”

Alexis nods and drinks her coffee. “Maybe. I’ll be in your office,” she says as she turns and heads back down the hall.

I stand there in the kitchen watching her hips sway as she walks away. I pull out my phone and send Conner and Aiden a voice text.

“We need to talk.”

Conner replies first. “I’ll be home in a bit.”

“I am...indisposed at the moment, but I’ll come over later.”

Conner replies with several laughing emojis. Jackass. I head back to my office. I was ready to let this all go until she mentioned the fraternity. Now, my intuition is telling me that something else is going on. Maybe it’s fine, but maybe it’s not. Regardless, they need to know about this fraternity thing.

Chapter 16

Alexis

I open one eye as I wake. Confusion sets in. I’m not at home. I’m...holy fucking shit! I sit up quickly. I’m in Sebastian’s bed. I look down. I’m wearing one of his shirts. Slowly, my brain starts to awaken. I fell asleep researching at his desk last night. I vaguely remember him carrying me upstairs.

What time is it? There’s not a single clock in his room. It’s like a casino in Las

Vegas. One could spend hours in here and have no idea how much time had passed. My cheeks heat with that notion.

The door creaks open. He's there, ruffled hair and a day's worth of hair growth producing the sexiest shadow along his cheeks and jawline. He wears nothing but a pair of gray sweatpants. I lick my lips as my eyes study the outline of his cock against those sweatpants.

"Eyes up here, little dove," he states with a smirk as he walks in and hands me a mug of coffee. He pushes my hair away from my face as he sits down next to me. "You fell asleep, and I didn't want to wake you."

I fold my legs underneath me and take a long sip of the coffee. For someone who seems above making coffee, he's either quite adept at it or he has a very expensive coffee maker that works utter magic. I'm going with the latter of the two.

I moan my appreciation as the hot liquid slides down my throat. His eyes darken as he watches me. "Careful, or we won't make the subcommittee hearing today."

My eyes widen as I remember that today's the hearing.

He grins. "Don't worry. It's early. I set an alarm on my phone."

I feel my shoulders relax. "I need to go to my apartment to get some clothes."

He nods. "Let me grab a shower, and we'll swing by your place on the way to the office."

I sigh as he stands. I'm surprised when he holds his hand out to me. "Come on, let's get you cleaned up."

I take his hand without much thought. I set my coffee down on a coaster and follow him into his bathroom. We undress as he turns on his ridiculously complicated shower. This time, he's all business. Although his eyes seem to be memorizing every inch of me as he washes each part, leisurely and carefully.

"I didn't find anything else," I admit while he guides me under the shower spray to rinse off.

“Well, you did your best.”

I don't tell him that my best might not be good enough. What if my gut is right and I just didn't find the missing evidence to back my intuition?

Bastian's eyes meet mine. When did I start thinking of him as “Bastian” and not “Sebastian”? I don't know, but the transition happened seamlessly as if giving him a nickname was the simplest thing in the world. It's unnerving. I'm treading in dangerous waters, and he's a shark.

“You have to let it go,” he commands. “We'll find you a new research project this week. Maybe you can deep-dive into some information for my transportation bill?”

I nod. “Sure,” I say slowly.

He takes my chin in his hand and forces my gaze to meet his. “Let. It. Go.”

I let out a long breath and nod again.

He rinses off and offers me a giant fluffy towel from a heated towel rack. I wrap myself in the luxurious cotton fibers and wait for him to dry off as I watch his muscles ripple with each swipe of his towel. Why does he have to be so perfect? Well, aside from that arrogance, but otherwise, he's damn near perfect, even when he's being a total playboy fuckhead.

He tosses me some sweatpants and a sweatshirt. I have to roll the pants down a few times to make them stay, but they work, or at least they will for the ride back to my

apartment. As we exit the bathroom, he hands me a small gym bag. It has my clothing from yesterday inside it.

I follow him to his car, and he drives us in silence toward the city.

The sun is rising as we get to the Potomac River. He's taking a back way, driving us along the GW Parkway. He points to a tree branch hanging overhead and I gasp as I see a giant bald eagle sitting there.

He chuckles at my reaction. "I have yet to drive down this stretch of road without seeing one. It's fitting, isn't it?"

The GW Parkway leads to George Washington's home, Mount Vernon. And he's right, it is fitting. I giggle. "You always see one?"

He nods. "Every time. Strange, huh?"

I shrug. "Not really."

He grins as he continues steering us toward our destination. "Why don't you skip the hearing today?"

My head nearly rotates off my shoulders as I swivel it in his direction. "What? Why?"

He pats my leg. "I think you've become too invested. You have me better prepped than any other staffer ever has for a hearing on a matter that, quite frankly, is a done deal."

I frown. "What do you mean, a done deal?"

"It's a formality because of the size of the companies and such, Congress isn't going

to stop the merger. It's more like a debriefing. You should get to work on the transportation stuff."

Now I'm glaring at him. "But I've spent all this time prepping. What if Jared says something and you don't know to ask a question?"

He gives me a pointed look. "And are you going to be in a chair next to me?"

I roll my eyes. "No."

He raises one eyebrow and part of me wants to smack him. "So there's no point."

"Fine, Congressman, whatever you want," I state from between gritted teeth as I cross my arms and look out the window. He laughs at my surliness. Damn it, he is such a fucking asshole sometimes. I continue to give him the cold shoulder as I watch the monuments appear in the distance. Fine, if he doesn't want my help, then I will go do research, just as he requested. As he pulls up to my apartment, I realize I missed class last night. Fuck! I'll have to email my professors, I've been really good about not missing any classes, so it shouldn't be a big deal, but I don't like the fact that I was so wrapped up in his chaos that I forgot about school.

He parks in front of my apartment. "I'll meet you at the office," I say as I get out of the car.

"No. I will wait. Be quick," he replies.

I groan and slam the door like a petulant child before walking inside to go get dressed.

* * *

After a quick change,I'm back downstairs. He's standing by the car talking on the phone. He looks every part the D.C. playboy politician. He's in a crisp suit with a red tie that has some blue pattern on it. He's practically an American flag, a very sexy American flag.

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He hangs up and looks at me. His approval is self-evident as his eyes trail up my borderline inappropriate stilettos to my just-long-enough-to-not-be-inappropriate skirt to my blouse that's just opaque enough.

He opens his mouth to protest, but I hold up my jacket and he grabs it, helping me to put it on. As he wraps it around my front, he leans in and whispers, "That's dangerously close to being inappropriate, little dove."

I roll my eyes. "What happened to your no-pants rule? You can't have it both ways."

He smirks. "Oh, yes, I can."

I roll my eyes as he opens the passenger door for me. I get inside and watch as he walks around the car. The way he moves is...well, it's like he owns this town, and I guess in a way, he does.

He's likely to become a third-generation senator. His family has money to boot, and his friends are well-connected. His life was handed to him on a silver platter, but there's this drive in him. I wonder what he'd be like if Kara hadn't died and turned his world upside down. Would he be this enigma? He's powerful yet guarded. I wonder if he has any fears. I'm not sure he lets anyone get close enough to allow any fears. A part of me desperately wants to break down his walls, but I'm not sure I have enough explosives to get through it.

Bastian parks the car and heads in the opposite direction of me. "Tell Harriet to meet me in the committee room."

I nod, not bothering to ask why he can't tell her. I make it to the office, relay the message, and settle at my desk. I can't help but turn on the committee hearing in the background while I start putting together briefing information for his transportation bill. Time to watch this man in action.

* * *

The hearing is delayed to the afternoon when Jared's plane is delayed. By the time it starts, I sneak into the room and sit in the back, watching. The questions are mundane, just as Bastian said they would be. Adam Blake is there as well. Their answers are well-rehearsed, the picture-perfect example of two successful company leaders who are selling their concept of a merger for the greater good. Bastian's questions are brilliant, his words cutthroat yet fair. He has the uncanny ability to walk on a razor's edge while not cutting his feet one little bit. How long did it take him to learn that skill? It's like watching a master class on how to question highly intelligent people. By the end, I want to stand up and applaud, but I refrain. I slide out the door as the hearing concludes and make it all of ten steps down the hall before my phone buzzes.

Sebastian: Meet me in the whispering gallery. Now.

I roll my eyes and change direction. The whispering gallery is in the dome part of the Capitol building. If you stand on one side of the room in a particular spot, you can hear everything going on across the room. There are many tales of eavesdropping amongst the founding fathers in the early days of the building's existence, but most of these are unlikely true since the floors had coverings that would have dampened the effect. Still, it's a popular tourist spot.

I go and stand by a statue, trying to look nonchalant. Ten minutes go by before I hear a whisper.

“Little dove,” Bastian’s voice calls out as I look across the room and find him standing opposite me. I grin, as he makes his way over to me. He puts a hand to my back without speaking and guides me down a corridor. It takes a few moments to realize where he’s taking me. The rotunda. Now, anyone can walk across it, but to go up in the dome itself is a treat. It is highly limited as to who has access. I watch as the last tourists of the day leave the building while Bastian leads me to a corridor that will give us access to the dome.

When we get to the top, I’m shocked by the view. He presses me into a small alcove with a window, facing the National Mall.

We stand in silence as the sun sets, a swath of different oranges, pinks, and reds fill the horizon. The white monuments in front of us take on each dominant color as the sky changes with every passing second. It’s breathtakingly beautiful. No photograph could do it justice, so there we stand, Bastian’s arm around me as we watch Mother Nature’s firework show. Neither of us speaks as the world goes from bright colors to dark.

I look at the Washington Monument again. It is lit in the distance, a phallic of bright white against the now dark navy-blue sky.

“I see you couldn’t stay away today,” he says, breaking the silence.

I shrug. “I wanted to watch.”

“Following directions is not your forte, is it?”

I roll my eyes. “Well, giving them is certainly yours.”

He leans in dangerously close to me in this small, secluded space. “It most certainly is.” I shiver under his touch. His words evoke an involuntary response from my body

just as much as his touch does.

