



Coach's Pet

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Category: Erotic, Romance, Lesbian Romance

Description: Tia- Life hasn't always been easy, but I've found who I am and I own it. College is supposed to be a fresh start, but there's one person standing in my way. My volleyball coach Laura Landrey. She makes me feel things I'm sure aren't real. It doesn't matter though because now that I want her, I'm going for it.

Laura- Coaching Volleyball at Groveton College has always been my dream. With eight championships under my belt, I run a tight ship. However, the second my eyes land on Tia Falcon, my world takes a turn. She brings things out in me that I'm not sure are right, but the second I taste her, all bets are off.

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One

“And the award for the most fashionable artist goes to Lucinda De Vil.” The applause is deafening as my sister—well, stepsister—stands to go get her trophy and a one hundred-thousand-dollar grant. Fury rolls through me as I look at the stage, and our father stares at me with disdain. I’ll get an earful the moment we get home. He knew I was going for this and insisted on getting Lucinda involved.

My designs are cutting-edge and trendy. Lucinda’s are retro and funky. It’s not that Lucinda doesn’t have talent—she does. Except the way her color schemes work is dastardly together. There’s no cohesiveness or sophistication to her work. Mine flows from one piece to another. There’s a theme and color scheme that meshes well.

Trying not to get too upset, I take a glass of wine the server offers, downing it in one gulp. Another hour goes by before I meet my ecstatic sister at the limo with my father, who is talking to Ricardo McKessonville. He’s the most sought-after clothing agent in the United States. Bile rises as I think about my internship with him this summer.

“Ah, here she is, Ricardo. I’d like you to meet Lucinda. I believe you granted her an internship.” My father comes up to me and gives my shoulder a hard squeeze. The message is clear—be nice, do not argue, and accept whatever he says as final.

“Hello, Mr....”

As I extend my hand to shake his, he cuts me off. “Call me Ricardo, dear.” He takes my hand in his and squeezes. “I’d like to start by apologizing.”

He looks anything but apologetic. My brow furrows, and I shrug. “For what?”

My confusion makes everyone laugh. Lucinda steps up and looks at me. There’s a bit of guilt in her eye, but it’s overshadowed by glee. “Well, I... Well...” she stutters, and I know I will not like whatever she has to say.

“I’m receding your internship. The winner of the grant should be the one to get to work for me.”

An ugly gasp leaves me as my vision swims in a dizzying effect in front of me.

“Cru, please. I really need this.” Lucinda grabs my hands, and I’m able to focus again.

“But I earned it,” I say quietly.

My father cuts in. “Enough, Crucinda. Get in the limo, both of you. Ricardo has spoken, and that’s the end of it.”

With shaking hands, I get into the limo. “See you Monday, Lucinda,” Ricardo says as she turns back and looks at him with a fond smile. Anger boils deep inside of me.

The door shuts, and we drive off. “You ungrateful bitch!” My father says as he slaps me across the face. “After everything I’ve done for you, you could have been a better sport about this.”

“I...” His hand finds its mark again against my cheek. Lucinda smiles at me with nothing more than satisfaction that I’m being hit.

“You really should have known I’d end up with everything, Cru.” Her cocky voice grates on me as I rub my cheek. The thing is, she’s not wrong. Father has babied her

ever since he married her mother.

“When we get home, you’ll go straight to your room.” He straightens his tie and turns toward Lucinda.

Sitting there stoically, I say nothing. It’s better if I don’t cry or speak. Lucinda and Father talk about her next line of clothes as I sit in my seat, looking at our driver. Jasper is my only friend, but he knows not to cut in when my father is talking. He looks away from me, and I truly feel alone. Hell, even he is ashamed to look at me. The rage inside me builds each mile we drive as we make our way home.

Once we get home, I wait until everyone else gets out of the car. Maybe if I take too long, Father will forget he wanted to punish me. The house’s west wing is silent as I enter through the side door. Walking along the gray hall, I feel a presence behind me.

“You disgraced yourself tonight, Crucinda.” My father says as he pushes me through the bedroom door.

“Father.”

He slams me into the wall and crowds into my body. “I’m going to step back and let you undress. Once you do, I want you back on this wall.”

Turning toward him, I know saying anything will make things worse. But I must try. “Please,” I whisper, hoping he won’t do this. He’s the only person who can make me tremble in fear and beg.

Instead of a slap across the face, he punches me in the right eye, and I fall to the ground. My eye feels awkward as pain radiates through me. Crab crawling backward, I try to get away from him.

“Don’t make me tell you again to take your clothes off. I’d hate to rip one of your stupid creations.” His eyes are full of malice and lust.

Not again, I think.

Please, not that.

Lower lip trembling, I stand up. Taking off my beautiful white and black mosaic dress that took me almost twenty hours to perfect, I think about a time and place when I was happy.

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“Panties, too.” My father growls at me as he unbuckles his belt and snarls at me.

Gulping, I take them off. He hasn’t had me like this in a long time. When he married Lucinda’s mom, the nightly visits stopped. Now that she’s passed away, he’s become increasingly horrible toward me again.

“Face the wall, breasts touching the paint, chin up, and your hands above your head.”

His tone means business. It has a harsh bite. I only ever heard him use it with my mother. Father treated her like shit, too. I don’t blame her for finding a way out of here. The belt hits my thighs first, and I yelp.

“Keep quiet and still. Or I’ll tie your ass up.” He doesn’t say anything else. I don’t want him to. Sucking in a breath as the belt punishes my skin, I vow not to make another sound.

“Twenty-three years, and you still haven’t learned your place.” The belt hits my head, and tears fill my eyes. Another hit on the back of my neck has me cowering into the wall as if it could keep me from being hurt.

“Your sister has earned this, and all you could do was be selfish. I can’t believe how you can only think about yourself.” He continues, blasting my skin with a torrent of hits. It burns, stinging with each lashing. Hot, thick liquid flows down my skin, drying on me.

“For fuck’s sake, turn around since you seem to even fail at receiving your punishment. I’ll continue on the front side. Your better side anyway.”

He wants me to ask him to stop. To beg him for his forgiveness. I refuse to show him weakness. My mother never did, and neither will I. The pain wants to win out, but I swallow the sickening vomit down. He won't get a word out of me. No, I'd rather die than admit defeat and ask him to stop.

Whoosh. The belt sings through the air and finds its target against my face. The scream that leaves me is otherworldly as I tumble to my knees.

"Goddamn it, Crucinda." My father grabs my hair and forces me to look at him. "You just had to turn slowly, didn't you?" He spits at me and yanks my hair hard and unforgiving. "Well, now your face will be as ugly as your clothes. Go wash up."

Tears, snot, and blood drip onto the gray carpet. "Don't even think about getting help. Your punishment isn't over with."

For once, I obey quickly and make my way into the bathroom. Trembling and shivering, I look at myself in the mirror. My right eye is swollen and getting worse by the second.

That's not what worries me.

No, it's the gash from the top of my eyebrow down my eye and cheek. Father split my face open with the belt buckle.

"Hurry the fuck up, girl." A loud thud comes from my bedroom, and I hate to think what one of the staff just brought him. The door opens, and there stands Jasper.

I'm not shy about my body, but I've never been naked in front of anyone but my father. He doesn't look at me. Instead, he thrusts a robe at me. "Here, put this on."

Hesitantly, I take the article of clothing, but I do as he asks and wrap it around me.

“We have to move now,” he whispers to me urgently.

Two

Ten Years Later

Cold sweat pours down my back as I jerk out of bed. It’s been ten years since I ran away and never looked back. Jasper saved me that night. He will never know how much he helped. Getting out of bed, I angrily grab my robe and walk into the bathroom. I’m fucking tired of the same dream haunting my sleep every night.

Jasper may have saved me that night, but unfortunately, he did not save my mind. My father already had his way with that. I’ll never forget the look on his face when we got in the car and drove away.

“How long, Crucinda?” His whispered question embarrassed me, but I answered.

“Since before he married Lucinda’s mother.”

“Son of a bitch!” He bangs his hand on the steering wheel and looks at me as we reach a red light. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

I try to catch my breath as I come back to the present. Jasper’s the only one that’s given a damn about me. Shaking it off, I resolve to let it go.

Yeah, right?

After washing up and doing my business in the bathroom, I head to the kitchen and find Jasper already there.

“Right on time, Cru-Cru.” His Russian accent washes over me, and peace settles

within me.

He walks over to me and hands me my favorite drink of black and white tea. “Thank you, Jasper.” I don’t bother smiling or making small talk. He knows when I get up, I want my tea in the bay window and to be left alone.

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Once I'm done with my tea, I get up and hear the news.

“De Vil Industries and McKessonville Agencies are proud to announce their merger. Lucinda De Vil has posted on Instagram that she and Ricardo McKessonville are finally to be wed on Christmas Eve.”

“Turn it off, Jasper.”

I look at the screen and frown. My sister is wearing a tacky fur coat, and it makes me sick. Unlike my sister, who uses real fur in her designs, I use faux fur. Synthetic blends. It's just better for the environment.

Looking out the window, I see a small lamb walking around, eating grass, and I smile. The left side of my face burns, and I frown. A constant reminder of how my family hates me.

“Your medicine.” I look around to see Jasper holding a small medicine cup in hand. He softly touches my face. “It's going to be alright, Cru-Cru. I could see the pain.”

If Jasper wasn't gay, I would have asked him to marry me long ago. As it is, his husband stands outside, throwing feed to the chickens. I chuckle and down my meds.

“Thank you, Jasper.”

“Boris says that everything is ready to go. He has confirmed your slot at the fashion show, and you are still anonymous, as requested.”

The pounding in my eye intensifies at the thought of having a confrontation with my

sister. Which is surprising, considering I do love to argue. Lucinda always believed I killed our father and was quick to tell the police that in a statement that was full of lies. There was no point in trying to tell the police that my sister was full of shit. The rumor mill made sure to tell everyone I was a horrid person.

Even with me having to go to the emergency room and therapy for months after the incident, I never told the truth. The police discovered it was self-defense, and Jasper was never mentioned in the conversations. I would protect him at all costs.

Once my father was buried, Lucinda never allowed me to set foot on the De Vil property again. I was banned from all fashion houses, which led me to start my own.

CDV Fashions.

No one's seen my face in ten years.

Until tomorrow, that is.

"Jasper, I want to arrive early," I tell him as Boris comes in and straight to him. He laughs and kisses his man.

"Of course. We should arrive about three hours early so you can set up."

"Perfect. Let's take Muffin with us." Muffin is my cat, but she claimed Jasper the second she set foot into the house. He loves that cat and would be lost without her, I believe.

"Should I bring the cat stroller as well?" Boris chimes in with a smirk. He knows how much we love to spoil our little girl.

"Yes." Jasper and I say at the same time, and we chuckle. Boris shakes his head and

rolls his eyes, walking off while mumbling about rotten cats.

“Smiling looks good on you, Cru,” Jasper says before he walks away. Ugh, I’m happy. Fuck happy. Brooding is where the fun is.

* * *

My first fashion show. Well, one that I’m showing my line. I look at the lineup and notice my sister is closing. I’m the opener. That is perfectly alright. It will give me a chance to make an impression and set up the surprise I have for her.

For the first time in years, I’m giddy. Biting my lip, I settle my mask on my face. No one needs to know who the hell I am. Besides, this will only work if I remain in the shadows. Making my way through the clothing lines, I’m impressed, except for my sisters. It’s not that they aren’t brilliant; they are. She hasn’t changed her style in the least since working with Ricardo. What a waste of talent to keep the same style after all this time.

Tearing her clothing with scissors, I cut each dress to have a letter. When the models walk the runway, it will spell out “traitor,” and the very end piece will have the word “liar” on it. It’s wrong of me, but it doesn’t matter.

“Crucinda.” Boris’s whisper makes me jump, but I quickly put the piece of fabric back on the rack. “What have you done?”

“What I felt like should have been done a long time ago.”

I shrug my shoulders and place the scissors back in my emergency pack.

“You are better than that.” His admonishment makes me feel tiny. I adore him and Jasper, but they still think I should be above revenge. Unfortunately, I’m not.

There's no time to get into it, though. My models come over in their undergarments, waiting to be clothed.

Once I put each piece on, I line them up in the order they should go out. A red and white pantsuit followed by a black-splattered white dress. Each piece of clothing tells a story. The first piece is innocence. The last piece is seductive, enticing to the dark side of my nature.

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Taking a deep breath, I give the girls a pep talk about how I want them to walk and show fierceness. I permit smiling if they feel like it, but I do not allow them to frown. Music starts, and my spokesman goes out. He explains the dynamic of my line, and the girls start their walk.

It takes exactly seven minutes to finish my show. By the time the last girl is down the catwalk, three celebrities are next to me. They want to buy certain pieces, and I know this is the start of something fantastic for me.

It has to be.

“You killed it!” Jasper comes over to me, and he smirks under the mask he wears as well. Everyone in my group is wearing one. Only their lips are showcased. Well, except mine. Considering my scar runs down my lip and down to my chin, it’s best I don’t show that side at all.

“These clothes are awesome.” One of the runway models squeals.

“Well, that’s good to know. If you liked your outfit today, you can keep it.” I’ve heard that most designers don’t allow anyone to have their runway styles, but I made a hundred of each so my models can keep theirs.

“Thank you so much.” The girls kiss my one cheek that’s exposed and scurry off. Jasper and Boris stand there, holding hands, and I smile.

“Well, that went fantastic!”

“Ladies and gentlemen, I present to you the De Vil highlight of the runway.” Jasper frowns at me as Boris gives me a side-eye. I simply stand there, waiting to hear the shock of the audience.

Gathering at the opening on the right, I watch as my stepsister pushes her models out of the curtain. She’s not even looking at her pieces.

Is Lucinda really that smug?

“Oh, my god.”

“What in the world?”

People start chattering, and that’s when Lucinda finally realizes there’s something wrong. Ricardo runs toward the runway, grabbing a microphone. “Everyone, please come back to the start of the runway. We need to fix your outfits.”

It’s too late, though. Once the walk starts, it cannot be stopped. The general manager over the show steps on the catwalk. “I’m afraid the show has already begun. We will have to finish it as is.”

Lucinda is in the back on the opposite side of the curtain, crying. Ricardo looks livid as the final dress walks out. I thought I would feel vindicated once I did this. Instead, sadness creeps in because I was cruel like my sister and father were toward me.

“We should go,” I whisper to the guys, and they nod, following me. “This was a mistake.”

Three

Fifteen Years Later

My brothers, Joey and John, message me as I wait for the right moment to strike. Taking a deep breath in, I look at what they sent.

Joey

In position and comms are up.

John

Ready when you are.

Me

10-4.

Right now, my focus is on my next target. Jasper Muhler. He's a man of habit, and I like that. It means I can tell where he's going to be and when he will arrive or leave someplace. Too bad for his husband; it's going to be a bad day.

Crackling comes over the comms in my ear, and I sigh. "What's your twenty?"

My brother asks me for the fiftieth time today. "Dude, I'm at the same location I was five minutes ago. My target isn't here yet."

"Because you're above this, Jason. Let our step-aunt live her life, and we live ours."

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The sick feeling I get when I think about letting my anger go has me breathing hard. “No chance in hell, little brother. Now shut up and get ready to drive.”

Silence.

Exactly what I want to hear from him.

Putting the binoculars down, I pick up the sniper rifle. Lining up my shot, I feel the wind against my arms and reconfigure my spot for the shift. As I’m about to pull the trigger, I see her.

Crucinda.

My heart races as she approaches Jasper, smiling and holding a cat in her arms. A tiny puppy barking at her feet throws me off.

What the fuck? She hates animals.

Why are they acting like they are safe with her?

Too many questions and not enough action. I tremble with anxiousness as I pull the trigger. I watch as the bullet hits Jasper in the neck, and Crucinda screams. Her voice permeates through the air, and I chuckle.

Crucinda’s scream is so loud I can hear it from where I’m hidden. The sheer agony in her voice is thrilling. “Jasper!” As she sits the cat she was holding down, it runs around with the dog that is barking, trying to understand the commotion. My other

brother comes around the corner as she falls to her knees.

My comms beep, and I can hear both my brothers' breathing. Ah, Joey must have activated the three-way. I smile because now I can hear everything that's going on.

"Get the fuck up," he demands. She shakes her head and covers Jasper's body. Her hand is pressed against his neck, but it's too late. My shot was dead on, through and through.

"He... He needs help," Crucinda cries out.

What. The. Ever. Loving. Shit?

"It's too late for him, lady. He's dead, and you're about to be if you don't fucking move."

"Hey!" Shit, Boris wasn't supposed to be here. I quickly pull the trigger again, and the bullet hits him directly in the chest.

He falls to the ground in a crumbled pile of blood. "No!" Crucinda loses her strength to stay upright, and her head falls to Jasper's abdomen. "No. No. No."

John yanks Crucinda up by her hair and snarls at her. "Move, or I'll drag your ass."

Watching them move, I quickly pick up my shit and make my way to the van. I'm happy I don't have to deal with Boris until later. I can't shake the feeling, though; I'm missing something. Everything our father ever told us was that Crucinda was a monster. We never mentioned her after our mother died. But these aren't the actions of a monster.

"Unhand me." I can hear Crucinda demanding, and my brother chuckles. His laugh is

cold and calculating. If she thinks she's getting away from him, she's sorely mistaken.

"Not a chance, bitch." John is playing the bad guy, but he's truly the softest of us. He'll play his part until we are at the warehouse. Then, back underground, he'll go.

Joey is the youngest and most volatile, but he is the voice of reason. He'll be back overseas in a few days, doing whatever Marines do. Me, I'm the eldest. The craziest of the bunch. I've served my time in the military, and now it's time to do what our soft-as-hell father couldn't do.

"Jason," John says as he throws Crucinda into the van. "She's a feisty one. You stay in the back with her."

"She's almost fifty. How do you have a black eye?" I raise an eyebrow at him, and he shakes his head.

