



Deceit of the Stepbrothers (2 Wicked Stepbrothers 1 Innocent Girl 2)

Author: *Stephanie Brother*

Category: Erotic, Romance, Adult, Young Adult

Description: "Two brothers.

One is light, the other is dark.

They both want me for all the wrong reasons.

They both love me.

And I love both of them."

Emme Ford is in love with her stepbrother Blane. It's wrong in so many ways, but when she gives herself to him, she knows it can't be dirty and forbidden, when it feels so good. But what happens when Blane's twin brother, Aiden, reveals Blane's true dark intentions?

Innocent Emme doesn't know who to believe - Aiden, who has been her best friend since they were both children, or Blane, who has held her heart for years without even knowing it. As the truth comes out, Emme is caught in a whirlwind of lies and sex. Enveloped in the twins' lies, the love she feels for both of her stepbrothers blurs the lines of what's right and what's wrong.

Torn between love, lust and forbidden feelings, Emme has to decide which brother to trust and in the end, which one to choose ...

Sins of the Stepbrothers is the second in a four-part series about forbidden love, dark desires and bad intentions. Look out for part three, Lies of the Stepbrothers, out in March.

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Prologue

I am torn, being pulled in half by the decisions I've made, the feelings I have for two forbidden men, both of them my stepbrothers.

I am only 21 and I have gone through so many bad things, I wonder how I haven't succumbed to the dark side yet. My name is Emme Ford and I am going to break in half.

"You fucker," Aiden murmurs into his brother's ear, as I scream my head off. He has his hands wrapped around Blane's throat. "You stupid fucker."

Two brothers.

One is light, the other is dark.

They both want me for all the wrong reasons.

They both love me.

And I love both of them.

As I lie in one of the brother's arms, I wonder about the other. Because this is how it has always been with us – The Rule of Three, not one, not two. Always Blane, Aiden and Emme. Always.

We lost our footing for a little while, wandered around broken without each other.

But it is only now that I am realizing maybe two is better than three.

Maybe one needs to be left alone to wander my himself, not in the other two's company.

Maybe, the last one is so broken the two cannot help him.

And even though it breaks me to know this, I know I can only choose one brother.

I replay the events of the last month in my head as my heart beats wildly in my chest, wrapped in the arms of one man I never want to lose. But to keep him is to lose another.

I am an orphan, my parents gone.

All I have left are my two stepbrothers, and I know now my love for both of them will tear us apart. Just like yesterday, when the twins had their first fight because of me. They would kill each other for me. One for love, the other for revenge.

I think of Blane.

Sweet, strong, reliable Blane.

Blane, who lied to me, betrayed me, hurt me, took advantage of me.

Blane, who claimed he loved me all the while breaking my heart.

Blane, who promised me he's had feelings for me since we were both teenagers, but only managed to confess how he felt when he found it would benefit him.

I think of Aiden.

Crazy, wild, laughing Aiden.

Aiden, who has been my best friend since the day I met him. Who comforted me, loved me, even when his brother did not. Who always stood by my side, and protected me.

Aiden, who I knew in some part of my brain has been in love with me for the past few years, but never did anything about it.

Aiden, whom I denied because of his brother, because I was lost in the lie.

I look at my stepbrother lying next to me. They're so alike, they look just like each other. Sometimes it's hard for me to differentiate between the two, and just for a moment, I let myself believe they've morphed into one person, so I don't have to choose.

But staring at the man in my bed, I know I've made my choice.

Whether I chose the right brother, I'll never know. But there's still time to change my mind ...

I can choose a life of happiness and a nagging in the back of my head, or a life of danger, living on the edge, always afraid for my life, but blissfully happy in those rare moments when the sun shines through the clouds.

Both decisions will make me happy.

Both will destroy me.

I am lost.

Chapter 1

I'm screaming.

I run after them, holding a shaking hand before my mouth and screaming my head off, because I have no idea what else to do.

Aiden's throttled Blane, sitting on top of him and holding his throat in such a tight grip I'm scared he'll cut off his supply of air. I stumble forward and try to pull Aiden off his brother.

"Aiden, stop!" I scream at him, but I can tell he's completely out of it. All he can think of is hurting the man beneath him, his own twin brother. But as I look at Blane on the floor, I can immediately tell he's not fighting. He could push Aiden off easily, I'm sure of it – even though they're twins, Blane's build is more muscular, stronger.

"Blane," I whisper. He doesn't respond, but his face is turning a strange blue colour. "Blane!" I yell louder, and finally his gaze stops on my eyes. I see so much there it chokes me up.

This man just admitted he loved me, took my virginity, and is now being strangled by his twin brother. I'm so scared for both of them, my heart thumping wildly in my chest.

Finally, Blane pushes Aiden off.

Aiden stumbles and Blane coughs and coughs and coughs. And I just stand there, hyperventillating, feeling useless.

In a moment of clarity, I rush towards Blane, cradling him in my arms.

“Are you okay?” I whisper, and I’m shaking again. He nods, but he won’t look at me. Won’t talk to me. “What the hell?!” I scream in Aiden’s general direction.

He smirks at me as I focus on Blane, but neither of them meet my eye.