“That was...beautiful,” I whisper, glancing up at him as the sky continues to darken. He timed it perfectly, but I’ve come to expect nothing less from him. It’s as if giving me this special treat of viewing the sunset from a location most citizens will never see is his way of showing me that he cares.

His hand comes up and runs along my jawline. “Not as beautiful as my view,” he says and I blush, my skin probably looking like the sunset.

I can hear voices below us, but we are the only ones up here in the dome. Pressed against this window, no one can see us. I lean up and kiss his cheek.

“Thank you,” I say softly, meaning it with all my being.

“Don’t thank me yet,” he replies as he presses me flat against the window. I feel his hand slide up my leg, and he groans when he feels my bare ass. “You ‘can’ take direction.”

I can’t help the grin that forms on my face. “I’m coachable.”

His finger finds my wetness, and this time, it’s me who groans. “Bastian.” The words are barely audible. I hear the hiss of a zipper.

He places his hand over my mouth. “Stay quiet, little dove.” I feel his fingers leave me and the crown of his cock presses against my opening. He slowly enters me, as though if he’s fast, it will make noise. I don’t move at all, letting him take charge of this. He picks up the pace.

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“Remember when I said I would fuck you on every significant parcel of property this city has to offer?” he whispers in my ear.

I nod.

“Well, check the national tit off your list,” he says on a low chuckle as he slams into me. Our pace picks up and I bite my lip to keep from moaning.

“Next time, we’ll go to the national cock,” he whispers on a groan as I stare at the Washington Monument in the distance.

I feel myself growing even wetter as I think about him marking me at each of these places. How does he do this to me? Will I ever stop asking myself this question?

Chapter17

Sebastian

I should take her home.It’s late now, and I have so many things to do, yet I don’t want to leave her yet. I have no idea what I’m doing or what she’s doing to me, but in a moment of weakness, I decide to take her to my bench.

“Come on,” I say as I help her straighten her skirt. I hold out my hand, motioning for her to go. We walk out of the Capitol and down to the street. The night air is cool. I shrug out of my suit jacket and drape it over her shoulders as we walk in silence. I seldom come down here anymore. When I was younger, Kara and I would occasionally be needed for some sort of family photo opportunity. While we waited,

Dad would send us out to stay busy while he worked. We always ended up going to the same spot at the Tidal Basin. We'd watch the tourists and make up funny stories about them. We never told anyone. It was something secret between us, a shared experience that now only resides in my memory.

The mall is less filled with tourists at this hour but there are still plenty of people milling about. Some take photos. Some are locals going for an evening jog or bike ride. The Capitol gets smaller as we walk past the Smithsonian museums and cross the street. The Washington Monument rises above us. A perfect streak of white in the dark blue sky.

I place my hand on Alexis's lower back and steer her toward the Tidal Basin. We walk for a long way until I find my favorite bench beneath a cherry tree.

I sit and pat the bench next to me. Alexis tentatively lowers herself, keeping her eyes trained on mine. She shivers, and I pull her against my side, wrapping my arm around her shoulders. She relaxes and places her head on my chest. She takes off her shoes and curls her feet beneath her. I realize we've walked a very long way and she has on shoes that are...not conducive to that.

But right now, I have the sudden urge to share something with her and I don't want to miss the opportunity to do that while I still feel this way. Sharing my past doesn't come easy for me. Alexis has been so very patient. No one else has ever been this patient with me. She deserves to hear some of the missing pieces. She needs an explanation.

"When Kara got sick, my parents, I think, honestly believed she would be cured. For two years, they kept thinking the next treatment would be the one, but it never was. There was this trial my father knew about. But it had to be approved for teenagers and it hadn't been. I watched her shrivel away, a little piece at a time, a tiny fraction day after day...until one day she was just gone. My parents' optimism clouded my

mind and kept me from seeing what was really happening. Had I known...maybe I would have spent more time with her. I did promise her that I'd keep fighting for kids like her; that I wouldn't stop looking for ways to get them treatments. Access to lifesaving treatments was at the core of my very first campaign. I may have grown up surrounded by the wealth my great-great-grandparents made, but I wasn't oblivious to the fact that our lives were different from others. If Kara couldn't get treatments, then most people don't stand a chance, and I still believe that shouldn't be the case."

I pause and look down at her. My fingers are stroking her hair, feeling the silky strands like a security blanket. She doesn't speak. She waits patiently for me to continue.

"Something happened in college. That's what made Conner, Aiden, and me so very close." I don't tell her everything. I won't tell her everything because it would endanger her life. But I can tell her this one thing. I'm not sure why I feel compelled to say anything at all, but I do. "We were leaving a frat party, heading to our apartment. It was faster to take the trail through the park. We'd done it a hundred times, maybe more. I forget who, maybe Aiden, heard something or maybe I did, but when we looked around, we found a young woman. She was naked and barely conscious. She had a faint pulse. We called nine-one-one."

Very slowly, Alexis raises her head and looks at me, her eyes wide. I reach out and stroke her cheek, trying to soothe her.

"Did she..." Alexis trails off as if afraid to finish her question because she doesn't want to know the answer.

I shake my head. "She survived. She didn't remember anything, aside from being at some party. Hell, it could have been the one we came from. There were a hundred people there."

“Was she high?” Alexis asks. I know where’s she’s going with these questions.

I shake my head again. “She was injected with a drug. Aiden found out more recently. And it has similarities to the drug found in the women in the park over the past few weeks but it’s not the same. There had been some disappearances of young women in the park back then, too.”

I watch Alexis as her eyes dart between mine. That brilliant mind of hers is working in overdrive. I’ve come to know this look. It’s sexy as fuck, but also a little scary. She’s too smart for her own good.

“But...could it be related to the drug?”

“I don’t know. Potentially,” I admit.

“Have you brought this to the attention of the officers working the case?” she asks.

“No. There’s not enough to go on yet. Aiden’s looking into things, if he finds more information that’s conclusive, we’ll share that with them. I don’t want them going down rabbit holes that don’t exist.”

She nods and bites her lip. I press my thumb to her lower lip and free it from her teeth.

“Thank you...for sharing all of that with me, for trusting me with a piece of you.” She pauses. “Does anyone else know...about the girl in the park?”

I shake my head. “No, we were kept out of the press. The officers recognized our names and didn’t want to draw a scene, so the local press who wrote about it just said it was some local college students that found her. Hell, I don’t even know what happened to her after that. Her name was Tina, and that’s all I know.”

She's quiet as she processes all this new information. "Why do I feel like there is so much more to your family and your college friends than you are telling me?"

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My little dove is smart, too smart.

My phone pings with an incoming text. I pull it out of my pocket and look.

Aiden: I have information. Call me.

“Everything OK?” she asks.

I nod and stick my phone back in my pocket. “It’s fine. Aiden was looking into something for me.” I let her other question die without an answer because I don’t want to tell her the truth. There’s a visceral need to protect her. And exposing her to that information will do the exact opposite.

“Aiden’s a doctor, right?” she confirms. I suppose I’ve never really talked about them with her.

“Yes, he is.”

“Why’d you decide to become a politician and not a doctor?”

Her question is a valid one. It’s not as though I didn’t think about it when Kara was sick, but family duty calls. Some families are doctors and mine were politicians. My father always expected me to run for his district. When my grandfather decided to retire, they made a conscious decision to wait until I was old enough to run for Congress. Then Dad ran for my grandfather’s Senate seat and vacated his, leaving it open for me. It’s the way our world operates. Everything is calculated and planned, sometimes years or even decades in advance.

“Family reasons,” I answer because it’s not a lie.

“Your family expected you to be a congressman?” she says, her eyes a little wide.

“More like, it was assumed,” I explain.

“Such a strange world you live in,” she mutters.

I fight the smirk on my lips; she has no fucking idea. A memory dances in the recesses of my mind.

“Fuck this. I’m not doing it!” I yell. My father doesn’t even flinch. He merely stands and walks around his desk. We are eye to eye, and I could take him if I wanted to, but I don’t, I don’t move a muscle.

“It’s too late for choices, Sebastian. You made your bed the second you took the vow.”

I hate him. I hate that he’s right. I hate that my fate is sealed of my own volition.

“What are you thinking about?” Alexis asks, her eyes now directly in front of mine.

I cup her cheek and run my finger over the silky skin. “Nothing, little dove. I should go. I have things to do.”

I don’t give an explanation and she doesn’t ask for one as we get a taxi and head back to the office. I know she’s contemplating all the little pieces of my life that I just unveiled for reasons that I can’t process. I, on the other hand, am thinking about all the strange pieces of my life and how I ended up here, at this moment, spilling micro-pieces of secrets to this gorgeous woman that I have no right to be with. Hell, if I do care about her, I should push her as far away from me as I can.

A strange decision washes over me as we approach the white-domed complex. I have the taxi drop us at the corner by the garage.

“I’ll take you home,” I say.

“My things?” she replies.

“Will be there tomorrow, unless you need something?”

She pats her pocket and pulls out a small wallet with a key attached and shrugs. “I suppose my computer will be safe.”

I drive her home. The silence between us feels like a dark cloud brewing in a storm that’s still far away but close enough to see. It’s only a matter of time.

She hesitates as she gets out of the car, pausing with the door open. She doesn’t turn to me as she speaks. “I know that sharing that wasn’t easy for you, and I know there’s much more that you didn’t say. I’m sure you have your reasons, but...I just want you to know that you can trust me. I’d never say anything to anyone, ever, regardless of what happens between us.” With that, she gets out of the car and walks into her building, leaving me in both awe and shock at her words.

I want to dumpster dive into what she said, analyze the hell out of her words and her life, and ponder if what she said could be the truth, but I don’t have time for such luxuries, right now, I need to talk with Aiden.

I press the call button on my steering wheel.

“Hello?” Aiden answers.

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“What did you find out?” I ask, skipping the conversation starter formalities because I need to get to the heart of this matter.

“There’s a lot to unpack here. But at the center of it all is something very strange and yet completely mundane.”

“Jesus Christ, Aid, stop talking in riddles,” I spit out in frustration. Aiden tends to use his big brain to speak above people, and it drives me crazy.