"Goddamn fast as hell for a fifty-year-old, Jase. She head-butted me when I was trying to get her in the van."

I expected a fight, but not from her already. Oh well. Either way, I'll enjoy breaking her. Putting my gun into its case, I push it against the wall and climb in. Shutting the door, I turn toward my target.

"Hello, Crucinda." Sitting on the bench seat, she keeps her head held high and refuses to look at me.

"When I talk, you are to look at me." The van lurches forward, and even though Crucinda is untied and free to fight, she refuses to do so. Grabbing her chin, I force her to look at me. Even with makeup, her scar is visible. She stares at me, breathing hard and tears running down her face.

“So, this is the big bad daughter of Cruella De Vil?” I move her face closer to me to whisper in her ear. “She would be disappointed.”

Still, she remains silent. Anger is burning inside of me. “Giving me the silent treatment, huh?” I laugh and push her away from me.

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“You’ll open up soon enough.” Keeping her face turned away, she sighs and wipes away her tears.

Ignoring her for now, I look at the GPS on my phone. We are about an hour from where we need to be.

* * *

“Get out.” I look at the woman who’s been the only subject in my mind for almost fifteen years.

“No.” Her voice is soft and hoarse from yelling earlier. Those strong brown eyes glare at me, and I feel the stirring of my cock in my pants. I smirk.

“Well, even better then.” I take hold of her right arm and pull her along behind me.

“Let me go.” Even though she has no idea who we are or what I have planned for her, Crucinda still demands as if she has no fear.

Turning around, I slap her. It only makes her close her eyes. I didn’t get the reaction I wanted, but that’s alright. Soon enough, I remind myself. “You seem to think you’re in a position of power.”

Keeping my grip on her wrist, I squeeze hard and growl in frustration. “You aren’t. Now, you can move on your own, or I can put you in a duffle bag.”

“No.” Simple, easy does it for her, it seems.

No anger or any other emotion.

Why isn't she turning into the killer my father insisted she was?

My brothers come up behind her as we stand outside the van, staring at one another in a standoff. "Fine." I nod my head to my brothers, and they hold her arms. This gets a reaction out of her.

A smirk tips up one side of my mouth as she struggles. Pulling the rope out of the van, I make a noose and put it around her thrashing head. Joey pulls his gun on her when she bites him.

"Fucking hell." He cocks his gun and puts it against Crucinda's temple. "Be still. Or die. I don't give a fuck what my brother wants to do to you. I'll end your fucking life right now."

She pales and stands up straight, trying to avoid angering Joey further. Bending down to tie the rope along her waist and place her wrists behind her back, I get a view of her ass. I wasn't planning to touch her sexually, but that may change.

"I'm glad you were smart enough to stop messing around when Joey pulled his gun." Whispering in her ear, I tell her my thoughts. "You know, I was going to torture you, but after getting a good look at that sweet ass of yours, I might need to dip my dick in you first."

A deep gasp leaves her lips, but she doesn't step away from me or try to act out. Her behavior has me so damn confused.

"What, you aren't going to try to fight us?"

"You have guns. I'm not stupid enough to try to run or fight you." Crucinda says this

as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.

Irritation runs through me as John bites his lip to keep from laughing. Joey stands there, like a good soldier, with his gun trained at her head.

“Leave us, brothers.” Taking the rope, I turn to them. “Don’t contact me. I’ll contact you.” They nod as I take my pack from the van and pull the rope to make Crucinda follow me.

“Keep up.” It’s the only warning I give her as I move along the trail to my cabin. It’s a three-mile hike, and I expect Crucinda won’t be able to make it halfway.

The first mile goes as planned. Me having to slow down only twice to yank Crucinda to keep going. By mile two, she’s lagging, and I’m getting angrier by the step.

Four

I’m doing everything I can to keep my wits about me. High heels in rough terrain are a bad idea. I’m not going barefoot, though. Even if my feet are killing me from this hike, being barefoot seems like the worst option. The further we get from civilization, the worse my chances of surviving are. It would be futile to fight. Boris and Jasper taught me how to defend myself, but they also taught me to never fight when guns are involved. Sure, I could push this maniac down, but I would go down with him. He’s tied the rope onto his belt.

Nope, no running for me. I’m going to bide my time and get away when I can. Well, if that is even possible. The man is walking like a fire is coming, and I can’t keep up.

“Can you slow down?” I keep my voice haughty as if this whole thing is beneath me. It’s stupid, but I refuse to beg for anything.

He doesn't even turn around to look at me. "No, now keep up." My question seems to have irked him because instead of slowing down, he picks up speed.

My foot catches on a branch, and I go down. Without my hands to balance me, I'm super ungraceful about it. "Ow." Closing my eyes as my ankle throbs, I try hard not to cuss and make a scene. Something deep inside me tells me this man would love to see me throw a fit.

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“Get up.” He’s holding the rope, and my neck moves into an awkward angle. Pain radiates down my spine worse than my ankle, and I bite my lip.

Trying to get up, I fail. The pain is just too much. “My ankle is twisted.”

“Have it your way.” He tugs me along, and I yelp. My face lands down in the dirt as we move. Twisting, I move until I’m on my back. This seems to alleviate some of the pressure on my neck.

Every blade of grass, stick, and rock seems to find its way toward me, punishing my skin. By the time the man stops walking, I’m barely able to keep my composure.

“Are you ready to walk now?” He looks down at me with his intense green eyes, and all I can see is his hate shining back at me.

My patience is gone. “And exactly how do you expect me to walk?” I point at my swollen ankle. The way he pulled me along the trail, my hose have runs through them, and my skin is rubbed raw along my legs.

“Don’t be a baby. Get the fuck up.” He puts his hand out to help me.

I want to tell him I can’t reach his hand because he has me tied up, but I don’t. Instead, I roll my eyes and try to turn away from him.

“For fuck’s sake.” He huffs and pushes me to my stomach. “I see you’re going to be a goddamn stubborn bitch about things, huh?”

I ignore him and struggle to get to my knees. He pulls on the rope, and I whimper.

“Be still, and I’ll help you up. I can’t be tugging on you the rest of the way.”

No shit. I don’t say that, of course, but I sure think it. He puts his hands under my arms and lifts. I stand there, unable to put pressure on my foot.

“Now, fucking move.”

Putting weight on my foot, I gasp in agony. Still, I move. It’s excruciating, but I limp forward.

“Oh my God. It’s not like you broke it.” He shouts at me, and my mind immediately goes back to my father. Sucking in a deep breath, I square my shoulders and look at him.

“You’re right. It isn’t broken, but I have five-inch heels on, and I’m on rough terrain. Even if I take my other shoe off, the sprain is severe. I’m sure you know all about sprains. If I try to walk on it, I could damage it further.”

He steps closer to me, and I swear he looks familiar. Olive skin, a strong nose, soft petulant lips. It’s clear he’s young and is used to getting his way. The man has at least a foot on me, and I’m five foot eight inches without heels. With them, I stand at six feet one inch. As he towers over me, I take in the way his black utilitarian suit is filled out.

If this was any other time, I’d have asked him to be a model or bodyguard. Before I can stop myself, I blurt out what I’m thinking.

“What’s your name?”

Shaking his head, he picks me up and throws me over his shoulder. I try not to let my vertigo make me faint. The man doesn't answer my question. Hell no. Instead, he walks at a pace that bounces me up and down. My head spins, and I feel myself shaking inside.

"Stop," I tremble out, but he picks up pace. How he can carry me like this and still walk like God is after him, I'll never know. My eyes swim, and blackness takes over as I lose consciousness.

* * *

Jackhammers wake me. Groaning, I slowly wake up and realize that noise is in my head and the pain is everywhere. Focusing hard on my surroundings makes me come to the realization that I wasn't dreaming.

"Jasper." A sob leaves me as I think about his death. "Boris." The blood seeps into my vision, and my body shakes as I think about why this all happened.

Moving isn't an option. I'm in a chair, and the ropes from earlier are still around me. Additional chains have been placed around my legs and abdomen to keep me upright.

Who are these people, and what do they want?

In the back of my mind, I feel like I know the man, but he doesn't work for me. I don't know anyone outside of my employees that young.

"Good, you're awake." The pain in my neck is almost suffocating, but I move my head up to look at my kidnapper.

"What do you want?" I can't imagine him wanting anything from me. Then again, I didn't expect to ever be kidnapped either.

“For you to pay for your crimes.” His full lips are gnarled in a devastating frown.

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“Crimes?” My confusion gets worse as the seconds tick by.

“Yes. You’re a murderer and animal abuser.” He stands before me, paper in hand and glaring at me.

“Excuse me? Do what?” My voice is shrill. Surely, he knows I’d never kill anyone, most certainly not animals.

“Your farm.” He puts the words in air quotes and rolls his eyes at me. “It’s being raided right now. As soon as the evidence comes to light, you’ll be done.”

“I see.” I don’t see at all. He’s not going to find anything. At CDV Fashions, we don’t use animal products except wool taken from our sheep and alpacas once a year. It’s only humane to keep them groomed.

Still, I don’t say a word.

“And who have I killed?” He paces in front of me, and I wonder if he expected me to rebut his allegations. Why would I? He’s clearly not going to believe me.

“You know who. My family.” He spit at me, and my eyes open wide in shock.

What?

“Again, I have no idea who you think I am or what you are talking about. I’m a pacifist. No violence in anything I do.”

Five

My better judgment leaves me, and I slap the shit out of her. The sound of my palm finding its mark is loud. Her eyes close, and her head turns to the left. I watch her take a deep breath and right herself.

“Don’t lie to me.” The red handprint on her cheek makes me smile, but I tamp it down. We aren’t here for pleasure, I remind myself.

“Until you can be honest, you’ll receive no food or any kind of treatment except to be beaten,” I growl at her, unable to keep my voice even.

“If you don’t tell me what I’ve clearly done, then I can’t tell you the truth,” Crucinda spits right back at me. The bitch has some damn balls, I’ll give her that.

Instead of answering her, I leave the room. It’s too much to be in the same space as her. My promise to my father eats at me, and I huff as I make my way upstairs.

“Are you sure we are doing the right thing?” Joey asks me, and I turn around. I wasn’t expecting my brothers to be here. They should be looking through the evidence.

“Yes. What are you doing here?” I should explain more to my brothers, but I can’t. Not when the death of our father is fresh.

John stands at the window looking haunted. “There wasn’t shit on the farm. Every fucking person swore there wasn’t a single animal harmed. Hell, most of the employees said they’d work for no one else.” He turns around to me and looks irritated.

“They fucking play with the animals on their breaks, Jason. They have no kennels.

There isn't a single animal that looks harmed. She even has a veterinarian clinic for the sick ones. What are we doing with our step-aunt?"

My head aches as I try to figure out what's going on. The letter from our father was explicit. Crucinda is the worst human ever to walk on the planet. But nothing is adding up.

"What about the workshop where they make the clothes?" I turn to Joey, and he shrugs.

"The only animal fur I saw there was wool. All humanely sheared from animals." He takes a bite of an apple and raises an eyebrow at me. "Those lovely animals are in the fields right now, eating some of the best damn grass I've ever seen."

Joey throws the apple core down into the trash can. "I even got to talk to the head dye mixer. They have a special pigment that makes the patterns that you swore were real animal fur, Jason."

Fuck me. He pulls the dye cartridge from his pocket and throws it down on the counter. It's ink. Not whale parts. Sighing, anger fills me. I'm wondering if the note was a lie, why? Thrumming my hands along the laminate, I close my eyes.

No.

There must be something deeper.

"Brothers, we need to go hunting. There's no way Father is wrong about this woman. I know I haven't told you everything, but trust that what I'm doing has a reason."

With a heavy sigh, John shakes his head. "Y'all are going to have to do this without me. I have my own problem to fix, and I can't let this get in my way."

He leaves the house before we can say anything, and Joey smirks. “He never could stomach being on the bad end of a gun.”

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“Killing is a necessity sometimes, but he’s right. We shouldn’t enjoy the rush that comes when the trigger is pulled.” Too bad I love it. The fucking feeling I get when I’m the one holding someone’s life in the balance is addicting,

“Eh, whatever.” He winks at me and checks his gun. “I’m ready when you are.”

* * *

Two days. Two fucking days and not a goddamn thing to show that Crucinda is the villain in my family’s story. I sit here, rereading the letter as Joey drives us to the cabin.

“Do you think dad was wrong?” He looks pensive and uncertain, making me feel like a bastard. I finally gave in and let Joey read the letter. He has the same feelings as I do about the situation.

“Yeah. The only person that can clarify now is in my cabin, Joey.” Folding the paper back and placing it in my pocket, I let my mind wander off to Crucinda.

Her hair is white on one side and black as night on the other. It’s unique and interesting. What’s even more intriguing is that she didn’t beg me to let her go. Or plead for her life. She did demand that I release her, though. Hell, she acted as if she was perturbed by the whole thing.

My cock rages in my pants the closer we get. There’s no way she was able to get out of her bonds. In a way, I hope she has gotten free and I get to chase her. Then again, I’m damn sure if that was the case, I’d be in handcuffs by now.

“You should apologize and let her go, brother.”

Taking a moment to size up my brother, I laugh. “And you think she’ll not press charges?” Shaking my head, I unbuckle my seatbelt. “That’s some wishful thinking right there, little brother.”

The SUV comes to a complete stop, and I get out. “Besides, she’s guilty of something. I’ll just have to get it out of her.”

Joey shakes his head and shrugs. “Cool. I’m back on duty in a week. Let’s try to have it resolved before then.” He salutes me as I shut the door.

Walking back to the cabin doesn’t take too long. It gives me enough time to come up with an idea on how to coax the info I need out of Crucinda. Unfortunately, I can’t stop thinking about what happened to my family to believe she’s innocent. Before I get into the house, I read the letter one more time.

* * *

Dear Jason,

If you are reading this, it means I have passed. Just know that I love you and your brothers dearly. There are some things you need to know.

First, your mother was a Pongonado, but her stepfather adopted her. The Pongonado family line lives on through you, and you must celebrate your heritage as both a Pongonado and McKessonville.

Second, your step-aunt, Crucinda De Vil, is the reason the family influence and fashion empire has been dissolved to nothing. She hurt your mother in ways that are too horrid to speak of. This woman is a manipulative user and a traitor to her family.

I always told you your mother was ill with cancer. But the truth is, fifteen years ago, your mother took her life after a fashion show went wrong. I know it may seem extreme, but what happened afterward would easily destroy our family. After the show, your mother's contracts were canceled. This devastated her, and McKessonville Fashions took a major hit. If it had been up to me, I would have filed charges against CDV Fashions for tampering with our clothing, but we could never prove they were behind the vandalism.

Your mother couldn't handle the bad press or the downfall of our merger. What little she had was put into trust funds for you boys when you turn thirty.

I'm sorry, son. The fact I've lasted fifteen years against CDV Fashions is a miracle. But this year, I filed for bankruptcy. What's worse is the shareholders of the company sold every one of their shares out from under me. McKessonville Fashions will no longer be after the first of the year.

The one regret I have is that I couldn't love you boys better. I was so focused on taking down Crucinda and her fashion empire I forgot about you three. My health has been on the decline, and I can't keep going on without your mother any longer.

Forgive me. I love you and wish you happiness.

Dad

Six

Waves of consciousness hit me, but I'm too weak to move. My head slumped to the side hours ago, and even though pain radiates through me, I can't seem to lift it up to ease it. The gurgling of my stomach annoys me as I pee on myself once again.

Tears left me a long time ago as the hot liquid soiled my body. I can't stand the smell

but holding it in isn't an option any longer. Sighing, I let myself finish and think about a hot bath.

Getting the ropes loose has been a chore. My left ankle slipped loose first, then my right, but my hands are still firmly behind me. I've moved them so much; the skin has become raw. Since I don't know how long I have until the man comes back, my efforts have been aggressive.

Of course, the problem now is that I'm too tired. God, I'd give almost anything to have a hot shower and some fried chicken.

“Well, it looks like someone's gotten dirty.”

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Lethargic as I am, my head pops up at the sound of his voice. For a fleeting moment, I'm glad he's here. Maybe I can get out of this chair. Laughter bubbles inside of me, but my lips remain closed. That was a foolish thought. He's not going to let me go.

My head falls back down, and all I can see is his feet approaching me. He bends down and clutches his nose. "Goddamn, you stink."

Still, he touches my feet and looks up at me, letting his nose go. "I'm impressed, pebble." His hand runs along my calf, and if I'm being honest, his touch isn't horrible.

He's the enemy, dammit. I keep reminding myself this man isn't here to set me free. He's the reason I'm here in the first place.

"Let's get you a shower, shall we?" He moves his hand away from my body, only to force my head up, and I whimper. The longer he keeps my head in this position, with my neck bent and my back arched, the worse the foggy gets.

"Sleep," I mumble.

"Not a chance in hell you are getting in my bed while you stink this bad. You need to clean yourself, and then I'll even let you have a bit of food."

The ropes fall from me except the one around my neck. He grabs the end and tugs me from the chair. With no strength, I fall to the floor.

"Fuck." He mutters as I curl around myself. There's no point in trying to get away

right now. I need to regain my faculties about me first. The darkness calls my name even as my brain tells me I should fight.

As he grabs me, I cringe. There's no telling where I'm at right now in my brain. It's too cloudy, and in my diminished state, I'm not sure who has me. Even after all these years, I hear my father's cruel words and painful hits.

"You're absolutely pathetic, Crucinda." A swift kick to my stomach has me doubled over in pain.

"If it weren't for your inheritance keeping me in line, I'd end your miserable life." He grabs my hips and pins me down. "Well, that and your soft little cunt is too good to give up."

"Crucinda!" Someone's shaking me, and I blink. Reality comes back to me, and I look at my abductor.

"Kill me," I whisper.

He has the audacity to chuckle. "Not today. There's no easy way out for you." He's carrying me bridal style, and I want to believe for a moment he won't hurt me. Though, it's more likely that I'm being stupid again, and I should find it in me to free myself.

He'll chase you.

Don't do anything that could make this so much worse than it already is.

Be good, Crucinda.

My brain begs me to just let things go as they are. That right now, I'm not in pain.

“You’re going to get in the shower. There’s a bench for you to sit on. Clean yourself up,” he grumbles at me.

I don’t speak. There doesn’t seem to be a point in doing so. He has all the control right now. I’m too out of it to care. Everyone I love is gone. He took them from me. The urge to tell him off is strong, but my stomach speaks for me.

The man sets me down, and I shiver. “Take your clothes off.” He demands as he turns on the water.

“What’s your name?” My voice cracks as the cold spray hits me. I whimper and try to get away from the stinging of the water.

“You keep asking, and I keep refusing to tell you. It’s not important. If you need to call me something, you can call me Master.” He adjusts the water temperature and leaves.

Moving still hurts, but the warmth helps me to remove my clothes. Slowly, I wash my body with his soap. It smells like him, and while I should be repulsed, I’m not. It’s alluring me into a false sense of hope. Jasper used this exact soap and any time he hugged me, I felt safe. Before I can stop myself, tears run down my cheeks. My safe haven is gone. Shaking my head, I force myself to keep my eyes open and stand up.

My entire body shakes as I slump against the wall, but I need to wash my womanhood and hair. I can’t do that sitting down. Letting the stream soak me, I finish washing myself and fall back onto the seat.

Sitting here, I close my eyes and try to relax. For now, I’m alright. Or at least I think I am. He hasn’t killed me yet.

That’s a plus, right?

* * *

“Pebble, come on. Wake up.” The soft stroke against my cheek keeps me from opening my eyes. No one has ever touched me so softly. I want to retain the moment and keep the dream world going. No one here is out to kill or torture me.

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The rope around my neck loosens, and I smile. “Seriously, now, Pebble, help me out here.” The voice comes out a lot harsher, and I frown.

“Sleep.” I tremble as the water shuts off, and my eyes open momentarily to see the man, whose name I still don’t know, standing in front of me. If he thinks I’m going to call him Master, he’s sorely mistaken. Laying my head against his chest is the only thing I can do as he picks me up and carries me to the softest bed I’ve ever felt.

“Dammit, wake up.” He shakes me, but the blackness tries to take me again.

The smell of food has me opening my eyes. “There you are.”

I jerk away from him, scared and uncertain of what he wants from me.

“Easy. I’m not going to hurt you.” My eyes focus on him, and I try to discern if that’s true or not. Everything rushes back to me, and his words don’t match his actions.

“I don’t trust that.” He laughs and shows me the tray of food.

“Good. I would have been disappointed if you were that naive.” The aroma of food hits my nose, and I groan as he sits the tray beside me.

“I’ve let you have a bath, and now I’m going to feed you. Once you are full, then we will talk.”

“What’s there to talk about you? You kidnapped me, left me to die, and for some odd reason, you are nursing me back to health. It must be so you can feel good about

yourself.” Well, my filter sure has left the building.

Anger flashes through his eyes, reminding me of my stepsister Lucinda when I’d get in her way. He doesn’t strike me or argue, just smiles. That calm, collected grin makes me uneasy.

“Well, I guess that makes you the pundit of the situation.”

He’s intelligent. I’ll give him that. “Well, yeah, I’m the expert here. It’s not like you got kidnapped and tortured.” I reach for the French toast and chew without thinking. The buttery sweetness fills my mouth, and the moan that leaves my lips is obscene.

The man watches me eat and has a pleased look on his face. True to his word, as soon as I’m done with the food, he takes away the tray and comes back.

I’m grateful he left the coffee, but yuck, it’s pure black with no sweetener. When he sits down, he crosses his arms over his chest. “Where are you hiding all the animal bodies that you’ve killed for your designs?”

Coffee spews from my mouth at his question. “What?” I sit the mug down and blink at him. “I don’t use animals in my designs. Only wool, and that’s because my alpacas and sheep need shearing once a year.”

Putting my hands in my lap, I try to size him up. What exactly is he trying to do here? “Couldn’t you have made an appointment with my secretary, and we could’ve talked this through? I would have been happy to show you my farm, warehouse, the line, everything.”

“Bullshit. I saw the zebra-inspired line you did.” He clenches his fists. “And the same year, five zebras were killed.”

Is this an activist issue?

“I sent money to the organization to get the rest of the zebras to safety, and everything from that line except five percent went toward a wildlife charity.”

He stares at me for a long time. I’m almost worried he won’t believe me. My heart is racing, and I can barely stand the silence. “If you are with WWF or PETA, every one of my inspections has come back as animal-friendly. That’s why my label is allowed to boast cruelty-free.” I thought everyone knew this.

“Is...is this really why you...?” The words die in my throat as he reaches out and wraps his fingers around my neck.

Seven

Putrid hate runsthrough my chest at her lies. Clearly, she’s not ready to tell me the truth. It’s a shame because I want to hear it. Things aren’t adding up, but there’s no fucking way she’s telling me everything. Yet, when she speaks, it’s with such voracity I almost believe her.

We scrutinize each other as I squeeze her throat. “I’m truly trying to give you a chance here, but it seems like it’s going to have to be the hard way.”

Crucinda’s hands come up to my arm and try to get me to let go. I refuse to do so. A slight bit of pressure on her tender flesh, and she gags.

“Get up.”

The fire in her eyes excites me. Fuck, I hope she’s going to show me something other than her docile facade.

She slaps me. “No. I’m telling you...” I pounce on her. I didn’t expect her to hit me, and the way she looks at me, guilty and with shock, tells me she didn’t mean to. As I wrestle her to her back, her eyes get big with fear.

“Don’t,” she whispers, hardly able to breathe by the way she is gasping for air.

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“What? You don’t like being a cock tease and making me go crazy with need for you with your bipolar attitude?”

“No. I...” Her neck bobs as she works hard to swallow around my hold on her. “I didn’t mean to hit you.”

“Well, too late for that.” I yank the cover from her body, and she looks down. A blush creeps along her cheeks, and I realize she didn’t know she was naked. “Damn, for an older woman, you’ve got a sexy body.”

This seems to shut her down completely. “Get it over with then.” Her face turns away from me, and her jaw locks.

Every ounce of decency I have yells at me to not touch her. Too bad I’m not a decent guy. Her skin is baby-soft under my hand as I make my way down to her breasts. Fuck, they are perfect. Small, Damascus-colored nipples peek at me.

Her tits are barely contained by my hand. My cock throbs with the need to feel what it’s like to be in between them. Moving my hand back to her throat, I hold her down.

Unzipping my pants is hard one-handed, but I manage. My cock pulsates as I free it. “Crucinda, open your eyes.”

She shakes her head, and I squeeze her harder. “It’s not up for debate.” Dead eyes glare at me. What the hell? Doesn’t matter, I tell myself. This is about revenge. Not what Crucinda wants.

“Push your tits together.” A growl leaves my mouth. Goddamn, I’m so turned on; my thoughts are leaving me. Right now, it’s about getting my dick between those boobs of hers.

“I’m not going to do that.”

Her refusal only adds to the fire in my balls. I laugh, and confusion crosses her face. “Oh, pebble. It’s adorable you think you have a choice here.” Stroking my cock causes pre-cum to lead down onto her stomach. Moving up toward her chest, I let the tip glide along her body.

“I...” Crucinda clamps her lips together.

“You, what?” I goad her, yearning to hear her tell me off.

“Just get off me so I can be alone.” Her eyes dilate, and she wiggles, trying to dislodge me. But I see her breathing hitch and the way her nostrils flare out. She acts like she isn’t affected, but her body gives her away.

“Put your hands on your tits and make a hole for me.” Running my tip along her left breast, I push on her nipple. Crucinda bites her lip, and I hear the little whimper.

Oh yeah, she will give in soon enough.

“And if I don’t?” Her eyes meet mine, and I see the lust, but there’s also a darkness deep within them. If I were a better man, I’d stop and ask her what’s going on in her mind.

“Fair enough.” I quickly take my belt from my pants and take her hands in mine. She struggles hard and bucks against me. My cock bumps against her stomach. “Stop. You’re going to wear yourself out again.”

“Like you care.” She spits at me, and I can’t help but chuckle. Taking her wrists, I move them above her head and tie them to the headboard.

“Since you don’t want to cooperate, I’ll just have to take it.” I watch as she yanks on the ties I made. She’s not going anywhere.

Bending down, I take one nipple then the next into my mouth. They’re perfect for sucking, and that’s exactly what I do. Crucinda squirms under me as I push her breasts together.

“Wow, they are real after all.” I wink at her, loving the way her breasts envelop my dick. “Such perky tits for an old lady. I would have thought they were silicone.”

My pebble rolls her eyes and turns her head away from me. Fuck, when did she become my pebble? And why the hell do I enjoy the sound of it? Pulling back from her breasts, I can’t seem to stop. It’s like a spell has come over me, and the need to know what every hole she has feels like runs through my entire body.

Rubbing my dick along her wet slit makes me moan. A hiccup of a sob comes from Crucinda, but I don’t see any tears.

“For someone so wet, you sure are acting like you don’t want me, yet your hot little cunt says otherwise.”

She yanks so hard on her binds that the headboard slams into the wall, making me smirk.

“Just like a man to take what is not freely offered.” She practically snarls at me with venom in her tone.

“Don’t act like you aren’t turned on, pebble.” I push the head of my cock into her,

and she freezes.

As she moves her arms, trying her damndest to remove the belt from around her wrists, she glares at me. “You killed my only family. And you think I want you? I’m not the murderer; you’re the murderer.”

I move my cock into her a smidgen more, and her bottom lip wobbles. “My body is being teased, so of course, I’m going to have a reaction. It’s a normal reaction to stimuli. Not you.”

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Her thrashing moves my dick deeper into her, and her hair covers a portion of her face. I see the lone tear moving down her cheek, and my mind keeps going back to wondering if something happened to her.

Ignoring the feeling, I move her hair out of her face. “Oh, but pebble, you will.” Sliding another inch into her causes her body to tense. Running my free hand up her shaking body, I watch her. She seems truly afraid. Something in me shifts, and my feelings twist and turn. Closing my eyes for a moment, I shut that emotion down. I will not feel sorry for her.

Try as I might to be a bastard, questions bombard me. Has she been abused in the past? I have no idea where that thought comes from, but it’s enough to make me stop.

Holding her face, I watch as she cries. She isn’t begging me to stop; she’s suffering in silence, but that doesn’t matter. It’s too late for me to fully stop. Pushing back into her, she gasps.

The only thought that makes me not feel like utter shit is that she deserves this. It’s not my fault she’s a devil and I need my revenge. Crucinda’s the evil one, and I’m righting a wrong, dammit. Taking my cock by the base, I shove deep into her, watching her body arch. She’s tight as hell, and her pussy tries to latch onto me as I pull out. Fuck, she has the perfect pussy, but I don’t drive back into her.

I will have her in every hole before I kill her, but for now, getting off on the thought will have to do.

Eight

He stopped. Yes. He entered my body, but he pulled out and didn't continue to take me. I wish he would have left me alone, and now he isn't touching me anymore. I realize that's enough for now. His hot semen hits my chest, and he rubs it into my body.

"Soon, I'll be coating that wet cunt of yours with this." He laughs and gets off the bed, leaving me here, petrified of him going through with his threats. Something tells me they are more like promises.

Calm down, Crucinda. I have to repeat this ten more times before I can genuinely get myself to relax. It's been hard to keep my mind from going back in time. I'm not safe, but this man isn't my father or anyone from my past.

Right?

With a plan to tell him whatever he wants the next time he comes into the room, a resolve settles over me. Whatever it takes to get away from this maniac. Even if I must lie.

The sun is set by the time the man comes back. He doesn't have food this time, and my stomach rumbles with hunger.

"My father said you were a manipulating bitch, but your employees adore you."

When did he talk to them?

Who is his father?

Why won't he answer any of my questions?

I watch him pace back and forth in front of the bed. It's dizzying to watch him, so I

turn my face away and close my eyes. There are too many thoughts and unanswered questions to focus on.

He hits my foot, and I look at him. We stare at each other, trying to size one another up. I'm tied up and unable to move. What could he possibly fear from me?

"Who's your father?" Damn, my curiosity. I wasn't going to ask, but if I can't have his name, at least maybe he'll tell me who the hell caused him to hate me so much.

"You really don't know?" He comes closer to me, and my breath hitches.

"No."

"Ricardo McKessonville." He sits down on the bed as my world does somersaults.

No. No fucking way.

No, I refuse to believe him.

It's clear I'm in denial. He's my step-nephew, then.

No. He can't be.

"You don't seem shocked. In fact, you look downright horrified." He stares at me with amusement in his eyes.

"Is..." Fuck, I can't even say it. Closing my eyes, I try very hard to control my breathing. "Is your father coming?" Yeah, I'm beyond horrified. I'm frantic. There are two people from my past I'm terrified of. One is dead, and the other's name was just uttered.

He flicks my nipple, and I jump. “You don’t know?” He chuckles; crazy and uncontrolled fury comes from him. “He’s dead.”

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Alright, I'm a horrible person. The glee I feel over knowing he's gone is insane. So damn glad he's gone. The horror he put my stepsister through was enough for me to be happy that the bastard didn't keep the internship with me. Once I found out my sister supposedly killed herself, I took it upon myself to destroy everything Ricardo had his hand in.

"I can't say I'm sorry to hear that." I should have kept my mouth shut. The man, no, my step-nephew, slaps me and holds my face in his cruel grip.

"Did you kill him?"

Taking a moment, I look at him. He's asking all the wrong questions. "No." I spit back at him. "I would never use violence like him." God, why doesn't he understand I'd never be the bad guy? Or at least not intentionally.

Acting like all of this he's laying on me is no big deal is harder than I'm letting on. It's huge. This means everything Lucinda had under her name can go to her sons, and Ricardo can't touch it.

"You destroyed my family." He's shaking as he growls at me.

Looking at him, a deep sorrow fills me, wondering what lies this young man has been told. "I'm not the bad guy in your equation." God, I wish I had been closer to Lucinda. Then I'd know which of her sons I was talking to.

His hand on me gets tighter. It hurts, but I keep my mouth shut as he stares at me. I understand now why I thought he looked familiar.

My gut sinks at the thought that he's like his father and mine. Although, I could say he's worse because he's killed my friends. No, my family. Emotions run high. Hate seems to have morphed into understanding. I should have reached out to the boys after Lucinda's death, but the idea of seeing Ricardo kept me away. His snarl takes me out of my thoughts.

"The fuck you aren't."

Peeking at him, trying to gauge his thoughts, my own go haywire. Nervously, I lick my lips as he moves closer. Our lips are a hair breath apart as he whispers. "Lick your lips again, pebble."

Why do those whispered words excite me?

He sounds almost entranced, and for some reason, my guard slips down. I want to know this man on better terms.

Is it because he's family?

Fuck, everything is turning hazy, and this cannot happen. I have to resolve to not fall for the sense he's going to be nicer to me. His breath tickles my lips, and he groans as I do as he asked.

Flickering my tongue across my lips, I smile at him. "What's your name?" I need to know his name. When he doesn't answer me, I resort to be a smart ass. "Cat got your tongue, nephew?"

Real smart, Crucinda. I admonish myself as my brain panics. Why do I have to goad him? Why can't I accept that he's in charge? Hell, maybe if I play along, he'll let me go.

The way he looks at me, it's the wrong thing to have asked him. I'm not sure which one of us moves and if I'm trying to get away from him or get closer. Things are becoming unclear as he slams his lips against mine. Hate explodes into a million pieces as we move our lips together. It's the furthest thing I feel when he runs his hands through my hair and angles my face the way he wants it.

"Jason, and I'm your step-nephew." For a moment, I let myself enjoy his touch.

"We need to stop, and you need to let me go." Anguish flows through me as my emotions war against themselves. There's no denying my feeling of want or my fear. How can I possibly forget he kidnapped me? I need to remember I'm not here on good terms and that he's a murderer.

"I see you've forgotten your place. It's going to get worse before it gets better." He mumbles as he runs his thumb along my bottom lip.

"Please stop." The words come out pleadingly. I've never begged for anything in my life, but I am right now. The lines can't blur here. We are family, and we most certainly shouldn't be kissing. It doesn't matter how good it feels.

We have to stop.

"I tell you what, pebble. If you tell me why the idea that my father might have been coming scares you, I'll untie you."

Remembering the promise I made to myself to tell him what he wanted to know, I take a deep breath and shrug.

"Speaking ill of the dead is never wise, Jason. But he wasn't a good man."

A switch inside of him happens, and the angry version is back. He moves his hand

down to my throat and growls at me. “How would you fucking know that?”

“Because we have a history, and it isn’t pretty.”

Jason shakes his head, and I feel the shakiness in his hand. He leans down and kisses me, forcing my lips apart. “The only thing I know is that when I touch you, everything goes quiet.” He presses those lips of his against my neck, and my eyes roll into the back of my head. “So, I’m going to kiss you. That way, I don’t have to hear your lies or my father’s voice in my head.”

He looks up at me, and for one fleeting moment, we are suspended in a truce, and I see his vulnerability. Licks and kisses leave a wet trail from my collarbone to my lips. The claim is clear, and I should fight. But my arms are tied down, and my skin is too raw to even attempt loosening the knots. Trickle of blood have already dried on my forearms from my previous attempts to get out of my bonds.

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The stroke of his tongue against mine coaxes me to react. Uncertain but wanton, I let my need flow through my kiss. Maybe he's right. The quietness is nice. Damn nice to have. There aren't any voices or fears. It's just us two, and we can enjoy the feeling between us.

Jason sucks my tongue into his mouth, and I moan. It's something I've never experienced. Shit, I've never made out before. What's weird is I've never wanted to before this. Yet, right now, it seems it's the only thing holding this peace between us together.