“Ever hear of a plant called a euphorbia resinifera?”

“No.”

“Well, the chemicals you found are interesting in light of the other elements found. I had to do some digging, but in conjunction with other elements, it seems a strange combination because the chemicals mirror some plant elements that are also present in both samples. It’s an evergreen found in Morocco. It has the ability to numb nerves, but it also can be toxic and cause joint paralysis. There were additional traces of thyme which is commonly used in anesthetics. Neither of these is unusual to find in pain meds or anesthetics; it’s the volumes used that were unusual and the combination with those chemicals,” he explains.

“So, this is unique? Both the sample from Tina’s case and the samples found recently show this?” I ask, referring to the young woman we found in college.

“Correct.”

I pause at his answer because this only means one thing.

“Is there any doubt they are manufactured by the same laboratory? Are we talking about something so unique that there’d only be one source?”

Aiden takes a deep breath. “Yes.”

“So...” I trail off as a few pieces of information start to form a puzzle piece in my mind.

“Whoever made the drug that Tina took is still making drugs,” he agrees with me without even hearing my thought.

“Fuck.”

“Yeah, double fuck.”

“Any idea where it’s being made? Could it be related to Confervo’s medicine that they made in Geneva?” I ask.

“No idea. I think I need to call Ella,” Aiden says. I can practically hear his jaw clenching. Ella or Estella Garcia is Aiden’s ex-girlfriend. They met while working on a summer project at Walter Reed during medical school. I’ve never seen such an intense relationship form from day one. Nor have I seen a relationship go up in flames as hot as theirs. They haven’t spoken since that day and I’m honestly shocked that he’s even considering reaching out to her.

“Isn’t there someone else you can talk to?” The words leave my mouth before I can take them back.

“It’s been years. It’s fine. It’s purely for professional reasons,” he states. His words

are clipped, and I know he doesn't want my input on this.

"Fine. Let me know what you find out," I say.

"Yeah, will do. And, Sebastian, be careful. Something about this doesn't seem right. Whoever is producing this, they don't want people to know it's being administered or has been administered to people. Just...watch your back."

"I will. You do the same."

I hang up and immediately check my rearview mirror. No one's following me. Why is Aiden being paranoid? No one even knows we've made a connection on these seemingly random cases. I push aside my feeling of unease and call my campaign manager to discuss next week's fundraising event.

I need to focus on my Senate campaign. If we can make a connection here and share it with the police, then I guess I'll feel slightly vindicated about all the terrible shit I've done in my life. And if it's somehow related to Confervo, then maybe I save myself from being associated with a company making and distributing an illegal drug. I'm not entirely sure what is driving me to figure this out, yet my gut now tells me to keep going. Perhaps I was wrong to stop Alexis from prying into things any further, she may have been going down the right rabbit hole the entire time.

Chapter 18

Alexis

My phone rings as I'm walking up to the Longworth Building.

"Harriet?" I answer.

“Have you seen Sebastian?” she asks.

I frown. Harriet is practically his keeper. The fact that she’s calling me is...not good. Sebastian was in a mood last night. And not his normal mood. He shared so much with me. I was surprised by how forthcoming he was. And more surprised when he abruptly ended the evening. That man’s mood shifts give me whiplash.

“I...no, I haven’t, why?” I ask.

“He was supposed to be here an hour ago for an early meeting, but he didn’t show and he’s not answering his phone. I called the house, but no answer there. None of the other staff have heard from him. He won’t let me put a tracker on his damn phone. Anyhow, it’s not like him. I’m...concerned. I’m two seconds away from driving over to that monstrosity of a house he lives in to check on him.”

“I’ll go look at some of his favorite spots and head over to the house. Go ahead and sit in the meetings for him. Last night after the committee meeting, he was...in a mood? Maybe he just needs some time?” I suggest.

Harriet sighs. “That boy knows better. We don’t have time. He has a Senate race to win. Time is not on our side.”

“I’m sure he knows that, Harriet. I’ll let you know if I find him,” I add as I hang up. Why am I annoyed with her? Harriet’s on his side after all. While he’s been busy digging around a potentially corrupt business, she’s been working with his campaign staff and his office staff. That woman is quite frankly his biggest asset.

I call a car and hop in a minute later. I explain that I’m looking for a friend, so I need to go to a few places. I call him, but he doesn’t pick up the phone.

The driver takes me to the Tidal Basin. I pop out and run down to the walkway, hoping he’ll be at his favorite bench, but he’s not there.

Then, I swing by his D.C. apartment. He’s not there either.

Something tells me to go out to his house, so off we go. Traffic is light, and thirty minutes later, the guy pulls up to the gated entrance.

“Damn, this is a fancy freaking neighborhood, lady,” he gushes as he looks down the lane at the giant mansions whose rooftops peek through some of the leaves of the trees surrounding them.

“Thanks, I think this is my last stop,” I state as I hop out of the car after paying. He leaves me there, and I look around. There’s no way inside. So, I call Sebastian; he doesn’t answer. I hear a car approaching and I sink in between some bushes and wait. Once it enters, I rush in behind it just as the gate slams closed.

I walk down the street to his house. Walking around back, I find him sitting in a chair in his garden. His head in his hands.

“Sebastian?”

He slowly looks up at me from between his fingers. His eyes are red-rimmed. Has he been crying? Can a man like him cry? It seems...unnatural.

I sink into the chair next to him. “What’s wrong?”

He leans back in the chair, his gaze focused on the horizon. “You remind me of her.”

I feel my face contort in confusion. “Of who?” The words are out of my mouth before I realize who he means. Kara.

“She loved pottery. All my mugs...she made them all. She loved clocks. I think it was because she always knew she had limited time and they reminded her to live each day to the fullest. Her laughter...it could make the angriest person happy, the saddest person smile. She was just...so alive. And then she wasn’t.”

I reach out and place a hand on his thigh, giving it a small squeeze. His hand covers mine. “She’s why you do what you do,” I state, repeating what he told me last night.

He looks at me. “I promised her that I’d change things, that I would help kids like her get access to drug trials faster. I never wanted this...” He trails off and motions around us. “But I did it all for her, to honor her memory.”

“And you are. Don’t you want to be a senator?” I ask.

He stares at me for a long moment as he considers my question. “I do. Now I do. It didn’t start that way. It was all for her at first. And then...once you experience power, real power, it’s hard to turn your back to it. You begin to crave it, need it. It becomes part of you.”

“You don’t always have to be powerful and in control,” I declare.

He leans forward, his hand cupping my face, his thumb running along my cheekbone. “Maybe I like to be powerful and in control. Maybe I need to be. Maybe it’s just who I am now.”

I shake my head a little. “I think, deep down, there’s a layer of you that’s vulnerable. You just don’t acknowledge it anymore.”

“Perhaps,” he muses. He smirks slightly and I know whatever he’s going to say next is probably fucking arrogant as hell. “But I think you like when I’m powerful and in control.”

I shiver at his words. I don’t like to admit that. I don’t want it to be true, but it is. I crave his power and control.

“That’s what I thought,” he says as he leans forward and bites my lip. His hands grab

my arms, guiding me to stand before him. He unzips his pants and pulls out his erection as he looks up at me. “Now make me forget about my vulnerability, little dove,” he states as he pushes me down on my knees.

I don't know what's gotten into him, but I want to fix this man with all my heart. I want him to share his secrets with me, to trust me as much as I have come to trust him in such a short period of time. I look up at him as I reach for his cock. He knocks my hand away with one hand while holding his erection in his other hand.

I feel powerful suddenly. This man who doesn't need anyone needs me to take away whatever is hurting him at this moment. It's a heady feeling to be the one needed.

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I open my mouth while looking up at him from beneath my lashes and he slowly works his cock past my lips. I lick the underside and watch as his jaw tenses. His eyes blink closed for half a second and then he opens them again and takes my head in his hands. He's giving me a moment to decide. I give him a nearly imperceptible nod and he slams his cock into my mouth, hitting the back of my throat. I gag, but he doesn't relent. He just continues to fuck my face. I close my eyes as the tears stream down them. I will myself to breathe through my nose as I let him take what he needs.

Suddenly, his cock is gone and he's hauling me up to stand in front of him. "I need more of you, now," he commands as he reaches for my hand and grasps it. I follow him to his room, where he makes quick work of removing our clothes.

He has me on the bed on my knees facing away from him in a matter of seconds. His hand comes up and grips my throat from the front, while the other pushes me down. His leg kicks my legs wider apart. His free hand comes to my hips and arranges me how he wants me. I don't have time to react as he plunges inside me in one solid motion.

I grunt from the impact. His hand loosens around my throat, and I swallow. He stays perfectly still for a long moment. I feel his thumb against my carotid artery. And then, he pulls out until just the tip of his cock is inside me before thrusting back inside again. Over and over, he repeats this punishing movement. It's slow and I want it fast, but as if he knows fast will make me climax, he refrains from speeding up.

"Please," I finally beg.

"Please, what, little dove?"

I lick my lips. Damn him and his overpowering demands, but like a moth to a flame, the words spill from my mouth without any thought given beyond my annoyance, “Please, Congressman.”

And with those two little words, his hips piston at a pace that shouldn’t be sustainable for more than a few seconds, yet he doesn’t stop, doesn’t relent even as I scream his name and go free-falling into total and utter peace as I let my body relax into the mattress. He removes his hand from my throat and grips my hips with both hands, keeping my pussy where he wants it as he chases his release.

He comes on a groan as he slams into me one last time. I feel his cock stretching me as it twitches again and again inside me, and it pushes me over one last time. My body trembles and I let out a cry that goes unheard as my face is pressed into the mattress.

I feel him slowly pull out of me, but he doesn’t release my hips. I turn my face to the side and look back behind me. It’s the most erotic thing I’ve ever seen.

He’s watching his release run down my thighs, his eyes intent on following the trails of liquid spilling out of me.

“You have no idea how fucking sexy you look with my cum running down your legs, do you?” he says in a low raspy voice.

I swallow. “How do you do that?”

His eyes finally leave my pussy, and his gaze travels up my body to my face.

“Do what?”

“Make me want you again after I just had you?” I admit.

He smirks and takes his hand off my hip, reaching between my legs and smearing his release all over my folds before shoving two fingers inside me.

“Someone’s greedy,” he says. I want to tell him to “fuck off” but I can’t because what he’s doing right now feels so good. He pauses as if reading my mind. “Play nice, little dove, and I’ll give you what you want, what you need.”

“I...am playing nice,” I stammer as I suck in a breath.

“Good, that’s good,” he coos as he works a third finger inside of me and finds the spot where I need him. His eyes shift back to watch his fingers fucking me. He has me at the precipice again, but then he removes his fingers and I gaze down between my legs to see his erection is back. He guides it between my folds and coats it in our mixed releases before plunging back inside me. This time, it’s fast. We both thrust faster and faster, our pace punishing yet perfect. He builds me up and pushes me over the edge once, twice, three times, before he finds his release.

This time he helps me to my feet again and lifts me into his arms. I relax and let my head rest against his shoulder as he walks us into his bathroom and turns on his shower with a touch of a button before setting me down. I watch as he checks the water’s temperature before helping me under the water so that he can wash me. His movements are so gentle, so caring. This man is a walking oxymoron. One second, he’s almost scary in how he behaves; the next second, he’s crumbling before me, and now he’s worshiping me with his touch. I have whiplash from his mood swings, and yet, I find myself falling harder for him by the second. It’s like wanting to touch the warm flame even knowing you’ll get burned.

He takes my head in his hands and leans down so his lips are a fraction of an inch away from mine. I feel his hot breath on my skin as he speaks.

“What are you doing to me, little dove?” he asks before closing the distance between

us and kissing me with such passion that I'm momentarily frozen in shock. It doesn't take me long to respond as I let go and match the strokes of his tongue along with mine. It's a kiss to end all kisses. It feels like hello and goodbye all in one and the thought runs shivers down my spine, but I suppress the nagging notion of doom materializing like smokey wisps in the recesses of my brain. I won't let my imagination ruin this moment, this very perfect kiss.

I allow myself to let go, to not think and just feel. The kiss goes on and on. I feel his hard length against my belly, and I reach to grasp it. He hauls me up his body and I slowly lower over him until he is fully seated inside me. He presses me to the hard shower wall, and we quickly find our rhythm without breaking our kiss. It's slow and tender and says things that neither of us can.

Tears form behind my eyelids as I keep them closed out of fear that they may spill over. Why does this feel like a goodbye fuck? Why does this kiss feel like it's our last one?

When we finish together, neither of us moves for long moments as our lips break their bond and our foreheads lean against the other's. I hear a ping in the distance and Sebastian's entire body goes rigid.

"What's wrong?" I ask, my voice coming out breathy.

His jaw clenches and he slowly lowers me to the ground and puts his palm under the automatic soap dispenser. He cleans me quietly without answering my question; his touch is soft, almost reverent and I don't ask any more questions because I know he's not going to answer them. I deserve answers, but I also know he needs the time to trust me first. Being with Sebastian is like being with a wild animal, he's skittish and working on pure instincts ninety-nine percent of the time.

He washes himself with much less care while I rinse off. He turns off the water and

hands me a towel before going to a screen on his wall and reading something. He swipes it clear before I can see it. His head hangs, and I wonder if he'll start crying again. Why was he crying? What's going on? I have so many questions, and as I'm about to ask them, he speaks.

"I'm no good for you. There's no future with me. My life is...orchestrated. I can't be the man you deserve," he says, his voice laced with such pain that I don't want to believe him.

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“I don’t believe you,” I whisper as I step forward, letting the towel drop to the floor.

He backs away and holds up a hand. “I mean it, Alexis. You can stay on in my office until you find a new job, but this”—he motions between us—“has to end, now. I’ll call a car for you. Harriet knows I’m here now. I won’t be in the office today, but you can head back over there.”

“What?” My response is half gasp and half sob. I feel myself begin shaking with a mixture of anger, shock, and sadness all rolled up into one.

I see his hand twitch, but his arm doesn’t move. He gives me one last pained look, and with that, he leaves me standing naked in his bathroom. My mouth gaping open. Tears streaming down my face. They aren’t from embarrassment, maybe they should be. They are from pure hurt.

“Fuck you,” I mutter as I pick up my clothes and dress. I walk down the stairs. He’s nowhere to be found but a car is waiting in the driveway. He doesn’t even come out to see me. Well, fuck him. I’ll finish this myself and then I’ll resign. This city is full of jobs. And I will find another one, one where he isn’t involved.

Chapter19

Sebastian

I know she’s left when the beep from the front door motion sensor sounds. I’m such a fucking pussy. I didn’t even have the balls to see her out, but I know there was no way I’d be able to let her go, and I have to let her go.

She's not safe with me. And yesterday, I learned why.

Conner is perched at his island like he always is. Aiden is next to him, the clickity-clack of his keyboard is the only sound in the room.

I don't say a word as I walk into the room and go straight for the alcohol.

"Rough day at the office, dear?" Conner says with a chuckle.

When I don't answer, he stands up and approaches me. "What the fuck is up?" he asks, this time his voice is all business.

I turn to him and take a long sip of whiskey. "A favor was called in."

Aiden's head pops up from behind his computer screen and both of them stare at me with a mixture of sympathy, anger, and resignation.

"For what?" Aiden asks, closing his laptop.

I run a hand over the day-old scruff growing on my chin. "I was flat-out told to stand down on any research related to Confervo. I was to accept their money. And I was to get rid of anyone that may have learned anything that isn't under the vow."

"Get rid, get rid?" Aiden asks, raising an eyebrow.

"It wasn't defined, so I'm going to tell Alexis to resign once she has new employment."

"What the fuck?" Conner barks.

"Shit!" Aiden says as he stands and walks over to pour himself a drink.

I down the rest of the whiskey and pour myself another. “I fucking hate this.”

“We all knew what we were signing on to when we did this,” Conner points out and I want to punch him. He steps back as though sensing my displeasure.

“We need to figure out what’s going on. I’m going to get to the bottom of this and burn it all down,” I state.

Conner’s and Aiden’s eyes both widen. No one had ever brought down the brotherhood or even contemplated it. We are kingmakers. We run this city.

“We know that Confervo is bringing in a drug it makes in Geneva. We think it is a new-gen of a drug they made ten years ago. We know girls are being found on the trails with traces of this drug. But how are they getting it here? We need to find the source. And then we need to blow this whole thing open,” I declare.

“Are you prepared for the fallout?” Conner asks.

I take a deep breath. I might kill everything we had created, yet, for the first time in my life, I am prepared to bring down the kingdom if it means saving the people in it.

“Yes.”

Aiden brings his glass out toward mine and then Conner does the same. We clink glasses.

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“So be it, then. Let’s bring this fucker down,” Aiden adds as we all take a drink. These two are the real deal. And I know that I was a lucky fucking bastard to have them in my life.

I stare out at my backyard. I have all this house, gardens, pool, for what? For my mother to set me up with someone like her? So I can have a Stepford wife to stand beside me at functions and wave politely? To live in a loveless marriage in this solitary mansion behind a gate?

I throw my coffee mug, not bothering to watch as I hear it shatter on the floor.

Fuck the brotherhood. I don’t know if they want me to get rid of Alexis because she’s not “right” for my campaign or if there’s a bigger scheme behind Confervo or both, but I’m not going to sit idly by and let others dictate my future, not anymore. Another memory comes brewing to the surface. I try to suppress it, not wanting to relive the conversation, but the mind is a dark place and it goes where it wants to.

“Promise me,” Kara says, her wide eyes seeming even bigger in her head with all the weight she’s lost.

I sigh and look down at her from where I am perched on the edge of her hospital bed. “Kara...” I trail off and look away because staring at her is just too painful.

I feel her hand on mine. Slowly, I raise my gaze to meet hers. I can’t say no. I don’t have the heart to do it.

“I promise,” I mutter.

A smile spreads across her face, but then it morphs into a sad frown.

“What?” I ask.

“I’m sorry,” she whispers.

“For what?”

She looks down at our hands and back up at my face. “It’s not fair to you, Bastian. You should be the captain of your own ship, but if you agree to it, then you won’t ever be. You’ll just be a slave to the system.”

We’re both quiet for a moment as the realization of the truth of my promise comes to full light.

“Promise me something else,” she says quietly.

I groan until I feel her hand give mine a small squeeze.

“What?” I mutter.

“If you ever get the chance to get out, do it. Even if that means you bring the whole thing down in a giant ball of flames. Once you do what you need to in order to help other kids, then let it burn. Use it for good, until no more good can come from it. But...make sure that you’re careful. They can never track it back to you. No one can ever know.” We knew too much for teenagers. We’d overheard too much. And as I look at my sister’s gaunt face, I know that I’ve been wrong about her health; very soon, I’d be keeping the burden of this secret all by myself.

I hear my side door open, which means it’s one of three people, Conner, Aiden, or Harriet. The sound of heels on my wood floor tells me which one before she even

speaks.

“For the love of God! I’ve been looking for you everywhere this morning. I handled our first two meetings, but I need you in the office, Sebastian. What the fuck is...”

I turn to see Harriet staring at my shattered coffee mug on the floor.

“What the hell is going on?” she asks, her hands going to her hips, yet her face isn’t showing anger, only concern.

I lean back against my counter and run a hand through my hair. “Sorry, Harriet. I...” I trail off because I don’t know what to say. I always know what to say. But this is beyond my norm. Harriet probably suspects things about what goes on behind closed doors in my father’s and my offices, but she doesn’t know. Clearing my throat, I start again. “I think I got food poisoning. I’m feeling better now. I’m sorry I didn’t return your calls.”

“Can you tell me why our best staffer is leaving?” she asks with a raised eyebrow.

I turn back toward the window above my sink, placing my hands on the cool granite countertop. “She was always a temporary staff member, Harriet. She’s in law school. She’s going to go on to do bigger and better things than be a staffer.”

“I see,” she says. “Can I expect you back in the office this afternoon?”