Nine

Crucinda is exactly where I want her—believing I've forgotten why we are here. Fuck, she can kiss, and I could get lost kissing her, but I stop. Pulling away from her, I resort to cruelty.

“Look at you. Disgusting how you're trying to seduce your family.” That's not true at all. I'm the one coming onto her, but I like the way she curls into herself, and that damn blush graces her cheeks. “You can't manipulate me or distract me from why we are here.”

Moving my hand from her face, I take the belt off her wrists. I notice that her skin is raw, and it needs to be looked at. It's hard wanting to kill her but feeling the need to take care of her at the same time. Silliest combination of feelings I've ever felt.

“We aren't through talking, but you did tell me an answer. Although it's not enough of an answer, I'm going to let you eat food at the kitchen table.”

She looks at me, and I feel like an ass. Dammit, I should have kept my name and the fact that I'm kin to her out of the equation. But the look of unadulterated fear on her face when she heard my father's name was worth it. Goddamn, I think keeping her in a constant state of fear is going to get me off.

"Come on, pebble, let's get you some food." I help her get up and stand on her still-swollen ankle. Fuck, add that to the list of things I need to take a look at.

Crucinda takes the sheet off the bed and makes some sort of wrap for her body. The way she twists the fabric around her is magic. I'm amazed how a sheet can look so damn beautiful around someone. I'll concede this time because she's not trying to run away or defy me.

"Why do you call me pebble?" Her sultry voice does things to me that I should tamper down. Instead, I stop walking and crowd her into the wall.

"Because you're nothing more than a pebble in my shoe."

Crucinda laughs. It's unexpected, and to be honest, I don't have the heart to stop her laughter. Placing a hand on her face, I realize I can use her height to my advantage. It makes it easy to kiss her by surprise. She doesn't have time to duck away from me.

Swallowing her giggle, I plunder her mouth with my tongue. I get lost in how it feels to have her in my arms.

Fuck, I'm not here to get attached.

Tugging on her hair, I make sure she cries out in pain as I bite her tongue and hold on. She opens her eyes, and the war that's going on in her mind must match my own.

"No more questions for now."

Crucinda nods, and we slowly make our way into the kitchen. This isn't the first time within a few hours I've felt like a complete bastard. Still, she needs to understand she's under my control.

Without saying a word, I sit down a plate full of mushrooms John found out while we were doing recon. This is the only food she won't eat. However, if she's hungry enough, she'll eat it. Or I'll stuff this shit down her throat.

When I come back with my steak, I notice she hasn't touched her food. "That's all you're getting." I cut a piece of my steak, and I moan with delight. "Well?" My left eyebrow raises, and Crucinda sighs.

"I don't eat mushrooms." She doesn't act haughty about it. No, she keeps her hands in her lap, looking at me as sweat beads on her forehead.

"Oh, you think you have a choice?" A chilling calmness comes over me as I take a mushroom and offer it to her.

"No, thank you." She puts her head down and turns away from the food I'm offering. My blood pressure rises as anger wells in my stomach. One of my pet peeves is for someone to be rude. It pisses me off and makes me irrational when things should be simple. It's a fucking mushroom, for God's sake.

"You." I stand up, yanking her head back. "Will eat every single one."

Without waiting for her to agree, I shove the fungi past her clamped lips and down into her mouth and slap a hand over her mouth. Crucinda gasps, and tears pool in her eyes.

"Swallow it." I pinch her nose. "You'll either eat it or lose consciousness."

I watch as her eyes change into slits, glaring at me. If she knew how that turned me on, she would probably cut her eyes out so she wouldn't be able to tempt me.

Feeling her mouth move under my hand, I grab another 'shroom. Crucinda shakes her head no, but she doesn't get a say in when she stops eating. Removing my hand from her mouth, she spits the chewed-up food at me and pushes against me with all her might.

Once again, she's taken me by surprise and manages to get up from the chair. "You can't make me eat it." She screams at me as she hobbles away. Goddamn, she thinks she's going to get away? This indiscretion will not go unpunished.

Walking over to her, I pull her against my body. "Let me go." Her struggle moves her ass against my cock, and I groan. That little huff she gives me makes me smile.

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“Pipe down, pebble.” Having to deal with this defiance is going to have to be a priority. Right after making her eat. “You couldn’t be a good girl, could you?”

“I detest mushrooms. I’ll eat anything else.” A shiver runs through her, and I wonder why.

“Sit down, Crucinda.” I guide her back to the chair, and with a push on her shoulders, she sits down. Standing behind her, I keep my hands on her shaking shoulders. “Take a piece for me, pebble. The reward will be better than the punishment. I promise.”

“What’s the punishment?”

Chuckling, I move my hands along her neck and make a circle around the tender flesh. Bending down so I’m near her ear, I kiss the flesh behind it.

“If I have to punish you, I’m going to make your body black and blue.” Licking her earlobe, I move one hand down her front, being sure to touch both nipples before I move downward.

Her breath hitches as I suck on her neck, and although I can’t touch her pussy because of the sheet, the heat coming off her is exhilarating. “If you’re my good pebble, I will take this sheet off and ravage you. I’ll show you how being good gets you orgasms.”

“They...” She whimpers as the pressure of my mouth gets hard. “They both sound like torture.”

Of course, she'd say that. "Eat the fucking mushroom, Crucinda. Make things easy for yourself."

"There's a reason I hate them." Her moan is a salve to my rage. Fuck, I want back in her tight slit.

"Alright, if your reason is good enough, I may let you eat some steak. But don't lie to me, pebble."

Removing my hands from her body is hard as fuck. I want to keep touching her, but I find myself wanting to know more about her, so I sit down. Looking at her, waiting to hear what's causing her to be up in arms about something as fucking trivial as a 'shroom, my mind hopes she lies.

Ten

Emotions. They are the worst. Mine are harassing me.

Panic.

Fear.

Exhaustion.

They are all hitting me at once. I'm not ready to share the truth. Fuck, I'm barely able to deal with the fact there are mushrooms here.

"I'm waiting, pebble." Jason is impatient, and I get it. I've been rude in refusing food, and that's not proper. But what is proper in this situation? Reminding myself that he kidnapped me seems to be the only way for me to forget my manners.

Besides, am I really supposed to be the bigger person and act as if he hasn't harmed me?

Taking a deep breath, I push everything back and look at him, wishing he was truly wanting to know because he cares. Or at least he didn't despise me.

"Alright." My voice is wobbly at best. Sighing, I continue. "Your mother and I met two weeks before her supposed suicide."

This gets his attention, and I see him trying to figure out if I'm telling him a lie. Gulping, I sniffle. "Lucinda was absolutely terrified when she showed up at my house, begging me to hear her out."

The smell of the mushrooms hits me, and I close my eyes. The memory assaults me like it was yesterday. God, the things I've buried deep within. Trying to stay in the present and tell the truth about what happened is overwhelming, and I gasp.

"She swore to me she had changed and that she was here to make amends."

Jason doesn't say anything; he just sits there, silent and brooding. "Anyway, she wanted to escape her marriage with Ricardo."

"You're lying." He stands up, and I shrink back from him. I expected him to react to this knowledge exactly like this, and I'm not sure I'm in the right headspace to deal with how it makes me feel small and in danger.

"I'm not." The force behind my words shocks me. Anxiety of him shunning my truth urges me to tell him everything. "Lucinda changed her will to include you boys and to take Ricardo out. She used my lawyer."

He still hasn't moved to sit back down. My hands shake as I stand up. Finding my

bravery, I move until I'm directly in front of him. "My lawyer's name is Perita Patton. I'll give you her phone number, and you can call her to confirm. She even had the legal documents for the divorce drawn up. When your mother died, I kept them."

"Sit down. You shouldn't put too much weight on your ankle."

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His thoughtfulness is touching, but I know better than to let that fool me. “I’ll sit down when you do. You make me nervous.”

Jason laughs and nods. “Fair enough, pebble. I’ll tell you what. You tell me the rest of the story and let me decide on whether you’re going to get a punishment. Or if I truly believe you.”

We both sit back down, and I think that he’s being fair. For fuck’s sake, I’m acting like this is a fair deal. If he doesn’t believe me, there’s no telling what he’s going to do to me. Yet, he’s sitting here, his hand on my knee.

At first, I thought he was going to squeeze it, forcing my legs wide apart.

He doesn’t.

It’s become soothing to have him touch me in a non-threatening way. I expected him to stand tall above me. Maybe even intimidate me for answers.

As his hand runs up and down my thigh, an odd feeling comes over me. Am I truly incapable of believing people can be nice to me?

“Tell me the rest of your story.” His thumb sweeps along the inside of my thigh, and I close my eyes as tingling sensations run through me.

“Your mother and I had a turbulent relationship. We both did things we weren’t proud of. Things no one should have done. But we were making amends. Your father hated that.”

The memory assaults me. Heaviness in my chest makes it unbearable to breathe. “Lucinda asked me to help her get back to her home in Spain. Back to her father’s side, the Pongonado’s. I told her I would help in any way I could.”

Jason moves his other arm, and I flinch, thinking he’s going to hit me. “Go on, pebble.” His hand pushes a piece of hair out of my face, and I relax a little.

“Your father caught us at my lawyer’s. His guards brought us to his house. You boys were away at school. I’m grateful you weren’t there to witness what happened next.”

His hand on my thigh tightens, and I close my eyes for a moment. It takes a moment to gather the courage needed to divulge what went down.

“Ricardo tied your mother up and had his guards hold me down as he forced a mushroom and drug-induced tea down my throat.”

Gulping, I look at him. My lower lip trembles as I recount that horrible day. “He forced himself on me in front of her and made me...”

Dammit. I’m stronger than this. Telling myself to pull it together, I hold my head up high and sigh. “He made his men take turns with me.”

“Did you enjoy it?”

My mouth pops open. “I was high out of my mind.” Anger runs through me. “How could you ask me that?”

His lips meet mine, and his hands run through my hair. As his tongue sweeps along the top of my mouth, I forget to be mad. At least for the moment. Jason pulls back and he smiles at me.

“There now. No need to get upset, pebble. I needed to see your reaction.”

“Oh. Still, it’s unfortunate that you can’t trust me.”

Why do I even care if he does?

Right, because if he doesn’t, he’s going to punish me, and I don’t want that. Maybe we are going in the right direction now.

“No, I didn’t like it. But, then again, I barely remember most of the night. Except...”
I stop talking and look at him. “Your mother. I remember her screams like it was yesterday.”

His hands are still holding me, making me keep eye contact with him. Any time I think of the past, I pace. The urge to get up is strong, but he’s not letting me.

“Crucinda, are you saying my father killed my mother?”

“It crossed my mind, but I don’t know if he did. When I was dumped out at my house, the police were called, and a full investigation was carried out. Your father never saw any charges because your mother supposedly committed suicide. I do know your father beat her, but I truly don’t know about her death.”

Jason nods and looks relieved. Silence surrounds us for the longest time, and when Jason doesn’t say anything, I peek at him.

“You aren’t done,” he says and runs a hand roughly through my hair. “What aren’t you telling me?”

How does he know?

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Moving my head into his hand, I think feeling him touch me gives me a moment of peace.

“Every year for fifteen years, Ricardo has sent me the tape of what he and his men did as well as a small vial with a mushroom in it.”

“Fuck.” He shakes his head, and for the first time, I see remorse in his gaze.

The decision to tell him everything keeps me talking. “Your mother sent me a letter apologizing the day before she died. I know you don’t want to believe this, but I’m the villain by your father’s design. To be honest, I think that was his way of putting his cruelty on someone and for giving you a reason to hate me.”

“Yeah, I’m starting to realize that pebble.” Those fingers of his are magic in my hair. I’m relaxed and don’t feel so stressed. “Give me your lawyer’s number. One of my brothers will call her and confirm your story.”

Rattling off her number, I turn to him fully. “Are you going to give me a punishment or pleasure?” Holy hell, I shouldn’t have asked that. Besides, I should be trying to get away. Jason pulls me closer to him, and I tense.

“How about I get you some real food, and you eat while I confirm what you’ve told me?”

“That sounds reasonable.” I’m not going to give him a reason to be cruel to me again. At least he’s willing to listen to me.

“You stay put. I’ll bring you some steak.”

Smiling, I nod. “Thank you very much.” I don’t think my stomach can tolerate something so heavy, but I’m not going to look a gift horse in the mouth.

He comes back, and I notice he’s cut the steak up for me into tiny pieces and even brought me strawberries. My lower lip trembles as he places a finger on my lips. “Eat.”

With that, Jason leaves, and I feel like we are finally moving in the right direction.

Eleven

Stepping outside, I can’t believe what I’ve been told. This means I’m no better than my father. “Fuck!” I hold my phone in my hand so tight I hear it groan. Taking a deep breath, I release my hold on it so my knuckles aren’t so white.

Punching out a text, I pace back and forth outside. My mind is going ninety to nothing. How can this be the truth? It just can’t.

Joey

What’s up?

Me

Check this number and let me know if it comes back to a Perita Patton.

Joey

Why didn’t you send this to John?

Me

Because you'll get back to me within minutes. John will take days if he's busy.

Joey

Fine, but you owe me.

Me

I'll pretend you did nothing for me.

He sends me a middle finger emoji. This gets a small chuckle out of me, but I'm too damn caught up in everything I've just learned. If it's the truth, it means I've done something unimaginable. And to apologize isn't in my nature.

Waiting for Joey to get back to me, I think about how Crucinda didn't seem fidgety or disingenuous during her story. Then again, Father told me she was a master of manipulation.

Is this what this is?

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As I'm about to call Joey, he messages me back.

Joey

Family lawyer. Why do you have her number?

Me

Crucinda gave it to me to confirm her story.

My phone rings, and I answer. Joey's voice is so loud I have to pull the damn thing away from my ear.

"What the fuck is going on, brother?"

Patience, I tell myself. Have patience. Unfortunately, I'm running short of it. "You know, I have a unique approach to getting information. Well, I broke her. And what she told me sheds new light on things."

"For fuck's sake. I told you this was not what we should be doing." He's angry, and I don't blame him. Hell, I'm edging my way to feeling confused and hurt about my father possibly lying to me.

Joey cuts into my spiraling thoughts. "So, what do you want to do, then?" He's always been a loud and cocky bastard, but he's always there for me.

"Let's not go guns blazing this time. I'm going to bring Crucinda back to civilization.

We'll put her in the barn with the animals while we confirm the rest of her story. Don't bother John with this yet."

"Goddamn it. Fine, but this better pan out, Jase, or we all could fucking go to jail."

He's not wrong, but I will not admit that to him. Laughing, I hang up and walk back to the cabin.

If what she says is true, that means I'm the monster, just like my father.

Crucinda is exactly where I left her. Well, that's a start. Maybe I can trust her for the moment. Now, for the test. I lock the door and stand there, looking at her as she finishes her last strawberry. This could go one of two ways. I'm hoping it goes the way I want it to go.

"Come here, pebble." There's no mistaking the demand in my voice.

Will she be good and follow my lead?

Or is she going to be a brat?

She doesn't keep me waiting. I watch her sit the plate down on the coffee table, stand up, and she limps toward me. If I were a better man, I would meet her halfway.

But I'm not.

"Do you remember what I told you to call me earlier?" I don't touch her. Nope. I want her to earn it first. Fuck, I'm a depraved man, getting hard over the fact I want to watch her obey me so I can sink my dick into her.

A soft, glowing blush pops on her cheeks, and I smile. "Yes." She's directly in front

of me now.

“And what was it?”

“Master.” She looks at me, perplexed.

“Good, pebble. You’re going to do everything I demand.” She doesn’t move or balk at the idea.

“Does that mean you trust me?” The hope in her eyes kills me because, if I’m being honest, I enjoy being the bad guy and crushing her.

“Not even a little, but for now, because the number came back as the person you said it would, you get a reward.”

Crucinda’s smile before this was almost blinding. “Okay.” She mutters with disappointment. I get this gut feeling that only a few people have ever trusted her before she became a fashion mogul.

“Go to the bedroom. Take off the sheet and get on the bed with your face down on a pillow.”

Apprehension contorts her features, but she nods. Turning around, she makes her way to the bedroom with no argument. Following her, I stay by the door, letting her decide to do as she’s told. I’m not into being a Master in the BDSM sense, but goddamn, I’m excited to see her obey me.

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Her hands shake as she takes the sheet off her. This isn't the first time I've seen her scars, but it's the first time I'm objectively looking at her. Her back talks louder than any words ever could. This woman has been through hell, and it makes me realize that I'm lucky she's not trying to fight back.

"Get on the bed." My voice comes out gruff. She tenses. "I'm not mad, pebble." This seems to calm her enough to drop the sheet and get into the bed.

"Good girl." I would have said that mockingly a day ago. Today, I mean it.

Crucinda lays there, head on the pillow, hands fisted, and her legs slightly apart. Her ass uncovered and taunting me. As I get closer, I see the trembling. She's scared. "Has anyone..." I stop. The answer is in the way she's trying to remain still and not cower from me. No one's been nice to her during sex.

"Never mind, pebble. Spread your legs wide for me."

She moves her legs, but not as wide as I would like. Doesn't matter, though; I'll move them for her. Getting on the bed, in between those thighs of hers, I lie down and look at her body.

Her puckered asshole winks at me as she takes labored breaths. "This is a reward. You'll feel no pain," I remind her. The need for her to relax eats at me.

Crucinda's pussy lips aren't wet, but they are pink and full. Moving my head closer, I run my tongue along her folds.

“Oh!” I smirk at her adorable squeal.

She wasn’t expecting this.

Good.

Touching her clit with my thumb, I push my tongue into her slit. Sweet nectar meets my tastebuds, and I moan into her.

Fuck me.

I’m hungry for her to obey, but it’s nothing compared to her taste and how I am going to lose myself in her. I’ll think about that later. Right now, my one thought is to give her the most pleasure she’s ever felt. My sweet pebble’s hips buck back against me. I smile into her pussy, and she whimpers for me.

Pulling back, I press a finger against her slit, and she doesn’t tense. No, she’s wet, gushing for me and panting.