“Yes,” I answer through gritted teeth.

“Good. I don’t know what’s going on, but if we’re doing this, you need to get over whatever this is and get back to work. We have a campaign to win, don’t we?” she asks.

Harriet walks a fine line. She only stayed on with my father because she knew I'd be taking on his role. She's protective like a mom, more so than my mom, but she's also a bulldog that wants to kick ass and take names. I know that she's realizing her ability to protect me and fight for me may be more mutually exclusive than she previously thought.

"Yes, Harriet, we do," I state. I'm not about to tell her my plans, my plans that end with either winning this election on my own or ending my entire political career. I'm about to light a spark that could blow up generations of work. Kara may have given me my first reason to do what I did, but Alexis just gave me my next reason. I won't put her in danger, but I won't be told who to be with and who to be without. And I'm not going to be without her. Fuck the brotherhood, fuck the vow. A war has been waged and I may not have won this battle, but I will not lose the war.

Chapter20

Alexis

I close my laptop and push back from my desk. I stroll over to my window and peer out at the world beyond it. It's a beautiful day out and I need to get outside. I've been holed up in here all weekend working on a paper for my constitutional law class. It's the only thing keeping me from crawling into my bed and crying. Erin and Whitney threatened to track down Sebastian and cut off his balls, but I kindly declined their offer. It's not worth it. I went into whatever this was knowing that it would end badly, yet I chose to do it anyhow.

I've been left confused, angry, and sad. I don't understand why he would want to be with me one minute and then send me away the next. I feel like something happened, but I don't know what would have made him act like that. It was beyond being an asshole, it was cruel and hurtful. Maybe Erin was right, maybe I shouldn't have ever gotten involved with him. Maybe I should have left that day at the White House. I'm almost as angry at myself for falling victim to the prowess of Sebastian North. God, that man is addictive in the worst way possible. Yet, he showed me the tiniest of glimpses into his big heart. He's so much more than he lets the world see. A tear threatens to escape, and I rub my eyes. He's not a broken boy in need of help. I'm being an idiot. He's a grown-ass man who should have ended things in a better way than he did. He was harsh and mean and not at all what I thought he was. I turn from my window. I need to clear my head.

"Anyone want to go for a run?" I ask as I waltz into the kitchen.

Whitney is lying on the couch staring at the television while wrapped up in a fuzzy blanket like a burrito.

“No, I need to know if this couple gets together at the end of this movie,” she mutters as she shoves a handful of popcorn into her mouth.

“Spoiler alert, they get together,” Erin says from the kitchen where it looks like a bakery exploded. Flour is on every surface. She looks at me and shrugs. “Sorry, I’m in the middle of baking cookies for the office party next week. It’s Francine’s birthday on Tuesday.”

“Oh, right. Uh, well, I just need to get out of here for a few minutes, so I’m going for a run,” I state as I grab my running shoes from the coat closet.

“Make sure you keep your phone on and let us know when you’re done,” Whitney says.

“I will. It’s the middle of the day. I’ll be fine.”

I stick in my earbuds and head outside. I glance up at the sky, letting the sun’s rays warm my face before I walk down the street toward the park trail. I glance around me, but the scene playing out is just another normal day here in the nation’s capital. In the distance, I can see a field where some twentysomethings are playing rugby. A few other people jog by me. A woman pushes a stroller while talking on a phone. Three men in suits sit at a bistro table at the local coffee shop across the street. Why do I feel like someone is watching me? I glance around again, but everyone seems to be in their own little world, oblivious to my gaze.

Brushing off the unwarranted feeling, I turn toward the trail and start running. I’m soon deep in the woods, enjoying the nature surrounding me.

The light filters through the leaves, leaving long rays of light that illuminate small patches of leaves and flowers. The rest of the forest floor is still dark and mysterious at this early morning hour. But the light moves so quickly as the earth spins that by the time I pull my phone out to snap a photo, the angle of the light has slightly shifted. I take a photo anyhow, and continue with my run, unaware of the danger lurking amongst those dimly lit tree trunks.

Yesterday was my last day at Sebastian's office, I turned in my research on the transportation bill and said goodbye to my co-workers. Erin was working two days a week at a small firm specializing in environmental law and offered to help me get a paid internship there. It seemed a like good opportunity and would at least give me a few weeks of pay. I haven't seen or spoken to Sebastian since I left his house. I purposefully avoided him all week.

I see a fork in the path up ahead and I take the right toward the ravine. I like this part of the trail along the stream. It's quieter and more peaceful with the sounds of the running water. I turn down my music just enough to hear it. There's a rocky outcropping ahead where I can stop for a minute and enjoy the peek-a-boo view of the city. There are still so many places I have left to explore here. Yesterday, Erin mentioned Lincoln's Cottage to me and now I'm planning to go next weekend. I still want to take the water taxi down to Mount Vernon or the National Harbor.

The stream comes into view as my fellow trail-goers disappear from sight, opting to stay on the more frequented part of the trail. I enjoy the solitude of my less traveled path.

I don't know if it's the sunshine or the solitude or the beautiful nature, but I start to feel slightly better. I let myself run in time to the beat of the music.

A murder of crows sits on trees nearby. It feels ominous, all those crows sitting on low-hanging branches, their beady eyes watching me. A murder...maybe it's what a

group of crows is called that's actually the ominous part. I contemplate that as I scale a few boulders and get up to my favorite rock outcropping. The sun beats down on my face and I close my eyes, feeling the warmth of it.

I hear a rustle nearby and my eyelids fly open as I look around. I don't see anything though aside from a distant squirrel. My phone pings with a message. I look down to see it's a calendar alert for something I needed to remember for work...work I was doing at Sebastian's office. I let out a breath and sit down on the rock. I need to go through and delete all of these. I don't want any more reminders. Having to live in the same city as him, seeing him on television and social media, hell, the horror that we might end up seated near each other in a restaurant someday is enough of a reminder. I find a few more alerts on my phone and I delete them. It's not nearly as therapeutic as I had hoped it would be. I'm left feeling more empty than before. Was what we had more than just fucking? I had promised myself that I wouldn't fall for him, yet here I am acting like I just broke up with a boyfriend. Maybe I should let myself mourn the loss of whatever it was between us. I decide then and there that I'll give myself exactly one more week and then I need to let Erin or Whitney set me up with someone. I can't live in this wallowing in self-pity mode forever.

I climb down from the rock, a new determination in my mind. I start trying to make a mental list of all the things that I hate about Sebastian. He's a smug and arrogant prick. He's demanding as fuck. He's horrible at sharing...anything. His family is clearly fifty shades of fucked up. See, I think to myself, I really dodged a bullet on this one.

I groan because I'm not fooling anyone, especially me. I was falling for him, hell, I might have already fallen for him. And now, it's over, just as fast as it had started. I feel a tear threatening to spill over my lower lid when I hear another rustle from behind me. This time it sounds closer.

I'm about to turn around when I feel something hit my head and then...nothing.

Chapter 21

Sebastian

“You need to focus!” Harriet chides as she stands in front of my desk. “That speech was half-assed and we both know it.”

I glare at her. If it was anyone but her, they’d be fired. “We’re up in the polls, aren’t we? And Jay thought it was fine.”

Harriet rolls her eyes with such dramatic flair that I half expect them to stay looking upward permanently. “You know what I mean. When you ran for this office,” she says as she points down at the floor, “you were passionate. You cared about it in a way that was infectious to everyone around you. Where is that Sebastian?”

She’s not wrong. In fact, it’s the fact that she’s hit the nail on the head that has me simmering with anger. Alexis hasn’t even been gone two weeks and I am still thinking about her. Plus, I’ve spent nearly every night sipping bourbon with Aiden and Conner while trying to figure out what the hell is going on with Confervo, and how can we figure out who in the brotherhood is behind what we think might be the murder of local young women that seems eerily similar to events from a decade ago. There’s a connection there between all three and we just can’t figure it all out.

“I’m getting there, alright? I just need to focus. So, get the hell out and let me work,” I growl.

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Harriet sighs and walks to the door. She puts her hand on the doorknob but turns back before she opens it.

“Also, our security cameras have been changed up. Bryce’s team says they were hacked. Probably nothing to be worried about. That shit happens all the time, but I’m not taking any chances,” Harriet states.

I pause. “What do you mean? When?”

She shrugs. “I don’t know exactly. I can have Bryce send you a report.”

“Please do,” I reply as the wheels in my head start to spin.

She leaves me sitting there with more questions than answers. I hit send on an email to Conner with the transportation bill research that Alexis had completed before leaving. I want him to go over things and give me talking points.

I decide to call my mentor, Charles Richards, to inquire if he knows anything about the brotherhood watching my office. It’s worth a shot. Chuck, as we call him, is old now and not as involved, but he might know—many members tend to confide in him. I dial his number.

“Sebastian, to what do I owe the honor?”

“Hi, Chuck. I’m curious if you’ve heard any rumblings amongst friends lately.”

“About?”

“My office had a security breach and a break-in, any idea if my friends are responsible?” I inquire, speaking with our code words in case the line is compromised.

“They are always watching, Sebastian. You know that. Maybe consider that when you make your choices in the future. I can’t confirm if that’s what’s happened in your case, so be careful,” he warns. Fuck, his answer is all the answer I need.

“Yes, sir.”

“Anything else?” he asks.

“Nope. That’ll do.”

“Very well, keep your head on straight, boy. You’re so close to your goal,” he reminds me.

“Yes, I know. I’ll talk to you later.” I hang up, pull a burner phone out of my desk, and call Conner.

“Mr. Sterling’s office,” Pricilla answers. Pricilla. She’s in her thirties and looks like a supermodel. I’m nearly one hundred percent sure that she had a thing with Conner at some point, but he’d never kiss and tell. She is amazingly good at her job though.

“Hi, Pricilla,” I state.

“Oh, Congressman North. I’ll put you right through,” she states.

There is silence on the other end of the line.

“Where are you calling me from?” Conner’s voice booms a moment later.

“Burner phone.”

“Oh. I didn’t recognize the number.”

“Can you go to another office and call this number back?” I ask.