“You like that, pebble?”

“I…” Another finger goes in, and my thumb furiously strums her clit. This keeps her from speaking, and I chuckle.

Slowly, I move my fingers in and out of her. Damn, she’s enjoying it, and I’m finding I want to give her more. The need to see her pleasure and not fear urges me to keep going.

“Jason!” She moans my name and meets my fingers, thrust for thrust.

“That’s it, pebble. Let go.” Bending my head back down, I lick her asshole, and she

wiggles against my tongue.

“Wh...” Her pussy tightens on my fingers, and I push my tongue harder against her tight little hole.

The scream of ecstasy that comes from Crucinda is beautiful. Yeah, I definitely want to hear more of that. Her walls are gripping me so tightly I can barely move my fingers. That wet pussy is quivering as she lets out a little mewl for me.

As her body relaxes and I pull my fingers gently from her, I move out from between her legs. I turn her over, and tears stream down her face, but there's a smile on her lips.

“Suck my fingers clean.”

Her lips open, and she greedily sucks on them. Not a word of complaint or an ounce of hesitancy comes from her as she lies here, legs still spread open. Pussy juice runs out onto the sheets, and she stares at me as her tongue curls around my fingers.

Taking my fingers from her lips is hard, but my cock needs attention. “Unzip my pants, pebble.”

I watch for any sign she's going to be difficult, but she takes a deep breath in, then releases it. Her hands are unsteady, but she opens the button on my pants and unzips the zipper.

“You know what I want.” I touch her face, and she nods at me.

Yeah, she knows.

Her soft touch against my cock makes it jump and causes me to groan. She pulls it

out and strokes me too gently.

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“Harder. It’s alright to squeeze it.” My words are a whisper as she grips me tighter and makes a full-length stroke.

Shit, it feels amazing.

I’m wondering why her doing things willingly turns me on more than me taking it. My cock pulses with the thought of her agreeing to ride me until we both find our orgasm together.

Crucinda gets on her knees and crawls in between my knees.

Holy fuck.

I wouldn’t in a million years believe she would do this. Although she is shaking like a leaf, my pebble moves her head down to my tip and sticks her tongue against the oozing pre-cum flowing down my shaft.

“Fuck, that’s my good girl. Don’t stop.” My words encourage her to keep going. It’s a special moment seeing her lost in the pleasure.

Twelve

What am I doing? This isn’t like me. The need to please him drives me to be good, and if I’m really honest with myself, I want him.

I’ve masturbated before. Orgasms aren’t foreign to me. Yes, it’s taken many years for me to be comfortable with needing to touch myself. But what Jason did was mind-

blowing. Nothing has ever felt like this.

Sucking his cock into my mouth makes me feel powerful. It's my choice to give him pleasure. Or at least that's how it feels. No one is taking it from me, and that's an exhilarating feeling.

His hand combs through my hair, and I stiffen. "Don't stop Crucinda. I need to touch you."

Oh, well, I can handle that. The thought of him becoming harsh again eggs me on, and I lower my mouth further along his dick. His moans are fuel for me to keep going.

My hand strokes him in a hard grip as I move my mouth up and down his length. His legs shake, and the grip on my hair tightens as I remove my hand and swallow his cock down my throat.

"Goddamn. Do that again, sweet pebble."

I don't think he meant to call me sweet or to use pebble in a tone that was so endearing. But I'll take it.

"Crucinda, come sit on my cock."

My mouth freezes on him, and my eyes pop open to look up at him, startled.

Dick inside of me has always equated to pain. It never fails. I can't see this being any different, and I clam up. My brain wants to act like he didn't just give me the most earth-shattering orgasm, and my body pulsates down there, wanting to feel him. I'm conflicted, and Jason seems to understand.

He runs his hand through my hair. “You’ll be on top and have full control over how fast we go. Unless you want me to take over.”

Releasing his dick from my mouth, I bite my lower lip. “Was I doing it wrong?” That’s the only explanation. He wants inside of me because I must be horrible at giving him a blow job.

Apprehension has me shrinking back into myself.

“No. Your mouth is great, but I want your pussy. I refuse to waste a perfectly good load of cum down your throat.”

He strokes my face and looks at me like he truly wants me. Those eyes of his don’t hold the glint of cruelty they normally do in them. Nodding, I straddle his hips and take his cock into my hand. My heartbeat quickens, and I feel like I’m a second away from a panic attack. Keeping my face down, I try not to think about how this could go. Or that he really does mean he wants to be in my pussy.

“Crucinda, look at me.”

His command has me turning my face to him. “There’s nothing to fear. Remember, this is a reward, and no pain can happen.”

His words reassure me, but I’ve never been on top.

How could I when everyone has always taken it?

Taking a deep breath, I guide his cock to my opening and move my hips downward.

“That’s my good pebble. All the way down, now.” As his words move along with me, my pussy clenches around his head.

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I think him praising me helps soothe me into lowering my body down his length. Once I feel his balls touching my ass, I blink and smile at him.

Jason moans as he places his hands on my hips. “You fit like a fucking glove, pebble.” He utters, and I feel him pulsing inside of me.

Can it be pleasurable? It doesn’t hurt right now. Moving up a little and then back down, I don’t feel the typical pain I’ve experienced.

In fact, the way he fills me is intoxicating.

Picking up speed, my pussy tightens around his cock. “Oh, God.” I whimper as he helps move my hips a little faster.

I’ve dreamt of good sex before and have come to the thought. But I’ve never experienced it before now. I want more.

Moving faster, our bodies slap together, and I cry out. My orgasm takes me by surprise, and the cusp of pleasure overflows. He flips us, and I wrap my legs around him.

“Goddamn, I knew you’d be wild.” He kisses me, making me lose my train of thought. His hips piston into mine non-stop.

“Yes. Oh. Yes.” That’s all I can say as he pounds into my body.

“Fuck, pebble.” He sucks on my neck and rubs my clit with his thumb, making the

orgasm continue to send waves of bliss through me.

“Jason!” I tremble as another big burst of pleasure hits me, and he chuckles. This orgasm hits differently.

Deeper.

Stronger.

It assaults me with so much emotion I’m not sure which way is up at the moment.

He pulls out only to slam deep into me and not move. I feel his seed spurting into me, and it causes another little shock to my system. My first real sex experience, where I chose to have it, was amazing.

I pull his head down and kiss him. How I find the strength to do so, I’ll never know. His tongue dances with mine as he moves his hips slowly into mine, riding out our orgasms.

When we pull apart, Jason is staring at me, and I thought I’d see a smile. Instead, he’s glaring at me, causing me to blush.

“Is...is everything okay?”

Without a word, he pulls out of me, and I miss his heat instantly. He moves my legs from his hips and gets off the bed. As he goes into the bathroom, I’m left here, uncertain what’s going on.

My mind races with what might have gone wrong. Or if I did something bad. As I’m moving to get up, he comes back and throws a washcloth at me.

“Get cleaned up. There’s some clothing in the closet. We leave in ten minutes.” Jason slams the door behind him, and I stare into space. My bubble crumbles and a coldness fills me.

Using the washcloth, I clean my sensitive body. Hot tears of embarrassment run freely as I walk over to the closet.

Taking a shirt down from a hanger and a pair of sweatpants, I go into the bathroom to better clean up. As I walk in and see myself in the mirror, I wonder how I could be so stupid. My hair is a mess, there are hickeys on my neck, and even though I look well fucked, my eyes look haunted.

Of course, they are. The way Jason is acting has ruined my moment of utter happiness with doubt. Taking a moment to pee, wash my hands, tame my hair, and put the clothes on, I ready myself to deal with whatever may happen with Jason.

Coming out of the bathroom, I run into Jason and scream. He’s standing there, shaking his head.

“Here, I want you to eat this to keep your strength up.” I take the banana he hands me.

With a soft smile, I let him know I’m grateful. “Thank you.” Opening it up, I take a bite, and the taste is wonderful.

“Let’s go.” He walks with me to the living room. “You’ll have to wear these.” He gives me a pair of slippers, and I slide them on.

Before I can thank him, he puts the rope around my throat and tightens it until I cry out. “What...what are you doing?”

My hands shake as I drop the banana peel. The hurt I'm feeling crushes me.

Stupid.

I'm so damn stupid.

How could I think what we did changed anything?

“Put your hands behind your back.” His voice is devoid of any emotion, and I sink deeper into myself.

There's no point in fighting this, I know. “But...I...”

Gripping my neck tightly, he pulls me so that I'm face-to-face with him. “I didn't ask you anything, and you told me you would do as I commanded. Now, put your fucking hands behind your back.”

He's made it obvious what my position is.

Turning around, I give him my back and move my arms until my hands are touching each other. My lower lip trembles as the rough texture of the rope touches my raw skin. I can't keep the gasp from coming out.

Jason ignores it. “We have a mile to walk to the truck. If you slow me down, I'll drag you.”

There's nothing left to say.

Or at least I can't talk right now because I'm too emotional, and I know it would

upset him. I simply nod, and he pulls me along behind him.

How did we get back here?

Thirteen

Goddamn it! I'm a fucking asshole. The feelings were too much, and I ran. Then, I had to become the cold bastard I've always been. It's easier. My heart aches at the way Crucinda has shifted back into her fear. Hell, she has every right to do so.

My mind keeps thinking she's lying to me, and the idea of trusting her scares the shit out of me. We walk at a clipped pace. One I know Crucinda won't be able to keep up with. Her ankle truly is still swollen and needs time to heal.

"Jason." Her calling my name makes me close my eyes. Hate for myself creeps into my soul, and I know I'm going to regret being this way to her later.

Stopping, I turn around and look at her. "What?"

Shit, I didn't mean to snap. Crucinda's head is down, and I can see she's barely holding it together.

"I know you said you'd drag me if I didn't keep up." Her sad eyes meet mine. There's a dignity about her that befuddles me. "So, I'm..."

Crucinda hiccups as I step closer to her. "I can't keep up. I'm asking you to slow down."

"Poor pebble." I laugh, only making me look more like an ass by the second.

Standing next to her, I try to reel in my twisted and confused emotions. "Beg me."

Fucked up as it may be, I want to hear the word please coming out of her mouth. This gets her attention, though. Her fiery eyes are back, and she stands there, head held high. There's my pebble.

"Jase." She licks her lips, and I feel my cock perk at her giving me a nickname. Hell, I'm going to have to tell Joey he can't call me that anymore. I don't need a hard-on every time I turn around.

Pushing my hands through her hair, I force her to keep eye contact with me. She's crying, and my heart shatters.

Fuck me.

How can I be such a dick?

"I won't beg you to slow down. But please, can we rest for a moment?"

"So defiant to not beg. But those pretty lips uttered the magic word." Taking her in my arms, I carry her bridal for the last leg of the hike. I'm tired as hell by the time we make it to the truck.

Helping her stand on her feet, I think about being mean again to take out my frustration. Before I can get a word out, she kisses me. It's sweet and way too short for my taste, but I see her smiling at me.

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“Thank you. I appreciate you carrying me.”

Ah, so she only kissed me as a thank you. Fuck, I shouldn’t even expect her to thank me for anything, especially with how I’ve acted with her since we had sex.

Crucinda stands there, waiting for me to open the door. I’m too busy sizing her up.

Did she manipulate me to get out of walking?

Or was she genuinely not able to make it?

Goddamn, I hate not knowing. Not understanding her motivations or mine anymore is driving me nuts. Helping her into the truck, I put her seatbelt on for her since her hands are incapacitated at the moment.

“Crucinda, look at me.” When she turns to me, I see something in her that makes me want to believe her. She’s so innocent, looking like she has nothing to hide. How can that be? “If what you told me isn’t the truth, you know I’m going to kill you.”

Even saying that makes me nauseous. I don’t wait for an answer. Shutting the door, I walk around the front of the truck. Her eyes track my every move, and for a moment, I wonder what it would be like to chase her on good terms.

Would I even notice her?

My cock hardens, and I shake my head.

Yes, I'd notice Crucinda.

Getting into my seat, I turn on the radio to a country station and gun it.

* * *

Another fuckingsurprise hits me like a brick wall. Crucinda can sing. Every fucking time I change the station, she belts out the song. It's annoying and sexy at the same time.

"How the hell do you know every song?"

Crucinda smiles. "My father didn't let me have a lot, but the one thing I had was a radio. Oh, and the library. I could go once a week. I'd fill my imagination and time with music and books. I eventually taught myself how to sing."

"For what it's worth, you have a beautiful voice."

That blush is back, and I smirk.

"Thank you, Jase. Since we are at my home, can you take the ropes off?"

I want to. But I have to remember she's the enemy until proof can be provided. Getting out of the truck, I pick her up and throw her over my shoulder.

"I guess that's a no." The disappointment lacing her tone almost does me in.

"About time you got here." Joey comes up to us and raises an eyebrow at me. I shake my head, telling him not now.

Crucinda stiffens in my arms but doesn't fight me as we walk toward the barn.

“Yeah, well, pebble needed assistance.”

Joey gives me a side eye, but I just wink. He rolls his eyes and roughly opens the barn door. “Put her in there where she belongs, and let’s get this over with.”

“Wait, I will not run.”

“Oh, pebble, if only it were that simple. Joey doesn’t trust you, and neither do I. You told me where the papers were. If they are where they are supposed to be, we can move forward.”

Opening the horse stall, I see a small mare eating some hay and place Crucinda beside her. “Be good and everything will be alright.”

Before I change my mind and untie her, I shut the stall. My brother and I walk out, but not before I hear her muttered words.

“Duchess, he’s going to find everything, and when he comes back, maybe I’ll mean something to him.”

My damn heart is shattering. I don’t know how much more I can take. Everything points to her being the villain in my mind. However, what’s she saying makes more sense? Joey doesn’t say a word as we walk to the house. I think he knows I’m in my head, trying to figure shit out.

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He opens the door to the house with ease, and we push our way through. The place is eerily quiet, and I look for an alarm system.

“Where the fuck is the box?” Joey looks at me and shrugs.

He shakes his head. “A multi-billion-dollar fashion designer with a multi-million-dollar home and no security alarm?” He looks as perplexed as I do.

“Yeah, that’s exactly how I feel. What the hell isn’t adding up, Joey?”

“Per the blueprints, we need to go through the living room, take a right to the kitchen, and her office should be behind the pantry.”

As Joey heads toward the living room, I look around. Vibrant colors are everywhere. This house feels more like a home than someone who just stays here for show. A Snickers candy bar wrapper on the coffee table with a magazine open to a perfume page.

“It’s true then. She doesn’t have a maid or servants.”

“Doesn’t look like it, little brother. It seems like Jasper and Boris were her only employees at the house.”

Fuck. That inner voice in my mind is so smug right now. It’s doing a little jig, telling me it told me so. That they weren’t employees but family. Goddamn it. I took her family away.

Shaking the feelings off, I move with Joey and smile as we come to her office. It's a damn mess. Chaotic. A lot like Crucinda. You can tell she uses the room, and the swatches of fabric on the worktable are in the color sequence of the rainbow.

"Where do we start?" Joey asks, and before he can touch anything, I stop him.

"Don't. I'll do it." A wave of possessiveness overtakes me, and I pierce him with a stare that tells him he better not touch one damn thing.

He chuckles and leans up against the door frame. "Be my guest."

I move meticulously through the piles of paper, and they are all designs. I stop when I come to a collection called 101 Dalmatians and Lucinda. The project was stopped because Crucinda put an injunction to stop using pet fur. It was the first of many cases my father lost. All because pebble didn't want him using real animals.

"Joey, take a look at this." I show him the file, and his nose scrunches in confusion.

"Dad always said that they were an animal-friendly operation."

I nod. "Not according to those lawsuit injunctions. Crucinda took every animal from the warehouse our family owned and..."

My hands start shaking as the realization sets in. "Every animal is here on this farm." The office shifts, and I grab onto the table as my stomach turns sour and my vision blurs.

"I killed innocent people," I gasp.

"Fuck, I told you we shouldn't have done this, Jason." Joey grips my arm to help steady me. It takes a few minutes before I can compose myself.

“Jason, get it together. We can right this wrong later, but we need to be sure she’s telling the truth about our mom.”

He’s right.

My God. No.

I’ll call it a mistake afterward. Right now, this points to mom committing suicide because she was caught using animal fur. We need more evidence that proves she came to Crucinda for help.

Opening the last drawer, I pull out the file that says divorce, and four tickets to Spain, as well as passports, fall out.

“What the hell?” Joey picks up an empty passport, and I realize Crucinda didn’t have our picture, but she was going to meet us.

“Our mother came to her for help. Take all the papers to John and meet with our family lawyer. He has some explaining to do.”

All the puzzle pieces are fitting together. Father lied. Fucking lies everywhere. But not Crucinda. She told the fucking truth, and I... Nope, not going down that road.

“I need to make amends with Crucinda. Or at least try to.” I lower my head, ashamed. Not only because I dragged my brothers into this, but because I’ve become a mother fucking killer for the wrong reasons.

The idea someone has hurt my sweet pebble so much, and still, she wants nothing but my affection in return, is killing me.

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“When this is all said and done, we need to sit down and meet her. She’s family, after all.”

I look at my brother and agree. “If she wants that, yes. But I...”

“Yeah, I know, big brother.” He hugs me and whispers in my ear. “You’ll make it right. Go untie her. I’ll go locate John and find out what else has been a damn cover-up.”

“Joey, I’m sorry.” It’s a hard pill to swallow, but I owe him at least that.

He leaves without answering. I look down at the other file and the vial of a mushroom. Along with it is a note in my mother’s handwriting.

Fourteen

I lie here, talking to Duchess. The pretty mare continues to eat as I jibber-jabber away about how wonderful she is. The stable door opens, and I only hear one set of boots walking toward me.

As the stall door opens, I ready myself emotionally to not expect anything from Jason. It would be unwise to think he would see reason and admit I was right. I peer up at him, and he looks pissed.

Uh oh.

“You fucking knew.” He throws a piece of paper at me and gets on his knees. With a

quick flick of his wrist and a knife in his hand, he cuts the ropes off my arms.

Picking up the letter from Lucinda, I hold it to my chest. “What is it exactly that I am supposed to have known?”

“Don’t play dumb. You knew about us and never came around.”

“Oh.” Shit, yeah, this isn’t good. “You’re right. I did. But how did you expect me to come around with your father threatening me every step of the way?”

He doesn’t yank me to him, but he doesn’t cut the rope from around my neck. “Read the letter, Crucinda.” Jason stares at me, and I fidget. Uncertainty swirls with me. I thought when he found the evidence, he’d be happy, and we could finally talk things out without anger.

“Read it!” His voice is stern as he yanks the rope around my neck. “Now.”

My hands are shaking, but I ignore them.

“Dear Cru, Everything you said to me the night of Jason being born came true. Ricardo married me for your father’s money only after I gave him three sons. Years of me carrying his fashion empire have led to lies, backstabbing, and cheating. I should have come to you and asked you for help sooner. No, scratch that. I should have apologized before now. I’m sorry.”

My voice cracks, and I look at Jason. The resemblance to his mother finally settles inside of me. It’s his father’s demeanor looking back at me. Taking a deep breath, I continue.

“My boys aren’t safe anymore. The plan had been to go to Spain without them, but Ricardo has gone mad. It was wrong of me to involve you, and I’m appalled at what

he did, but I can't stop him. Meet me at the willow tree at the park on the seventh, please. This will be the last time I ask anything of you. I know I don't have the right to even darken your step, but I beg you. If not for me, the boys. I'll always be grateful you loved me enough, even when I never returned it. Luci."

Pressing the note to my chest, I don't hide the tears. "Yes. I knew about y'all. It was going to be a clean break for you four. What Lucinda didn't know was that I was going to go with y'all."

Confusion crosses Jason's face, and I give him a teary-eyed smile. "I'm guessing you found the folder 101 Dalmatians and Lucinda?"

I move to get off my knees, and Jason helps me up. I wasn't sure if he would, but then again, I shouldn't expect anything from him.

"Yeah. Joey has it along with everything else. Why..."

Interrupting him, I wave a hand in the air nonchalantly. "Like you, I have made mistakes. Instead of taking you boys, I destroyed your father's one thing he loved more than all of you. His empire."

We stare at each other for a moment, and he takes a sharp breath. "He killed our mother." He roars at me, and Duchess whinnies.

"Don't make any sudden moves. She could stomp on you." I move slowly toward Duchess. "It's alright, sweet girl. He didn't mean to scare you. Jason's found some things that have upset him. He will not hurt you."

I stroke her mane, and she calms down. She nudges her head into my chest, and I chuckle. "Yes, there we go, girl. Everything is alright, Duchess."

My sweet horse finally relaxes, and Jason seems to be calmer. Hobbling over to him, I hug him.

“At least you know the truth now.” That’s the only thing I can say. It doesn’t help his parents are dead or that he’ll never get the revenge he was seeking. Yet, the truth will set you free, so he has that now.

Jason holds on to me, and there’s that peaceful feeling again. Stroking his back with my hands, I try to find solace in the knowledge he isn’t hurting me any longer. The rope around my neck loosens, and he steps back from me.

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“Why don’t we go up to the house. I’m sure there’s something we can find to eat, and I can prop up my foot. We can talk.” Having him in my home, willingly and not filled with hate for me, is a dream of mine.

“You were right all along. You’re the villain by design, but you aren’t the monster. I am.” He turns and walks out of the stall.

Following him as fast as I can, I frown. “Where do you think you are going?”

He can’t be serious, right?

“Away from you. I... No. My brothers and I don’t deserve to be near you.” He won’t look at me, and my heart begins to crumble.

“I want to meet them. You three are my only family left.”

This makes him turn around and crowd me into the barn door. “You chose not to help us after our mother died. What makes you think we want you in our lives now?”

His words are cruel, but his eyes are full of regret. I blink at him, and it takes everything I have to stand there under his judgmental stare.

“Fair enough, Jason.” I wish I could give him a reason to stay. I’m obviously not enough, and I won’t beg him to be in my life. Even if it rips my heart in half.

Jason pushes off the barn door and walks away, leaving me and my world tumbling down.

* * *

Six weeks have passed since I last saw Jason. It's taken a lot to put my life back together. Sure, I have the resources to go after the boys and press charges, but I won't. I feel like Lucinda would want the hate to be over with.

After a small service for Jasper and Boris, I told my assistant that I needed to take some time. For the moment, put everything on hold because I wouldn't be in. I don't want to be seen or to see anyone else. Plus, all the fucking reporters loitering about.

At first, I thought the reporters were about the death of my two closest friends in the world. No. It was Jason and his brothers who used all the evidence and had their mother's body exhumed. After a complete autopsy, they found a broken neck not consistent with a hanging. It was ruled a homicide, and a full investigation ensued.

What they found wasn't what anyone thought they would find. Their father is very much alive, and he's in Bangladesh. Since the country has non-extradition laws, they can't force him back to the States.

I haven't heard from the boys, and I've decided that's for the best since I'm not sure I can forgive them for taking Jasper and Boris from me. Yet, every night, the nightmare I used to have has morphed into a sensual tease and need for Jason. In my dream, he isn't mean or cruel.

Forceful?

Yes, but I wouldn't want him any other way.

For the first time, I'm out of the house and visiting with my animals. They are all I have left. They miss Boris and his special treats. Spottie, the pig, is currently oinking at me as I throw feed to the chickens. If I ignore Spottie too much longer, he'll charge

me. He thinks he's a bull, but he's a softy.

"Hello, Crucinda."

My hand stops mid-throw, and I drop the bucket of feed.

Turning around, I see Ricardo.

"How did you get back into the States?" My hands move toward my neck, and I take a step back. This...this cannot be happening right now.

His laugh is maniacal, and I move too fast, bumping into the fence. It's bad enough that he betrayed his sons, but to come back and show his face after they've found out the truth? God, he really is crazy.

"I've come to take back control of my family. You've messed with my sons' heads, you bitch."

I gasp as he steps closer to me. "No. They found out you were feeding them lies. That you're a psycho, and I'm not the villain."

"You know, you are who you are today because of me. I should have made your father sell you to the highest bidder in Mexico. You've been nothing but a thorn in my side since the night I chose your sister."

"Too bad your greed blinds you. You chose well. Lucinda truly loved you until you ruined it."

"No. You did when you started helping her. Lucinda didn't love you. She knew you'd be a bleeding heart and ran to you. Even in the end, she was using your ass."

“That might be true, but she still chose me in the end, and that’s all that matters. You should go back to the hole you crawled out of. You were better off dead.”

Fifteen

Day After

“What the helldo you mean our father isn’t dead?” My brothers and I are standing here, looking at our family lawyer. After a round of hard fists to the stomach, he started squealing.

“Your father staged his own death so that he could escape the country and the backlash of tax evasion and animal cruelty lawsuits.”

John holds him by the neck and shakes the weasel hard. “Where the fuck is he?”

“He had me secure him a fake passport. Once he was in the air, I canceled it. The last I heard, his plane was in Asia. That’s all I know.”

John throws him to the ground and twirls a pen in his left hand as Joey stomps on his leg. “You aren’t done answering questions yet.”

“I...I’ll tell you anything you want to know,” he moans out, and I chuckle.

“Oh, we fucking know you will.” I cross my arms, and John picks his head up. “Our mother.”

He pales and struggles to get loose from John’s hold. “Who killed her?”

“She...” Joey takes the pen from John and stabs the pen in his eye. His scream is

shrill, but I don't give a fuck.

"Answer the fucking question."

"Your father's security guard, Johan. Then your father killed him. No loose ends. Except Crucinda. She's been untouchable for years."

"Goddamn right she has because she's fucking innocent," I spew. Thinking about her makes me sick to my stomach. I should have never left her.

"When was the last time you spoke to our father?" My patience is wearing thin. This rat bastard helped cover my father's sorry ass.

"I haven't. There's been no reason to do so."

"Let him go, John." I hand him my card and punch him in the nose as John helps him stand up. "The minute you speak to him, you call me. If he even sneezes in your direction, you better tell me."

"Yes, sir." The damn bastard bows, and I have the urge to kick him. Instead, I leave with my brothers, and all I can think about is my pebble. She's been right this whole fucking time.

"Joey, I know you leave on deployment for a year in a few days. What do you say we go kick it back on the beach with some booze and forget all about this shit for now?"

He smiles at me. "Hell yeah! You in John?"

A noncommittal shrug is all we get. Good enough. I need a night out where there's no violence involved. Or regrets.

* * *

“We’ve been searching for six goddamn weeks!” I explode at John, and he growls at me over the phone.

“You think I don’t know that? The sorry son of a bitch is hiding from us, Jason, and we don’t have jurisdiction to go to Bangladesh and commit murder. Hell, we don’t have clearance anywhere for that.”

“Shit, I’m sorry, John. You’re right.” Hell, I’ve been saying that a lot lately.

Pulling the envelope out of the mailbox, I slam the door shut. “Fuck.” The big “return to sender” glares at me mockingly.

“Crucinda, return your letter again?”

Getting into the house, I slam the door shut. “Yes.”

“Well, what did you expect?” John laughs in my ear.

“Watch it, brother,” I warn him, and he laughs harder. Fuck.

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“Go see her, you doofus.” He hangs up on me, leaving me to my thoughts. Ever since I found out the whole truth, I’ve been hellbent on dismantling every aspect of my father’s secrets.

Crucinda dissolved the De Vil-McKessonville Empire into CDV Fashions and sent me and my brothers checks for the company in liquidation. Her words still haunt me.

How dare she send us money and not return my calls or letters?

I’ve been trying out the nice way, and she’s ignoring me.

I can’t go see her. Not until I know my father is taken care of. Throwing the letter on top of the ten other letters I sent, I skulk into my office. Might as well go hunting for the man that’s caused all this heartache and guilt.

Looking at the clock, I wipe my eyes. Four-fifteen in the evening, and my phone is beeping at me. I yank my phone off the charger, only to get pissed. It’s not a message telling me my father has made it back to the States.

Unknown

You should have killed Crucinda and not gone digging.

A video comes through, and it’s of my pebble.

“Jason...”

My father comes into view and punches her. I roar in anger but keep watching. She pushes her shoulders back and snuffles. Giving him a death glare, she gulps and looks into the camera.

“Don’t come. It’s a trap.” She quickly begs me before I can hear my father calling her every name in the book.

The camera turns to my father. “You have two hours, or her remains are going to be spread across this fucking farm for these goddamn animals to eat.”

“No!” The phone goes black, and I look at the clock on my wall. Two hours to make it seven hours away. Fuck. Getting up from my desk, I pace back and forth, trying to figure out how to get to her. I guess it’s time to call in a favor.

Dialing my friend, whom I bailed out of jail once, I wait impatiently for them to answer the phone.

“McKessonville, you better be dying if you’re calling me on a Sunday.”

Laughing, I shake my head. “Don’t ever change, Queenie. Listen, I need a favor. How fast can you get the chopper up and running?”

“Well, I can be to you in less than twenty minutes. I’m gonna be sleeping in her tonight.”

“Do I want to know?” Who knows what he gets up to now? He’s a damn wild card, for sure.

“No. Be ready, jackass.” The call ends, and I stand here, wondering about what if I don’t make it in time?

Taking a moment to send a text to my brother, I go over what I'm going to do. Joey will be behind me no matter what I choose to do. To think John would disagree with me is not setting well, but I want his blessing.

Me

He's got Crucinda.

John

Do you need me?

Me

No. Queenie is going to fly me out. I'm going to end his life.

John

After every fucking thing he's done, I don't blame you. Do what you have to do. He's dead to me, anyway.

Me

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Thank you, brother.

John

Be careful. He may not be alone.

That thought crossed my mind, but our father wouldn't want witnesses. I have Queenie, though. He'll stick around to get us out of harm's way if things go south.

True to his word, Queenie shows up in eighteen minutes. "Bro, what's so fucking urgent?"

"Let's just say it's a matter of life or death. And if I tell you who it is, you won't believe me. So, let's just get there."

"Respect." He nods his head and gets us in the air as I put the seatbelt and headphones on.

When I'm too quiet, he shakes the chopper, and I growl at him. Queenie laughs, "Get out of your head, dude. I'll get you there in time to save her."

"That's not what I'm worried about. The bastard has hurt her before, but he may not stop this time."

This seems to make him think, and he scrunches his nose. "Got it, man." The last few minutes of our helicopter ride are solemn. As we land, I don't see my father or Crucinda out in the field. My hackles rise, and Queenie touches the chopper down.

“I’ll be right here. If you need firepower, I got you.”

“I’m hoping it doesn’t come to that, but be on the lookout.”

“You got it, man.”

Getting out, I duck my head and run toward the house.

Where the fuck did he take her?

I look at my phone, and it’s less than two hours. I’m early.

My father steps out of the house, laughing. “Well, I’ll be damn. You must have gotten yourself a taste of her pussy. I know how you feel, boy. It’s a ripe peach, but that ass is so much better. You get your dick wet in there too?”

I don’t answer. I know better than to engage in this kind of pissing contest. “I’m here, just like you demanded. Now, what do you want?”

His facial features turn dark, and he takes a step closer to me. “You see this?” He holds up his phone, and I can barely make out Crucinda on a bed.

“You don’t do exactly as I say, or I’m going to blow her up. Like I said, scattered along the land for the animals to enjoy.”

He cackles as I step closer. “I’m listening.”

“All the money she got for my company. You are going to talk your brothers into giving it to me.”

“That’s easy enough. We never wanted the money.”

He shakes his head as I put my hands up to show him I'm unarmed. "Once you make the call, your last deed for me, and I'll consider us even afterward, is to walk into that bedroom, fuck Crucinda, and once you've busted your nut all over her, kill her."

"What the fuck?" My reaction makes him chuckle like a schoolboy.

"Ah, you really have feelings for her. You poor sap. I want to watch her get fucked by my eldest son. You'll do this for me, won't you, Jason?"

Bile rises in my stomach as I hold my phone in view of my father. "If I do this, you are done here. You'll go back to where you came overseas?"

He winks at me. "Of course. Do all this for me, then I'm gone. You can all do whatever you like."

"Alright. We should get the show on the road."

Sixteen

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My vision is gone because my eyes are swollen shut from being hit repeatedly. I know it's better than the alternative, but I'm in pain. The churning in my stomach is enough to make me dizzy any time I move. And believe me, I'm trying my damndest to get my hands free from the chains wrapped around my wrists and ankles.

Thank God Ricardo didn't touch me sexually. I shudder at the thought of him coming near me. I'm glad I can still hear despite being unable to see. There are two sets of boots thumping across the floor. Alright, I know one is Ricardo, but what if it's one of his guards? They are just as bad as he is.

"Why the fuck did you beat her like this?"

"Jason." I whimper, and the feel of a hand on my face makes me flinch.

"Son, she's the enemy. Of course, I am going to beat her into submission. Now remember what I fucking said."

The scrape of a chair makes me turn my head toward the sound, but I do not know who sat down. I feel the bed dip, and I tremble. "Don't be gentle with her, Jason. I expect you to fuck her hard and fast."

"What?" The word leaves my mouth before I can stop it. Surely, Ricardo isn't for real.

"No one was talking to you, pebble. All you have to do is keep your legs spread, and I'll do the rest."

“Jason, don’t do this.” His voice shows no emotions.

Has his father really turned him against me?

Well, he wasn’t with me to begin with. I have to remember that.

I wish I could see. To be vulnerable is one thing. To have your sight impaired while tied up and not sure what is going on is another.

“There’s a plan, pebble. Just be the good little whore that you are for me, and we will make it out of this alive.”

His breath tickles my ear, and I feel my guard slipping. Those words give me hope, but what if he is lying? Who’s to say that he isn’t here on his own to show his allegiance to Ricardo?

The tears are hot and painful as they leak from my eyes. Jason runs a hand along my neck down to my breasts.

It’s gentle.

Kind.

“Fuck, Father, you have her so damn bruised. It’s beautiful.” His voice is hitched wrong and too high. There’s no lust in his tone.

Jason sucks a nipple into his mouth, and I want to remain unaffected, but it’s Jason. It’s his mouth sucking on me, and he’s always been right. My body reacts to him like no one else. The feel of his tongue running along the underside of my breasts makes me quiver and arch into him.

Ricardo's laughing douses my arousal instantly. "Fuck, son, she's such a naughty piece of ass. Look at her arching into you."

God, this is mortifying. If the Earth were to open up right now and swallow me whole, I wouldn't be upset. I would willingly die to get out of this situation. "Stay with me, pebble." He whispers into my belly button, and I focus. In my mind, I build this bubble around me and Jason. Him and I together and no other person around.

"Crucinda, all those years ago, you acted like you didn't enjoy my dick in you, but I could feel your hot little snatch gripping my cock so succulently. You were a dirty slut for me back then and my men. Goddamn, my men would tell me stories about how you sucked their cocks clean." I hear a zipper being pulled down, and I strain to keep the bubble up.

Ricardo's words aren't true, but Jason rams two fingers into me, and I cry out. His father is goading him into being harsh, and I must come to terms with this.

To accept that this is Ricardo's main plan.

Controlling his son.

Jason's words are in my ear this time. "Ignore him, sweet pebble. There's only me and you. We are the only ones that matter."

His fingers leave me cold, and I realize that even if Ricardo is here and my mind is going a million miles a minute, my body wants Jason. My pussy throbs to have his fingers back inside of me. He places the tip of his cock into my opening, and I rub against him.

"Is this what you wanted, Father? To see your son own Crucinda De Vil?" His words are spat out, and he shoves his cock, balls deep inside of me. I wasn't expecting the

force, and a scream escapes me.

He pounds into me unmercifully. My hands ball into fists as Jason takes my battered thighs into his hands and pushes them further apart. The chains on my ankles clank as he thrust into me, forcing my body to move with his power.