“Uh, OK,” he says slowly before hanging up.

I wait a few minutes before the burner phone rings again.

“What the hell is going on?”

“Someone’s watching us,” I hiss as I walk out of my office, past Tory at the front desk, and into the hallway.

“I’m sorry, what?”

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I walk down the hall and turn a corner, waiting until a staffer has passed before I continue. “My security cameras were hacked. We’ve been being watched. At least, I have been.”

“Fuck,” Conner groans.

“Yeah, fuck. I’m going to have Bryce check my home security as well.”

“Have him check mine and Aiden’s too.”

“I will. I just...there’s clearly something more going on here.”

My cell phone pings with a text. I pull it out of my pocket and look down at it. I don’t recognize the number.

Unknown: Hey, it’s Erin, Alexis’s roommate. Have you seen her or talked to her?

“Conner, I need to go. I’ll call you later.”

“Seriously?” he huffs as I hang up on him.

I press call on the number and Erin answers.

“Erin. It’s Congres—Sebastian. Why are you asking if I’ve seen Alexis? And the answer is no. I haven’t spoken to her in almost two weeks.”

“She went for a run yesterday and didn’t come back,” Erin says, her voice filled with

panic.

“Did you call the police?”

“Yes, but it hasn’t been twenty-four hours. They said to keep checking with friends and then call them back this afternoon if we still haven’t heard from her.”

I feel my blood run cold. Something is wrong. Something is so very wrong.

“Erin, I’m coming over now. Are you at home?”

“Yes. Whitney and I called off this morning. We’ve been calling everyone we know. Her phone shows she’s still on the trail, but we went out there. We couldn’t find her or the phone.”

“Stay there, I’m coming.”

I rush back to my office and grab my car keys.

“Where are you going?” Harriet asks as I practically run back through the office.

“Something happened. I’ll be back. Move my two o’clock to Thursday.”

“OK,” she says in confusion as I sprint past her.

I reach my car in record time. A million horrible thoughts pass through my mind as I drive the short distance to Alexis’s apartment. I park illegally and rush inside. The front desk guy waves me through and I feel my teeth clench at how unsafe this building is. Just because I’ve been here before doesn’t mean I should be a welcomed guest. I stew on this as I take the elevator up and run down the hall, pounding on the door when I arrive.

The door flies open mid-knock, and a very disheveled Erin stands in front of me. Her eyes are rimmed in red.

“Where was she going?” I ask.

“Running.” Erin pulls out her phone and shows me the map with a blue dot. It’s in the park not far from here. Damn it. Why did she go there? And alone!

“Why was she running alone?” I growl as I push my way past her.

“We told her not to, but she thought it was safe,” Erin explains.

“And did she say anything? Was she upset?” I ask.

Erin shakes her head.

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“She was because you’re a dick,” Whitney says from behind the kitchen counter.

I glare at her.

“Not helpful,” Erin mutters.

“What? He is.” She turns back to me. “You know if you hadn’t been such a jackass to her, then she’d probably have been with you and not out running by herself.”

Her words sting because they are true.

“I’m going to the trail.”

“I’ll come with you,” Erin says.

“I’ll wait here, just in case,” Whitney adds as we leave.

Neither one of us says another word as we walk down the hall, take the elevator, and walk out on the busy midday sidewalk. The entrance to the trail isn’t far, just a few blocks.

“Does she come here often?” I ask as we follow the trail.

“Sometimes,” Erin answers. Not far down the trail, a small clearing cuts through the trees.

“Give me the phone,” I command, motioning for it with my hand. “Where exactly did

you say you checked?”

“All up there. We even went in the woods a bit,” she says, motioning to the trail ahead of us.

But my gut tells me Alexis didn’t stay on the trail. I step onto what looks like a small deer trail in the brush and follow it with Erin in tow. It opens up to a slightly larger unpaved trail along a stream.

“Did you check all of this area too?” I ask as we walk.

“Yeah, but it’s just a bunch of rocks up there. It dead-ends,” she explains.

I climb up on the boulders and look around. That’s when I see the phone. It’s hidden under a rock and is only visible from a very specific angle. I climb down and grab it, pressing the side button. It turns on and the sight of a photo of Erin, Whitney, and Alexis has my heart stopping mid-beat.

“Oh God!” Erin cries out when she sees the phone in my hand.

I climb down and start running over rocks and across the stream, but I find nothing, not a single trace of Alexis. I sink to the ground, placing my head in my hands. What have I done? There is one hundred percent zero doubt in my mind that this was all orchestrated because they didn’t like what she was finding, and they didn’t like what was happening between us.

“Fuck!” I yell.

“What?” Erin asks. I look up to find her standing in front of me, eyes wide.

“I...I’m going to find her,” I stammer as I rise to my feet. I check the time. “I’ll keep

looking, if we don't find her in another hour, call the police and file a missing person report."

I walk her back to the apartment building. "I'll be in touch," I add as I go to my car and toss the parking ticket on the windshield into my glovebox.

Sighing, I call Conner.

"She's missing. I think...it's them," I state.

"Could you be more cryptic?"

"Someone took Alexis," I start, and I hear Conner suck in a breath. "She went for a run by her apartment and never came back. I'm going to keep looking. Can you grab Aiden and try looking at the trails near this address that I just texted you?"

"Just call the police," he urges.

"I will. But...I have a bad feeling about this."

"OK, OK, I'll come over there. Give me thirty minutes," he says as he hangs up.

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I walk to the local coffee shop, but no one has seen her. I text Erin to confirm that they reached out to her family. They haven't heard from her either. Erin's trying not to worry them yet. None of her other friends have heard from her. She hasn't posted on social media. She hasn't made contact with anyone since she went for that run.

At some point in my searching, Erin texts to say she filed the police report. The afternoon is quickly turning into evening. Conner and Aiden have checked area after area. Between the three of us, I feel like we've scoured most of the city by the time the sun starts to lower in the sky.

"We're going to have to call it a night," Conner states after I call him to check in for the fifth time.

"Use a flashlight," I growl.

"Sebastian, go home. Get a good night of sleep, and then we'll start again tomorrow."

I hang up on him because I'm not having any of that. I wrack my brain for a second as I get in my car again and start aimlessly driving around. Can I call someone? No. The only two people I trust right now are Conner and Aiden. I don't know who in the brotherhood is on my side. Hell, I don't even know if anyone beyond my two closest friends is on my side. Maybe Aaron? I should trust all my brothers who live by me, but I'm starting to have doubts in the pit of my stomach and I don't like that, not at all.

I know who I can't trust. My father. I can't help wondering if he's behind the text messages and the help from the White House on my transportation bill. The elders of

the brotherhood, the elite, never reveal themselves, but based on those conversations that Kara and I heard so many years ago, I'm fairly certain he's one of them. And I don't like that he's pulling the strings. Where my moral compass might be directionally off, my father has no moral compass. He'd sell his soul to the devil to make sure our family's political empire stayed intact.

My mind zones out to the memory of that conversation.

"Kara?" I ask as I walk down the back hallway of our home. She's leaning against the wall with a glass cup to her ear.

Her eyes widen and she puts her finger to her lips to indicate that I need to shut the fuck up. I roll my eyes and walk toward her.

"What are you doing?" I mouth.

"Listening. Dad is in there talking to someone. I was curious," she mouths back. This has been our game for as long as I can remember. We've gotten very good at lip-reading because in our family children should be seen and not heard.

"Does that even work?" I ask, my lips forming the words.

She nods and smiles, offering the glass to me. I shake my head and walk back to the kitchen. I grab my own cup and head back down the hall. This time, I motion for her to go into the butler's pantry that backs onto our father's office. It's safer than being in the hallway.

She follows me and we both put glasses to the wall and listen.

"It's done," my father's voice hisses in anger.

“What do you mean it’s done?” another voice asks. It sounds like someone on speakerphone.

“I signed the order this morning. It will be completed today.”

“Todd didn’t vote,” the voice says in a flat tone.

“Fuck the vote. This can’t wait for all of us to be wrangled onto a call. And I wasn’t going to send a message out through the encrypted channels. This can’t get out. This is too sensitive,” my father explains.

“Fuck. Fine. But at our next meeting, this has to be explained. The council will not be pleased.”

Our father sighs. “The council’s time is coming to an end. It’s our time now.”

There’s a long pause. “So, the plan has been put into action, the whole plan?”

“Yes.”

“The hit was ordered.”

“Yes.”

“I see. Inform me when it’s over.”

“The other elite will be informed when it is completed. He shouldn’t have overstepped. We all know the price we pay for breaking a vow,” my father states.

“Will we be invoking the vows at that time?” the man asks.

“We will. The new elite member will be invited to our next meeting and we will vote on the council then. Orders will go out shortly.”

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“Very well.” We hear the dial tone and the two of us look at each other, confused by what we’ve heard.

Our father comes out of his office and we press against the wall behind the door, staying out of sight until he’s gone.

“What did that all mean?” Kara asks.

“I’m not sure,” I state as I ponder what we just heard. But whatever it is...it’s not good.

I didn’t know then what it meant, but when I joined my fraternity, I learned about the brotherhood and my father’s role in it. As I’m about to immerse myself in that memory, I look to my left and quickly pull the car over. It’s on total instinct that I’ve driven myself here, where our lives took a sudden turn so many years ago. I get out of the car and look at my old apartment building as I run a hand through my hair. Good and bad memories crash together like waves at the bottom of a cliffy shoreline. The sky is holding on to the last bit of light, the sun now having sunk below the horizon.

I put my hands in my pockets and begin to stroll along the path. Flashes of that night stew in my mind. It’s a quiet trail. It skirts the park, only connecting side streets and not connecting into any of the major trails running through the middle of the city.

I stroll along the curvy paved path. It’s as I round the corner that I see it. My present collides with my past as I retrace my footsteps from over ten years ago. My mind can’t make sense of what I’m seeing. It doesn’t want to make sense of what I’m seeing.

Alexis.

She's exactly where Tina was found by us. Her body lies in the same position. She's naked, and for a split second, I am frozen in fear that I'm too late, that she's gone, but then I see her chest rise slowly and run to her.