A whimpered gasp escapes my lips, and Jason kisses my ear. “It’s going to be alright, pebble. Five more minutes. You can be my sweet pebble for that long, can’t you?”

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“Yes,” I whisper back to him, and he kisses me. My world might be crumbling, but his lips are home. A peace washes over me, and I sink into the hope that his plan is more than him getting off inside of me.

His thrust is still brutal and fast, but there’s a sway in his hips that tells me he’s not trying to hurt me. As I’m getting into the rhythm, the house shakes.

“What the fuck?” Ricardo yells as Jason continues to take me. My head turns to the side, trying to determine where the noise came from.

“Focus on me, pebble,” Jason insists. He rubs my clit as I hear the door being opened and the sound of footsteps running.

“We aren’t leaving this room until you come for me, Crucinda. Don’t worry about anything but the feel of my dick.”

His finger runs along my clit, circling it, then moving away. I arch into Jason, wanting to feel him, but how can I focus? The noise is loud, and the house is rattling.

“Pebble, you’re too bruised for me to spank. But if I have to punish that ass another way, I will.”

I’m ashamed to admit that my body lights up at his words. This is a different kind of torture. That tone of voice is laced with lust now as he continues to thrust deep into me.

“You came for me,” I whisper in awe.

“There was no way I was letting him have you, Crucinda.” My muscles tighten around his cock, and I meet his thrusts. No one has ever truly chosen me. Well, chosen for me. It’s always been what I can do for them in the long run.

The chains around my arms release, and I move slowly to wrap them around him. “There now. That has to feel better, huh, pebble?”

“Yes.” My arms are tired, and my hands ache, but I run my fingers through his hair. He moans into my neck as we let our bodies do the talking for us.

Jason’s finger grazes my urethra opening, and I feel a jolt of pleasure run through me. “Again.”

That chuckle that comes from him is wicked. He knows exactly what he is doing to me, and I can’t do much about it. I’m dependent on his cock getting me to the peak of pleasure.

“When I touch you, you respond so pretty to me. It’s time for you to come for me, sweet pebble. Do you understand?”

His cock throbs inside as he moves in and out of my body. The thought of him stopping makes me eager to please him so he will continue. I want to feel him come inside of me as much as he wants to feel me milking him.

“Come inside of me.” I feel the quivering of my orgasm right there on the precipice of breaking.

“That’s my naughty pebble. Being bold and demanding.” Jason chuckles in my ear and slams into me as he pushes his index finger into my urethra.

The scream I release is unearthly because the orgasm takes everything from me. I’m

not only drained physically, but mentally and emotionally, I'm a wreck. It's all because of the man deep inside of me, giving me his essence with wild thrusts.

Seventeen

Filling Crucinda to the brim with my seed, I kiss her. She's been such a good pebble, passing out from exhaustion. It will not take long for her to recover and want to know what's going on. I don't fucking blame her one bit. It's irritating that she can't see.

Not because it's her fault, but because I couldn't save her from the agony of being punished by my father. Taking a moment to let her enjoy the moment of peace as the world crumbles down, I roll off her and untie her completely.

"Pebble, we need to get up. I know you can't see, and that's alright. I'm going to take care of you." Pushing her hair out of her face, I press my lips to her forehead.

Goddamn, she's my everything and doesn't even know it.

"Alright." Her voice sounds vulnerable. It has a tremble in it that I wasn't expecting. Sighing, I get off the bed and pull up my pants. We will have to clean up later.

"Can you walk?" I inquire but already know she shouldn't be.

"I think so. It's mainly my eyes and my abdomen." Helping her off the bed, I watch her wobble.

"Yeah, I think I should probably carry you. First, we need to get you something to wear."

"Third door on the right is the closet. There are dresses that have a tie on them. Pull one, please." Her please at the end makes me shiver.

Fuck, I want her again already.

Now isn't the time.

"Stand there and don't move, pebble." I move away from her and open the closet door. Fuck, she has a lot of shit. I'll never be able to replace all this shit. Picking one dress, I walk over to her and help her get it on.

"Good choice." She tries to smile but ends up wincing since it seems to hurt her to move her face at all.

"Don't try to smile or move too fast, sweet pebble." Fuck, I'm going to rip my father limb for limb if Queen hasn't already killed him.

Picking her up, I carry her out of the bedroom. Her gasps and whimpers kill me. She's in so much pain, and I've done nothing but fuck her. I'll make it up to her once we are away from here and she's safe.

The closer we get to the first floor, the louder the commotion is. "What's going on?" I'm not sure if she notices it or not, but her lips touch my neck, and I almost drop her.

Why the fuck am I worried about getting my dick wet again?

Focus, you prick.

"Nothing for you to worry about, Crucinda. I'm taking care of the problem. You just keep your head in my neck and keep kissing my skin, pebble."

Her soft chuckle is a balm to my soul. If she forgives me for everything I've done, it

will be a damn miracle. With each step I take, the closer I am to making her mine. Mine forever if I have anything to say about it. Of course, it depends on if my pebble will have me.

* * *

Three days later

The first day we tried to fly her out, her blood pressure dropped, and I almost lost her. Queenie swore he couldn't move her until she stabilized. The problem was she was getting worse.

John stands there, waiting on us as we touch down from the chopper ride. It's been hectic, but my father is in the cargo hold, bloody, and frankly, I don't give a damn.

It's imperative I get help for Crucinda. Sure, I've done my fair share of things to her. Things I shouldn't have, but nothing this severe. Her breathing is labored, and she's shaking in my arms.

"What the fuck?" John says, and behind him, I see Joey. My elation grows knowing he came, but he should be doing his part to keep this country free.

"What are you doing here, Joey?"

He shrugs and waves a piece of paper that I'm sure is his two-day pass. Those sharp crystalline eyes look at me, sizing me up, and the snarl on his face tells me everything I need to know. Joey isn't going to let this go easily.

Holy fuck, this isn't good.

I thought for sure Joey would be on my side of things. If he isn't talking, that could

only mean one thing. He disagrees with my decision to end our father's life. Something that will happen only after Crucinda gets her licks in.

I carry Crucinda in my arms quickly into my home. "We need to get a doctor here immediately," I tell John and Joey as Queenie throws the box I stuffed my father into down.

"What's in the box?" Joey asks, hesitation in his tone.

Shit, yeah, he's not happy.

"Father." That's all I say as I move us into the downstairs master bedroom.

"Crucinda?" Her eyes had started to open earlier, but they are closed now, and she's so pale. "Pebble, come on, wake up."

"No," she croaks out, and I laugh.

"Don't scare me like that." I push her hair out of her face as Joey and John come into the room.

"Did you..." John asks, but he shakes his head like he has already answered his own question.

"I've got a friend who could help us. But why didn't you go to the hospital?" Joey inquires, and I sigh.

"Because as soon as she's better, I want her to beat the fuck out of Father to pay him back."

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“No,” Crucinda says again. We all look down at her, and she has her eyes opened as far as they can. “No more violence, Jase.” Her hand trembles, and tears run down her face as she reaches for my hand. “Please.”

Gripping her hand softly, I sit down on the bed and kiss her palm. “Okay, pebble.” It’s a lie. I’m going to take so much enjoyment in dismantling my father. I can’t wait to rip into him. But first, I have to get things squared away with my brothers and pebble.

John and Joey come closer, and I see John’s lower lip trembling. He hates to see women and children hurt. Joey is a different breed altogether. He looks down at her with disdain, and I realize he looks at everyone he doesn’t know like that. It’s upsetting, but Crucinda doesn’t even flinch.

“Hello,” her voice breaks as she tries to swallow. “You...” A cough comes out, and I fret.

“Don’t speak, Cru, it’s alright. John, Joey, this is our step-aunt, Crucinda. Pebble, this mean bastard is the youngest and the one that got a two-day pass to see you, Joey. The one over there about to cry is John.”

We all laugh, and Queenie comes in. “So, I’m willing to stick around, or I can go get something if y’all need me.”

Looking away from Crucinda, I nod to Queenie. “If you can get someone to help Crucinda, that would mean a lot. Then, of course, you’re welcome to stay as long as you want.”

“You got it.”

“I’ll go with you, Queenie,” Joey says but then turns back and bumps me out of the way. He sits down and looks at Crucinda. I see the exact moment he realizes she’s not the enemy. He knew this for a long time, but it’s finally settling into him.

“I’ve hated you for so long, I don’t know how to love you. But I’m hoping that you’ll give me the chance. And...” He bends down and lays his head down on her chest gently. “And you’ll forgive me for being a part of killing the only family you had.”

I fully expect Crucinda to not forgive us. She once again surprises the hell out of me, but it endears us to her. “There’s nothing to forgive.” Joey’s head snaps up, and he looks at her.

“How can you say that?” he whispers.

“Your father made me the bad guy, Joey. You were only following his lead. It’s alright. I hope we can get to know each other better soon.” Crucinda puts a battered hand on his face, and Joey bursts into tears.

He’s never done that before.

Ever.

He hugs her tightly, and she whimpers. I pull him back, and he looks chagrined. “Sorry, I...I didn’t mean to hurt you.”

Crucinda’s smile is tight, but it’s full of happiness. “It’s no problem. I’m glad you are willing to give me a chance to be in your life.”

Joey gets up and vows to us he’ll be back shortly with help. As Queenie and Joey

leave, John comes over, and while he doesn't sit down, he gets on his knees so I can sit back down near Crucinda.

"You have every right to hate me."

She shakes her head and looks at me. "I'm not mad at y'all," she whispers. John looks like he wants to say more, but he keeps quiet as Crucinda peers at him.

"You know, you have your mother's eyes." Slowly, pebble takes her hand and pushes it through John's bangs. "And her hair. Pitch black with that blue undertone. It was one of her best features."

John is still as she holds her hand against his face. "Thank you." He gasps out and takes her hand in his. "Thank you."

That's all he seems to be able to say, and I don't blame him. Crucinda is way too gracious. "John, you and I should go get some food started. Let's let Crucinda rest."

He doesn't argue as he gets up and kisses her forehead. As he walks out, I turn to my pebble. "We don't deserve you." That's all I can say as I rush out of the door, and she sees I'm on the verge of a fucking breakdown.

Eighteen

The door closes after them, and I lie here, wondering what the hell is going on. I mean, I know what's going on. I'm not in my home anymore, and I've met my other two step-nephews, but what am I doing forgiving them? A chuckle leaves me, and I know I'm being stupid.

Of course, I'm going to forgive them.

I have to.

They are my only family, and they don't deserve my wrath.

Jason got me out of the line of fire with his father, but can I trust him?

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My body wants to say yes, it can, but my mind is still worried he will always be the monster I've known him to be. Taking a deep breath, I try to calm down, but the anxiety is crawling all over me. It's painful to move, but I don't want to be on my back.

Pain radiates as I turn. I must have cried out too loudly because Jason comes running in. "What's wrong, pebble?"

He comes into my view, and I gasp. "I don't want to be on my back." A whimper leaves my throat, and I cry out as the struggle to turn over gets worse.

"Pebble, honey, you can't." He tries to calm me down, but I cry harder.

"Okay, pebble. Okay. Please, don't cry." Jason presses kisses all over my face, and he rubs his hands along my arms. "Let's see what we can do. It's going to be all good, I promise, pebble."

Jason helps me as much as he can to make me comfortable. There are pillows all around my body, and I'm finally halfway on my right side. "I can breathe better. Thank you." I gasp out as John comes back into the room with a tray of food.

The smells are divine, but I don't know if I'm going to be able to eat with my nerves the way they are. "Well, since this jerk left me alone, I brought you some scrambled eggs and oatmeal. That's all I really know how to make." John says as he puts the plate on the bedside table.

"I'm grateful for anything." Jason chuckles, and he winks at me. He knows I won't

eat anything, but I'm trying to be gracious.

John beams at me, and I feel like I said the right thing. Jason takes the food, and John sits down on the other side of the bed. We shift and I chuckle. The pillows topple, and John curses.

"Sorry, I didn't think."

"It's alright, John. Please get comfortable," I tell him, wanting him to know I'm not upset at all. Why would I be? He clearly wants to be near me, and that's a good thing, right?

"Open up, pebble." Jason's words make me turn back toward him and he has a spoon full of oatmeal. I want to be a brat and tell him no, but not in front of John. I'm not sure Jason would appreciate that, and it would be kind of embarrassing to show my ass in front of his brother.

Opening my mouth, Jason spoon-feeds me, and I accept it. The sweet taste of strawberries and cream hits my mouth, and I moan. "So good." Jason chuckles as I smile at him and John. John looks satisfied.

Spoon after spoonful of oatmeal comes, and when Jason tells me it's empty, I pout. "I was just getting started."

John jerks upward. "Do I need to make more?"

For the first time since Ricardo took me, I feel a lightness within me. "No. I was teasing."

Jason puts the food back down on the table and helps me drink some water. "Crucinda likes to make jokes, John. You'll get used to it."

The way Jason says that, he makes it sound like we will see each other more often. He left me once before, so I'm not sure if that's true. Maybe he's making John feel better. I'm not sure.

"At least she's alright." He sounds genuinely concerned about me, and I wonder if he was the tough guy only because Jason asked him to be. I don't ask, not knowing how much they would tell me. Instead, I yawn.

"Let's let Cru get some rest," Jason says as he stands up and kisses my lips. "I'm going to leave the door open. All you have to do is call out my name. I'll come running."

"Thank you, Jase." He shivers, and his eyes heat with lust at me calling him by his nickname.

* * *

I wake up to the smell of smoke, and I cry out. "No!" The fire is hot and licking at my body. Where is everyone? "Jase!" Panic sets in, but I can hear him screaming my name.

"Wake up, Crucinda." The urgency in the person's tone makes me freak out. I am awake. Why do they keep telling me to wake up?

"Pebble, dammit, open your eyes."

Jason's harsh tone scares me, and I force my eyes open wider.

Why can't they see me?

Or the smoke?

“Dear God, her dream must have had a hold on her.”

“She has night terrors, it seems.” That’s a voice I don’t recognize, and I gasp out. My eyes open now to see five sets of eyes looking back at me.

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The woman looks at me and sizes me up. “In fact, I bet she has them often. It seems that her brain is trying to reconcile her trauma. Although night terrors are genetic, they can be a reaction with PTSD as well.”

Jason looks away from me, and I feel bereft. “Who...who are you?”

“I’m Doctor Kirkland. Joey has told me all about what’s happened and that you need some medical attention. I’d say you need more than that.”

Taking a deep breath, I nod. “I’m fine. Just had a bad dream, that’s all.”

All the guys look at me, and Queenie leaves with John and Joey in tow. “We are going to let the doctor take care of you while we fix some things that need to be addressed. If you need us, Doctor Kirkland, please come get us.”

“I...” Jason rubs his hand along my face.

“Don’t worry, Crucinda. Everything will be alright soon enough.” I don’t think things work like that, but I don’t say a word. It’s not like I can argue. I’m in no state to do so. “You rest and let the doctor look over you. There are some things I need to take care of. Don’t forget, all you have to do is call my name, and I’ll come back.” He bends down and kisses my lips softly. “Be my good pebble.”

Watching him leave, I don’t feel safe anymore, but the look Dr. Kirkland gives me provides me reassurance. Her eyes are soft and downcast, trying to not stare at me. I know I look hideous. The scar on my face was already bad. Add swollen cheeks and eyes, and I’m sure I look like a monster.

As the doctor looks over my body, she asks me so many questions. I don't have the answers to most of them. I haven't been to a doctor in fifteen years. I haven't had a reason to go. It's embarrassing that I don't know the answers.

"You're lucky that you aren't dead." She mutters when she pokes and prods me. It's painful, but at least it isn't torturous.

"I know." If it weren't for Jason, I'd be somewhere locked up, I'm sure. It's the hard truth. Of course, it doesn't negate what he has done to me, but it helps in knowing where I stand with him.

"There's nothing broken, Crucinda, but the bruises are severe. I want you to take it easy for a few weeks. I mean absolutely no moving unnecessarily for at least three weeks."

"I have fashion week coming up."

The doctor laughs. "No, you don't. You can't even see how many fingers I have up. Sure, you can see up close, and since the guys are here, I don't mind leaving you here, but you should be in a hospital, getting better."

"Thank you. I will follow your directions to the letter. It's best if I stay here." She smiles down at me and tells me she will check in on me in a week.

Jason and the others don't come back, and I fall asleep, hoping my dreams will be better and there will not be any more fires.

Nineteen

"We can't just kill him," Joey says as we look at our father, shivering on the ground in our basement. I really don't give a fuck if he likes it or not.

“Why the hell not?” John asks before I can let out my frustrations. He’s itching to end his life and understands how I feel about the situation. God, leave it to John to have my back on this and not our little brother.

“Because he needs to pay for his crimes. He wanted Crucinda to pay for them. Why would we give him the coward’s way out?” Joey glares at me like this should be obvious.

Goddamn, I release a breath I didn’t even know I was holding. To know that Joey doesn’t care if he dies is a fucking load off. “You’re right, Joey, but I don’t want him alive any longer. Pebble needs to know he’s dead. It will give her peace.”

John huffs. “She said no more violence.”

“Dammit, I know, but we are doing this.” I pull my gun down from the top bookshelf, and before I can cock it, the doctor calls out my name.

Placing the gun in my pants behind my back, I motion for the others to go upstairs. I guess killing father will have to wait until the doc is gone. I wait for the irritation to come from not finishing my task. It never comes, and my brain catches up to my heart.

Crucinda is more important.

“How is she?” The words come out breathily, and my brothers look at me. I shake my head, and they turn toward the doctor.

With a heavy sigh, she looks at her notes and then back at us. “I’ve given her some medication to help her sleep without dreaming so much. Also, to be frank, she needs to be X-rayed. I’m worried since at least sixty percent of her body is covered in bruises.”