I take off my jacket and throw it over her. "Alexis, baby, I'm here. Can you hear me?" I yell, my voice choked with emotion.

She doesn't respond. I whip my phone out and call 911. I give them my location and examine her for injuries as the operator instructs me to. I don't find anything, except for a marking on the inside of her thigh. The initials TOD are scratched into her skin. Not a deep cut, but enough it's left red bumps there. I shiver at the initials of my fraternity. To anyone else, it looks like somewhat scratched "too" or "tool" on her thigh, but not me. Because those same initials were scratched on me a long time ago for very different reasons. I panic, wondering if she was assaulted, but I see no sign of trauma between her legs. I relay that she has no visible injuries to the operator. The woman keeps talking to me, but my mind is already processing this. It's a warning. But why? They told me to get rid of her, and I did. She was out of the picture, so why?

I can hear the ambulance coming.

"It's going to be OK, Alexis," I whisper as I lean down and kiss her forehead. She lets out a small moan. I grip her hand and squeeze it.

I hear voices but all my senses are fixated on this woman...this woman that I love. Fuck, I love her. It's been less than three months, but I've fallen completely in love with her. I feel myself contorting with pure pain at the thought that I might lose her without ever telling her how much I love her.

“Sir! We have to help her now,” a man’s voice says to me.

I blink and look over at him. He’s a paramedic and is kneeling down beside us.

I realize I haven’t taken a breath in a long moment, and I gasp for air as I sit back on my heels. I don’t let go of her hand, but my movement gives him access.

A woman comes to my side, another paramedic. “Sir, I’m going to need to have her arm, OK?”

She gently pries my hand away from Alexis’s. I don’t move as I watch them work on her. Then she’s lifted onto a gurney, and I stand, following them like a lost puppy.

When we get to the ambulance, the woman turns to me.

“Are you family?”

I nod. I may not be her official family, but if the universe gives us another chance, I will most certainly make her my family. I will not lose her.

“OK, you can ride with us, then,” she says as she motions to a seat in the corner of the ambulance.

I watch Alexis’s face the entire ride. I don’t even know how long it takes. When I follow her gurney in the emergency room and am asked to sit outside while they assess her, a nurse asks if I’m alright and if she can call anyone for me.

I shake my head as I reach for my phone. I send a text message to Erin. And then to Conner and Aiden.

The pain inside me is slowly morphing into pure rage. Whoever did this is done. And

if she doesn't make it, the city will see a wrath unlike any other.

Chapter 22

Alexis

It's so quiet and peaceful. I feel myself waking from a long sleep. There are things just beyond my consciousness that I try to remember, dark things. They hover just out of reach. I try to move but my limbs feel heavy. I try to open my eyes but my eyelids fight the command. It takes many tries, but eventually, I manage to open them a crack. I'm confused as I take in my surroundings. A hospital room. The lights are dimly lit. From the windows in front of me, I can see it's night. I continue to scan to my left and am surprised to find Sebastian sitting there. His eyes trained on mine.

"Alexis?" he says quietly as if he's afraid to say my name aloud.

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I try to speak but my throat is so dry. “Water?” I manage to croak.

He presses a button on the side of my bed and a nurse comes in.

“Well, hello there, Alexis. My name is Kelly Hasber. I’m your nurse. Do you know where you are?”

I nod, and then frown and manage to shake my head.

“You’re in the hospital, but you are going to be fine.”

“She needs water,” Sebastian cuts the nurse off with a stern voice.

“Of course. I’m just going to grab the doctor and we’ll get you some water,” she says as she leaves the room.

Sebastian looks at me. “It’s OK, little dove. It’s going to be OK.”

He squeezes my hand in his. I can’t tell if his hands are hot or mine are cold but his grip feels good and I don’t want him to leave me.

“Hello, Alexis. I’m Dr. Farley. How are you feeling?” a woman in a white coat and scrubs asks as she walks in the room.

“She wants water,” Sebastian says.

Dr. Farley nods and looks back to me as if she’s exasperated by Sebastian, which

knowing him, he's probably been driving her crazy. "You want water?"

"Yes," I whisper.

"Great. We'll get you some. I just want to give a quick listen to your heart if that's OK?"

I nod slowly and she helps me sit up, pressing the cold end of the stethoscope to my chest. She then tests my eye dilation and asks me to track her finger moving back and forth. Then she checks my reflexes.

"Do you remember what happened?" she asks after a few seconds of listening to my heart.

"No," I manage as the nurse hands me a glass of water.

I take long sips of the cool liquid. Water has never tasted so good in my life.

"Easy," the nurse whose name I already have forgotten says.

I slow down a bit, and when it's all gone, Sebastian takes the cup and hands it back to the nurse.

"Alexis?" Dr. Farley asks.

I look back at her.

"What's the last thing you remember?"

I frown and purse my lips as I try to remember. "I went for a run."

“OK, good. And then what?”

“I went off the trail...and I went to my favorite boulder by the stream.” I pause, trying to remember. “I turned to head back and...that’s all I remember.”

I freeze as the worst-case scenario plays out in my still foggy mind. “Oh God...I wasn’t...” I trail off, unable to complete my thought.

The doctor shakes her head. “No, you weren’t assaulted in any way. It does appear someone hit you on the back of the head with an object. That likely caused you to lose consciousness. You have a concussion from that. We are running blood work to look for any sort of drugs in your system as your body’s responses were unusual when you were found. Your respiration was low. Your blood pressure was very low.”

I close my eyes and take a deep breath. A fuzzy memory starts to appear in the recesses of my mind. A man’s voice. Everything is black. He is saying something but not to me and then...nothing again.

I open my eyes again. “I...thought I might remember...but no.”

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“That’s OK. Sometimes, when you have trauma like this, it can affect your memory. We ran scans and everything looks fine with your brain. Your vitals are back to normal. Whatever was going on seems to have corrected itself. We’d like to keep you at least until we get your bloodwork back in a few hours. And you should rest. I started my shift when you arrived a few hours ago, so let’s look at maybe discharging you at the end of my shift. Rest for a few hours and I’ll come back by once we know more,” Dr. Farley says.

“OK,” I say quietly.

“Call if you need anything,” she says to me, but Sebastian nods.

They leave us in silence, shutting the door as they go. Sebastian stands and leans over me to plant a tender kiss on my forehead.

“What did you remember?” he asks.

I look up at him in surprise. “What do you mean?”

“When she asked if you remembered something...I could see it in your eyes. You did.”

I take a breath. He leans over to the side table to grab me more water. After a few sips, I hand it back to him.

“A man’s voice. But...I couldn’t see anything, and he wasn’t talking to me. And I don’t remember what he said. That’s all.”

He nods. "Would you recognize the voice if you heard it?"

I shrug. "Maybe."

"Why the fuck were you out there by yourself?" he growls as though he can no longer hold back his anger over my stupid actions.

I chew on my bottom lip before answering. "I thought it would be safer. I...it was daytime. None of the women have been taken in broad daylight. And it was a busy trail."

"You went off the trail."

I blush. "I know, but not far. I could have screamed."

"But no one would see you if you were unconscious," he snarls.

I close my eyes. I'm so very tired still. "I know. It...was stupid of me. I just..." I trail off and look up at his eyes, but he doesn't look angry, at least not at me. I daresay he looks like he cares about me. "I was upset about us, and I needed to get out of the house."

His grip on the metal of my hospital bed has his knuckles turning white. I place a hand over his. "I won't do it again."

He looks down at me. "Damn right you won't because I won't allow it."

I roll my eyes, but my sleepiness rears its head and I yawn.

Sebastian frowns. "You should rest. We can talk more about this later."

“Where was I found?” I ask as I lean back into the pillow behind me.

“You were in northwest on a small trail in Rock Creek. I...found you.”

I stare at him trying to comprehend his words. “You found me?”

He nods. “I...Erin and Whitney were worried sick. They’ve been here, by the way. I sent them home to rest for a few hours. They’ll be back soon. I had to tell them that you’d need your things in order to get them to go. You have good friends.”

I smile. I can only imagine what Erin would have said. “I know,” I whisper.

“I called Conner and Aiden. We were all looking for you for hours. Erin reported you missing to the police. I was driving and ended up near where I used to live. I started walking and there you were.”

I frown again. “Isn’t that over where that woman was found? The one you told me about.”

Sebastian’s face pales and I know I’m right before he speaks. “It was exactly where she was found.”

Now it’s my face that pales.

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“Alexis? Are you OK?” he asks, his voice laced with concern. “Shit, I shouldn’t be telling you these things yet. You need to rest.”

My thigh suddenly hurts, and I reach down to feel a scratch.

“I thought she said...” I trail off as I raise my hospital gown to look at the inside of my thigh. “Is that a word? What is that?”

Sebastian bats my hand away and covers me back up. “It’s just a scratch. You need to rest. Lie back down. We can talk more after you rest.”

I want to talk more now but I comply because I know he won’t take no for an answer. Sebastian sits back down next to me and grips my hand again in his. He draws lazy circles on the back of it with his thumb as I slowly drift to sleep. I swear I hear him say that he loves me, but then sleep pulls me under.

The next time I wake, I hear another man’s voice. My eyes fly open to find Conner Sterling standing next to Sebastian. They are whispering.

“Sleeping beauty is awake,” Conner says with a smile.

Chapter23

Sebastian

I lookover to find Alexis staring at us.

Conner has stopped in twice now. The first time was to tell me that he may have cracked open one of the mysteries in our search. He has been trying to figure out how the drugs from Confervo's Geneva lab are getting here. But he needs to do more research. He thinks they may be coming in on ships, but he hasn't found anything conclusive yet.

Conner has always been the edgy tattooed bad boy of our group. He's the one that looks the part. No one ever wants to cross him and that's not just because his father is a shipping mogul that is also part of the brotherhood's elders. Conner is savvy as fuck. He's ten times smarter than anyone gives him credit for, which lets him overhear many things he shouldn't. It's his secret weapon, and I have zero doubts he'll figure this out.

I walk back over to my little dove and feel her cheek. She looks better after a few hours of sleep. The color is back in her face.

"How are you feeling?" I ask.

Her tongue darts out to lick her dry lips. Shit, her toiletries that Erin brought.

"Better." She looks past me to the door to the bathroom and then down at the IV in her arm.

"Hold on, I'll call a nurse," I state as I press the call button next to her bed.

Dr. Farley walks in and looks at us. I can tell from her face that something isn't right.

"Everything OK?" I ask.

She quickly changes her frown to a smile. "Yes. We're going to run a little more bloodwork, just to be cautious, but overall, your numbers look good. I'm going to

discharge you but I do want you to follow up with your regular physician as soon as you can.”

“Why? What’s wrong with my bloodwork?” Alexis asks.

“It may have just gotten contaminated, which isn’t typical but can happen. We just saw some chemical compounds that aren’t normal. I want to make sure we get a clean read on it, but it’s nothing that’s alarming and everything else seems fine.”

“What chemical compounds?” I ask, stepping forward. Dr. Farley looks at Conner and me nervously.

“I...let’s just run the additional bloodwork. I’m going to grab a fresh sample right now and then we can get this IV out. You can clean up and we’ll get you discharged,” she says with a tight smile. Fucking hospital privacy rules.

Conner gives me a look and I know he’s thinking what I am. What are those chemicals? I have a sneaking suspicion that we may already know, and I don’t like it.

“I’ll give you some privacy,” Conner says as he looks at us. “I hope you feel better, Alexis.”

“Thanks,” she says with a small smile as he leaves, the doctor takes her sample and leaves us as well after a nurse comes in to remove the IV and provide discharge papers. She helps Alexis to the bathroom so she can change.

“I got it from here,” I assure her.

She gives me a look and rolls her eyes as she walks out of the room and shuts the door. I hear something fall in the bathroom and I throw the door open. Alexis clutches her hospital gown to her chest. I look around and find a hairbrush on the

floor. I reach down and pick it up.

“Here,” I say softly as I grab a sweatshirt from the bag Erin dropped off.

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“When were they here?” She looks around confused.

I gently help her put the sweatshirt over her head. She complies while awaiting my answer. I grab her sweatpants next and help her put them on, kneeling down to assist her in sliding her feet inside. I take her hands and place them on her shoulders. I’m dangerously close to her pussy and it takes all my concentration not to lean forward and kiss it. God, I’ve missed her.

“Bastian?” she prods as she looks down at me. I stare up at her eyes, which are so much clearer now.

“They were here while you were still...asleep. I sent them home. Erin tried to argue with me. She wanted to stay with you. She called your parents. You should call them. They are ready to come here.”

“Shit,” she mutters.

I pull her phone out of my pocket. “I found this on the trail.”

She looks down at it and back at me. “Thank you.” She presses the call button and a frantic woman’s voice answers. I listen as she speaks to her parents and assures them that she is alright. She glosses over a lot. Meanwhile, I help her put her shoes on.

I begin brushing her hair. She winces and I realize she’s got a nice-sized bump on her head. I lean forward and kiss it.

I feel her shoulders sag a bit as I kiss down her head to her neck, pushing her hair

aside so I can feel her pulse against my lips.

“Mom, I swear I’m fine. Really. I’ll follow up with my doctor this week. I was really lucky. It could have been a lot worse.

“No, Mom, I’m not leaving the city. It’s no more dangerous than anywhere else. Yes, I’ll call you tonight. Yes, Dad. Love you both, too.” She hangs up and turns to look up at me.

“You’re coming to my place,” I state.

“I think that’s a bad idea,” she whispers, her eyes glancing down at her feet.

I take a finger to her chin and lift her head up, so she’s forced to make eye contact with me.

“I’m sorry,” I say as I search her eyes. “I fucked up. I was trying to protect you, and all I ended up doing was putting you in more danger.”

She looks at me in confusion.

“I’ll explain later. In any case, I shouldn’t have let you go, Alexis. I should have kept you right by my side, where you fucking belong.”

“Where I belong?” she asks, her voice barely a whisper as her eyes gloss over with tears.

I nod. I bring my thumb up to catch a tear. I lean down and brush my lips over hers. “You do.”

“W-why?” she stammers as I lean back slightly. Her eyes are still closed and damn it

if she doesn't look like the most ethereal being I've ever seen. Her beauty is raw and pure. It's almost painful to look at her. I run my thumb over her jaw and down her neck. Her eyes slowly open and I stare at the blending of unusual colors that mesmerized me during her job interview.

I take a breath before I speak. How does this woman scare me? Nothing scares me, but her. I trace her lips with my thumb as I cup her jaw.

"Because..." I trail off as I lean my forehead against her, relishing in the warmth of her skin. "I love you."

Her eyes widen. Tears fill them and spill down her cheeks in streams too great to catch with my thumbs. "I love you too..." she replies as her lower lip trembles. "But I'm still mad at you."

I chuckle at her feistiness as I press my lips to hers, tasting her salty tears as I kiss her. When I pull back, I take her head in my hands and wipe the trails of tears from her cheeks. "You're allowed to be mad at me. I was a jackass."

She nods and bites her lip before smiling. "You are a jackass, but I sort of can overlook that..." She trails off and smirks.

I raise an eyebrow. "What do I have to do for you to 'overlook' that?"

She blushes and now it's me that's smirking. "Well?" I prod.

"Take me home and I'll show you," she whispers as her cheeks pinken further.

"It will be your home, too." I stare at her again, letting all my feelings that I can't express pass to her through my gaze. She smiles slightly and reaches up to caress my cheek. I lean into her touch, letting my eyes close for a moment. How does this

woman completely unarm me?

“Let’s get you home and bathed and then I’ll do whatever you need me to in order to make you feel better,” I declare as I start packing up her things. I have no idea where things are going to go between us, but I do know that I’m not letting her out of my sight again. If the brotherhood thinks they can remove her, they have another thing coming because I will destroy everything that they built in order to keep her safe.

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I gather her things and insist on wheeling her in a chair to the hospital door all on my own. I have the hospital valet pull up my car that Conner and Aiden dropped off earlier. We drive in comfortable silence, each in our own thoughts. She spends most of the time texting and talking to Whitney and Erin. Neither of them seems pleased that she's coming to my home.

When we finally arrive at my home, I park and run around the car, opening the door for her and helping her out. She doesn't fight me on it and accepts my outstretched hand.

I lead her up to my bedroom and into my bathroom, where I set about getting a bath drawn for her. I roll up my sleeves and check the water temperature before lovingly stripping her clothes off and lifting her up into my arms, setting her down into the warm water.

She watches me as I carefully apply soap to a sponge and run it over her skin. I'm even more careful washing her hair, making sure to stay clear of the tender spot on the back of her head. When I finish, I help her out and dry her off. I kneel before my queen, carefully dabbing at each drop of water on her skin. I lay a small kiss on the inside of her thigh where she was scratched. It looks better today. No welt, just a faint red mark remains. I can tell the hospital treated it.

I look up at her. She places her hands on my shoulders. "Make me feel better...Congressman," she commands. Normally, I'd not be pleased by such a bold request, but for her, anything. I smirk as I lean forward, running my nose along the folds of her sex. I take my tongue and run it down the same path. She spreads her legs farther apart, granting me more access. I run my tongue around her clit. Her thighs

tremble beneath my palms that are firmly planted there, keeping her open to me. I slowly move my hands up and separate her folds with my thumbs, plunging my tongue inside her. Her body stiffens in response. I withdraw it and plunge two fingers inside her as I suck her clit into my mouth and flick it with my tongue. She cries out my name, her hands flying to my head and gripping it as I continue to fuck her with my fingers, milking out her orgasm as long as possible.

When she finally releases my hair, I pull away and look up at her as I lick her essence from my lips. She looks completely satiated.

“Fuck worshipping you at every national monument,” I whisper as I stand to my full height and plant a kiss on the corner of her mouth.

“I’m going to worship you at monuments all over the world. The Eiffel Tower,” I state as I plant another kiss to her mouth. “The Roman Colosseum.” I kiss her again. “The Great Wall of China.” Another kiss. “Machu Picchu.” I kiss her once more, plunging my tongue into her mouth and letting her taste herself. She moans.

I hear my front door open. I freeze. Then I hear the door to my liquor cabinet. I look down at Alexis. “That would be Conner. Here, put on this.” I hand her some clothes that I had delivered overnight when I had decided she would be coming back here.

She gives me a curious look. “I ordered you a few outfits,” I explain. She raises her eyebrows but doesn’t speak as I turn to head downstairs.

Conner is sipping my best bourbon as I walk into my kitchen. Fucker.

“How is she?” he asks.

“Good.”

He smirks. “Any word from the doctor on the second lab results?”

I shake my head. “Any progress on figuring out how the drugs are getting here?”

“Not yet.”

He looks down at his phone and groans. I watch as he presses play on the voice message.

“Conner, what did you not fucking understand about taking goddamn orders? If I say jump, you better fucking ask how high. I expect you to fall in line. Do not cross me, boy,” his father’s voice booms. Theo Sterling is not a man to cross. He’s British, but the type of British you’d run into in a back-alley pub. He’s smart as fuck. His adoptive father made him come to the U.S. for college after he ran into some trouble at home. He joined the fraternity and pledged with my father. There is little doubt he is a member of the elite.

I feel Alexis standing in the doorway even before I see her. I turn and she looks pale, so very pale.

I rush to her. “Alexis? Baby? What’s wrong?” I ask as I take her in my arms.

She swallows, eyes wide. “That’s the man.”

I frown, not understanding her words.

“The man from my memory of the abduction...the voice I remember. He’s British,” she finally says. “But his accent is subtle like he’s been here a while.”

I look over at Conner, who looks like he might crush someone.

“Are you sure?” I ask as I turn back to her.

She nods slowly. “W-who is that?”

Conner stands and throws back the entire two-finger pour of bourbon in one swallow. Roughly setting the glass down on the counter, he looks at Alexis. “That is my father.”

Continue the story in A Man of Wealth.