Her demeanor is professional, but I can see the worry lines on her face. “She has refused to go in, and I think that’s because of you.” She raises an eyebrow at me, and I don’t comment. Even after everything that’s happened, my pebble is thinking about me.

“You will need to watch for expanding bruising or loss of eyesight. And make sure she does nothing but walk to the bathroom or the kitchen. Nothing more. Crucinda said she has a fashion show in a week, but it’s not feasible for her to even think about going.”

“Thank you, Doctor Kirkland.” Fuck. I should do what’s right for her and get her to the hospital.

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But I won't.

The need to have her under my watchful eye builds and makes me stand my ground.

Joey watches her with interest, and I smirk. John laughs and nudges his shoulder against Joey's. "What?"

"Don't stare, dude, it's rude."

He fucking blushes. He's never going to live this down with us. I smile and wink at him, and he bows up. This makes me laugh harder as the doctor closes the door, and John bursts out in whole-body chuckles.

"Fuck you bastards." He swings the door open to the basement and stomps back down the stairs.

"What do you want to bet he goes and finds her later?" I ask John and he nods.

"He's a goner. And she better run hard." We follow Joey downstairs to see him beating the hell out of our father.

"How could you be the fucking monster, dad?" I try to see this through Joey's eyes. He idolized our father more than me or John. "I fucking did everything for you."

Our father laughs and spits blood. "You can hit better than that, you pussy."

Fuck, Joey hates being called that. Taking a moment to watch our little brother

explode in fury, I know what's about to come. Joey rears back and throws his entire weight into the next punch. Father's nose crunches, and he howls in pain.

"How's that for better, you bastard?" Joey doesn't stop hitting him, though. Fist after fist hits our father, and with every hit, we hear more and more bones crunching.

John walks over to him and pulls him back, trying to calm him down. "Joey, that's enough."

"It will never be enough. He betrayed us." Joey spits at our father and tries to get loose from John.

"We aren't here for this," I say calmly.

How did I manage that?

To say I'm calm at all is a joke.

Both look at me. "Answers. We need answers, goddamn it."

They both nod, and the wind seeps out of Joey as John stands there with his arm around his shoulders. "Later, little brother," John whispers. Joey takes a deep breath in as I step in front of the man that I can't even stand to be in the same room as now.

My anger consumes me as memories of a loving father play in my head. Memories that don't reconcile with the man on his knees, laughing at Joey. A hero, in my eyes, has died, leaving me uncertain if anything I was ever told is true. John looks at me, and I see the sadness. The betrayal sitting in his features. I'm not alone in how I feel.

How could this man be this way?

Ignoring my walk down memory lane, I look at our father. He's sickening and disgusting to be around. "All we want to know is why you killed our mother." Nothing else fucking matters.

"I didn't. That bitch upstairs..."

I use the gun's butt to hit him against his forehead. It leaves a nice imprint, and that giddy feeling I get when I'm causing violence fills me. "Stop fucking lying. I know Crucinda didn't kill her. Try again, Father."

"Your mother had a purpose, Jason." He lifts his head and looks me in my eyes. "That purpose was to strengthen my empire and to give me sons. When she became a problem, I took her ass out. Quite simple, really."

"Not fucking simple at all, dick." I put the gun to his forehead, and he smirks at me. "Did you beat and rape her too, like you did Crucindia?"

"Ah, you found out the truth, and now you are acting like you are the one in control. Don't forget that I hold the key to everything you own, you little shits."

Of course, he would turn to this type of behavior.

Typical.

How could I have not seen this before?

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Have I always cowered to his demands?

Fuck me.

“Doesn’t matter. You’re dead either way. Tell us, why did you lie about our mother? Why not turn us against her instead of an innocent woman?”

He laughs.

Fucking laughs!

The roar of outrage coming from both my brothers is almost enough to make me pull the trigger. But I reel it in for the moment.

“Because what better way to keep you three ungrateful bastards under my thumb? If you had a purpose to stay with me, the poor widower who lost his doting wife, then I could control what happened. It was so easy for you all to follow my lead, and when my businesses started crumbling, it was fuel to fire.”

Black dots float within my eyes, and I breathe hard. The anger builds so fast; I pull the fucking trigger without thinking. His brain splatters as the bullet comes out of the back of his head. “Good riddance, you son of a bitch.”

Pulling out my phone, I snap a photo and put the gun down on a table behind me. Sliding my phone back into my pocket, I mutter what needs to happen. “Get him buried, and I’ll clean up this mess. John, is the thing you needed to clear up a few weeks ago taken care of?”

“Eh. I’ll nip it in the bud soon enough.” He hedges, and I don’t say a word. It must be important, but he’s not ready to talk about it.

“Alright. Joey, why don’t you go sit with Crucinda. She might be asleep, but I don’t want her alone.”

He pulls me into a hug and whispers, “This fucking changes everything. We have to earn her trust and...”

Patting him on the back and running a hand on the back of his head, I calm him down. “She’s our only family now. We will show her what it’s like to have a family that’s ride or die.”

“What if she doesn’t accept us?” Ah, there’s the vulnerability I know Joey for. He may be a hair trigger and brutally honest, but he still wants to be accepted.

“She will. You heard her before all of this. Crucinda craves family, and that’s what we are going to give her.”

“Okay. Okay. Enough of the sappy shit.” Joey says and pushes away from me, causing us all to laugh. He shakes his head as he looks at our father, dead and lying in a pool of blood. “Serves you right,” he mutters and leaves.

“This is going to be hard for him.” John pulls our father’s arms from the post Queenie tied him to. Smiling, he wraps him in the tarp.

“Joey will survive. He’s a strong kid.” Pulling my phone back out of my pocket, I look at the camera app and see Joey walk into my bedroom. Crucinda is asleep as he sits down on the bed and starts talking to her. He’s apologizing again. Joey’s shoulders shake, and I shut the app off. This is a moment he needs with her.

“Are you going to be good, though?” John has our dead father on his shoulder, and he’s asking me if I’m going to be good with all this?

“Are you?” I throw back at him as he turns and stares at me.

“I’ll survive.” He opens the door that leads to the woods behind my house, and he’s gone, leaving me with a mop and a trash bag to clean up the goo.

Once I clean the area, I pour hydrogen peroxide on the blood and know I have about fifteen minutes before I can mop that shit up.

Twenty

When I wake up, I feel someone looking at me. A small bit of fear freaks me out for a moment before I force myself to open my eyes and see who’s sitting beside me. It’s Joey on my left, John is across the end of the bed, and Jason is sitting in a chair on the right side, holding my hand. My chest expands as I look in their faces. They are so peaceful as they sleep.

Not moving, I lie here, knowing I’m safe. I have not achieved this feeling with anyone but Jasper and Boris. A stabbing pain hits my chest, and I gasp. The sound wakes up the guys, and I blink before looking at each of them.

“Sorry. I...I didn’t mean to wake you all.” Hot tears run down my face, and even though I know they were acting in accordance with how their father raised them, the pain isn’t gone.

“What’s wrong, pebble?” Jason is the first to react and squeeze my hand. His action forces me to look at him, and he growls. “Are you in pain? Can we get you anything?”

Joey is already up and running to get me some water as John stretches and tells us he's going to get food. "You...you don't have to do this. Just leave me here and let me wallow in my pity." I'm miserable, and it's silly.

"You were thinking about Jasper and Boris, weren't you?" There's an edge to his voice, and I know I should try to assuage his thoughts.

But I'm not a liar.

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“Yes.” Closing my eyes, I know I’m going to forgive him. While Jason could have chosen not to do what he had done, his father coerced him. I must believe that.

“Tell me how to make it right, pebble. Please.” He’s begging me. I blink and look at him, wondering why he would do that.

“I told you I forgave you all yesterday. My words are my bond.”

“But it still hurts you.” He moves to the side of the bed, sitting right next to me, bent over, and holding my face so I’ve no way to look away.

“Pain like that doesn’t go away. Even with time, the wound is still there. Sure, it’s softened and doesn’t hurt as often, but it’s always with you.”

Jason leans down and kisses me gently on the lips. “Tell me how to make it right.”

My heart beats too fast, and my head swims. It’s all too much right now to take in. But I do. I have to because Jason is looking at me, panicked and unhinged.

“Stay with me.” I’m not sure that’s what he thought I was going to say.

“What do you mean, stay with you?” He kisses down my throat, and I moan. I’m hurting physically for him, but my body needs time to heal. “You think you are getting rid of me?”

A laugh escapes me, and I shake my head. “And if I want to leave, are you going to let me?”

“Fuck that. You’re mine, pebble. I’m not sure you understand. This house is just brick and wood without you. This body is nothing but meat and bones without your love. So, if you think I’m letting your old ass leave me, you got another thing coming.”

“After all that, you’re calling my ass old?” Growling at him seems to make him smile.

“You are old, but you’re my old pebble. I wouldn’t have it any other way.” He crawls over my body and lies down next to me. “Can you be happy with me?”

The vulnerability in that question makes me cry again. “Yes. I forgave you and your brothers. Don’t leave me and be in my life until we all die. That will make me happy.”

“Good, because I wasn’t really giving you a choice.” He slowly moves his arm around my midriff, and I tremble in his arms. “As soon as the doctor tells me I can fuck you again, I’m going to wear you out.”

“Of course, you’d be thinking about sex.” He rubs his jean-clad dick along my thigh, and he growls in my ears.

Licking my earlobe, he mumbles, “I’m a guy, pebble. I’m always thinking about sex.”

Rolling my eyes, I lick his bottom lip. “Well, at least you are honest about it.”

“Am I interrupting?” Joey asks, his hands full of water bottles.

“Just making sure Crucinda understands our arrangement.” Jason plays with my hair, twirling it in his fingers. “Isn’t that right, pebble?”

“Yeah, yeah. Hostage... Never going to be let go...blah blah blah...” Joey drops the water bottles on the bed and looks at Jason.

“You can’t keep her locked up.”

John comes in at that moment and squints his eyes. “Who’s locking who up?”

Jason laughs so hard; he shakes me and the bed. “No one, guys. She’s being sarcastic. You guys will see it soon enough. Crucinda has a mouth on her.”

“I do not.”

I totally do.

“Don’t give these guys false information about me. Is that some more of your oatmeal, John?”

“Yes, ma’am. Here, let Jason help you eat it. It’s too hot for you to hold.” John brings the bowl over to where Jason is sitting and hands it to him. He walks back over and takes the chair to the right of me while Joey sits on the end of the bed and passes out water.

“We hear you have a fashion show in a week,” John says carefully, trying not to upset her any further.

“I do, but I need to cancel it. In fact, Jason, you can do that for me. Call my assistant and make sure they cancel all scheduled items for at least a month.”

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“Would you like me to bring your assistant here?” Jason puts the spoon to my mouth, and I take the food. Seriously, I am going to have to ask John what he puts in the oatmeal. It’s like nothing I’ve ever tasted before.

“No. She’s at the corporate office and would never come to the woods.”

Jason’s chuckle is sinister, and I look at him sternly. “Don’t even think about it.”

“Damn, all I did was chuckle.” He feeds me another spoonful of deliciousness, and I moan.

Swallowing my food, I point a finger at him. “I know that chuckle. It’s the ‘I’m about to do bad things’ chuckle.”

“She has you there, brother,” Joey says and winks at me. I smile and John sighs.

“We could talk to her, Crucinda. You need to have some normalcy, even if Jason doesn’t like it.”

Jason flips John off, and John smirks. “He has a point, pebble. You let us know if you want your assistant, we will get her.”

“I’m good for now. If you have a computer, I’ll give you my login information so you can get my phone numbers. Don’t ask me if I know her number; I don’t.”

“That’s what phones are for, keeping the information we forget,” Joey says as he shrugs.

Jason teases my lips with the spoon, and I whimper, opening my mouth for him. “Joey is going back to his post tomorrow. We will not have him AWOL. John needs to take care of some personal business. I’m going to be here to take care of you. No matter what you need, I’ll make it happen.”

Epilogue

Six months later

Peering at Crucinda, I get lost in the way she moves. It took her almost two months to fully heal from her wounds. That didn’t stop her, though. The woman is a damn machine. In bed, every day from eight in the morning until two in the afternoon, she would work remotely, getting things ready for the next show.

Joey writes to us weekly from his post, and pebble sends him care packages. It’s something she loves doing, which is why I can’t seem to tell her he doesn’t need anything. John moved a mile away from us on a farm where Crucinda has moved all her animals. He has become the caretaker, which seems to fit him. I’ve never seen him enjoy anything like he does when he’s taking care of those animals.

Taking over Jasper’s job has been challenging. It’s wrong of me to enjoy doing it and be jealous that he got to do it for so long. I keep that shit to myself, though. It would devastate Crucinda to know I am jealous of someone who is dead and was so close to her.

I focus on what I’m supposed to be doing—ordering swatches of fabric for some kind of suit that I don’t understand at all. But it’s for pebble, and she said as soon as the swatch was here, I’d understand why this fabric would be the final touch to her new theme.

“Hey, hon,” Crucinda says as she limps into the kitchen, where I’m cursing the form

I'm filling out. Guilt rides through me, knowing she may limp for the rest of her life. Just watching her have trouble like she does makes me want to bring my father back to life and kill him all over again.

"Hey, pebble. What are you doing?" She sits on the stool next to me, looks at the form, and laughs.

"You know you can hit the button up top and change it to English, right?" She smiles so sweetly at me, like I should have known this, but says nothing to make me feel stupid.

"No," I growl and hit the button. Sure enough, the website quickly goes from Italian to English, and I sigh. "For fuck's sake, I could have used that an hour ago."

Her chuckle calms me down as she pulls the laptop toward her. "Hey, no. I'm doing this. It's my job, damn it."

"Honey, it's alright. I got it. You do so much for me." She kisses me, and I watch her fingers fly across the keys to order that damn fabric. I feel like a damn failure, but she looks at me. "Get out of your head."

"Well, yes, ma'am." I salute her, and she giggles.

"I love you." She gasps as she says and, at my look of shock, goes pale.

"You what?" The words come out in a whisper, and she looks down.

"I love you." She says them again, trying to be brave, but I see her hands twisting around one another.

"Thank God." Her head pops up, and I smile at her. "I've been wondering how to tell

you that the feelings I have for you are much deeper than family.”

“Much deeper.” She breathes against my lips as she licks her way into my mouth.

“Fuck, pebble, I’ve been waiting to hear you say it.” Picking her up, I carry her to the couch.

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Laying her down, I go with her. “You do not know how glad I am that I don’t have to tie your ass up and torture you to hear you say you love me.”

“Well, you’ve been torturing me every day by not saying them yourself.”

“I’m sorry, pebble. I will shower you with lots of love every day. It seems I haven’t been as straightforward with my feelings as I thought I had been.”

She runs her hands along my face, and I reach down, kissing her scar. Every single fucking inch of it as I run my hands along her body, wanting her to know how much I need her.

“Are you going to make love to me now?”

She sounds needy.

Just like I like her.

“Does my sweet pebble need my dick?” I tease her, and she wraps her legs around my hips, enclosing me to her.

“Yes. You’ve been a tease for far too long.”

“We had sex three hours ago.” I chuckle and she pouts.

“Too long.” She mumbles and pushes my shirt up so she can scratch her fingernails down my skin. I close my eyes and moan as I move my hands further down to find

she's bare for me.

"Naughty, pebble. Look at you going without underwear." Her hand reaches my zipper, and I realize just how hungry she is for me. Goddamn, I never thought I'd see her be as frantic to have me as I am for her.

Boy, was I wrong.

Her hand strokes my cock, and I shiver with the intensity of her touching me. "Harder, pebble."

Crucinda smiles up at me and shakes her head. "No."

"Oh, such a naughty word. You know better than to tell me no." I take her legs from my waist and flip her over. She squeals, and I know exactly why she told me no. "You want me to fuck you doggy style, don't you, pebble?"

"Yes. Please." Ah, that magic word is like a fucking key turning my madness loose. Sometimes, I can control how I feel about Crucinda and let her have some time to herself. Other days, I don't let her out of my sight, and I fuck her every few hours. Today seems to be the day she can't stand to be away from me, and that wrecks me so damn good.

Grabbing her hips, I see the red handprint I left this morning, and I smack it again. "More, Jason. More." My pebble has learned that she gets so much more when she begs and isn't so hard-pressed to let me hear her whiny tone.

"That's my good little whore. Beg me some more." I slap her ass, embedding to her that her being my whore gets her good things. Things like the diamond ring in my back pocket.

"Yours. All yours." She mutters to herself, lost in the passion as I push my cock deep

into her hot, wet, and ready pussy.

“Goddamn right, you are all mine. I’m yours too, pebble, forever.” Moving faster, I reach around her upturned hips and touch her clit.

“That’s it, squeeze my cock. Let me feel how much you want me to own you.” She whimpers, moans, and pushes her hips back into me. Oh yeah, she’s lost, just like I am. We are wild and freaky for making each other have an orgasm.

“Jase!” She screams my name as I pinch her clit, sending her over the edge. “Oh, Jase... Jase... Jase.”

Taking my hand from her clit, I rub it along her urethra hole, and she bucks so violently back into me as she clenches her silken flesh around my cock. “Fuck, Crucinda.” I moan as I thrust one last time into her, balls deep, and release myself into her.

Falling forward against her, she flattens out onto the couch and whimpers my name over and over until I feel the last wave of her pleasure recede. “That’s my good, pebble. Such a good little whore for your Master.”

She chuckles, and I turn us so we are on our sides. Keeping my arms around her, I whisper in her ear. “Pebble, you are going to be my wife, and I’m going to make you the happiest woman if it’s the last thing I do.”

“Well, you kind of have to ask me first.” She smarts off to me, and I slap her thigh.

“No.” That’s all I say before I pull the ring from my back pocket and slip it onto her ring finger. “Wife.”

Crucinda looks at the ring and then back at me. “Husband.”

My heart snaps, and I hug her. Life will never be the same, but that's perfectly fine with me. That means I have what I want. My pebble, forever.

The End