“What is this all about?” I demand, feeling shocked and confused. In all the time I’ve known them, I’ve never seen Aiden and Blane fight.

“Tell her, Blane,” Aiden says viciously and Blane tenses in my arms.

“Tell me what?” I want to know.

“It’s nothing,” Blane murmurs.

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“Then you don’t mind if I tell her?” Aiden taunts him and like a shooting arrow, Blane bursts from my embrace and tackles his brother. He’s got him in a grip, but as if he changed his mind suddenly, he lets go and steps to the side. “Coward,” Aiden spits out.

Beat.

Beat.

Beat.

“Tell me what?” I repeat again, but this time, my voice shakes. Because this time, I’m pretty sure it won’t end well.

“Blane wanted to seduce you to get the money,” Aiden says, his voice dripping with venom. “I tried to stop him, but he never told me you two ... were seeing each other.”

My jaw drops and I just stare and stare at my other stepbrother.

“What do you mean?” I ask, my voice trembling.

“He wants the inheritance,” Aiden explains. “He thinks it should be ours, too. So he decided the best way to get it was to get you.”

I’m going to break.

“It is what it is, Emme,” Aiden sighs, and finally I look at Blane.

I look at the man I've loved since I was a child, the man who just took my virginity and in the same breath, admitted he loved me too. I was too weak to say it, but I felt the same in that moment.

But now?

Now it feels like I'm breaking.

Fa

lling.

Crashing.

"Get out," I whisper.

"Emme ..." Blane reaches for me.

"Get out, now," I say softly.

I think what hurts the most is that I'm not even able to scream at him. I can't even raise my voice, because it hurts so bad I think I will break down if I so much as look at him.

But I'm wrong, because I experience a whole new level of pain when he walks away.

Doesn't stop to comfort me.

Doesn't think to apologize.

And then I crumble, and just when I'm about to hit the floor, Aiden catches me in his

arms and I melt into his embrace as the tears come.

Chapter 2

Aiden stays with me all night. He holds me as I cry over his brother.

I lick my wounds, Blane pours the salt.

He doesn't call, doesn't text, doesn't even shoot me a Facebook message.

I guess he got what he wanted from me, and now he's done.

I should have known. How did I not figure it out?

I retreat to the safety that is Aiden. He always has been my solid rock, and in this past year when we lost touch, I felt so lost. I tried to find that with Blane, which I'm only realizing now. But all he wanted was to use me, take me, and then my money, too.

I'm slumped on the couch and Aiden is holding me, stroking my hair softly. The tears have all dried up now, but I'm still whimpering with the pain, because it hurts so fucking bad.

"You have to talk sometime," Aiden says softly and I curl into a ball in his arms, refusing to acknowledge what he said. "Shhh," he says as I whimper again. "Just tell me what happened. It will make you feel better."

I'm hesitant, because after all, it's his brother we're talking about. But I need to tell someone, need to pour my pain out of my body, because otherwise, I might just drown in it.

"We've been ..." I sniffle. Aiden squeezes me closer and I go on, feeling encouraged.

“We kissed. Remember when I came to your place for lunch?”

His body tenses and I can feel his hands trying hard not to form into fists. “Did he kiss you?”

“I don’t know,” I lie.

We lie still for a while, the only sound that of my ragged breathing. But then Aiden grabs me by the shoulders all of a sudden, making me face him.

“I need to know,” he says, his voice breaking over the words painfully. “Was he ...”

I know what he’s going to ask, but it doesn’t hurt any less knowing what words are going to come out of his mouth.

“Was he your first?” Aiden wants to know.

I look him in the eyes and I think of my blissful happiness only hours ago. Think of the sticky, wet feeling between my legs, where his cum marked me.

I nod, and I don’t break eye contact.

This is my shame.

Aiden moans.

This is his pain.

“Did you use protection?” Aiden finally asks.

“I didn’t even think about that,” I answer truthfully. “It was ... my first time.”

Aiden gets up suddenly and I move away when he runs his hands through his air, cursing out loud. “That fucker,” he says quietly, but with such rage it scares me to the bone. “That bastard.”

“It’s okay,” I whisper, scooting to the edge of the couch. “It will be okay, right?” I need him to nod, need him to say it will, because otherwise, I will break right now.

He just looks at me blankly.

So it is that I find myself in a pharmacy at 3 in the morning, where I utter my shame. Ask for the morning pill. Feel the love, the life, everything leak out of me.

Aiden hands me a glass of water back at home.

He tips my chin backwards and makes me swallow the pill.

He holds me while I cry until I’m all dried up.

And the call never comes.

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Chapter 3

5 years ago

“Are we going or what?” Aiden asks impatiently, smacking me on the butt.

I glare at him to make him stop, which means I nearly gauge my left eye out with the mascara wand I’m holding in my hand. The incident resolves with a black smudge over the left side of my face and I gasp. “Aiden!” I say with a raised voice. “Look what you’ve done. Now I have to start over!”

Aiden snickers and I shoot him a look, but end up convulsing in giggles right along with him. I look like some kind of tribal warrior with war paint on.

“I’ll leave you to your girl stuff,” Aiden finally resigns and gets up from behind me, heading for the door. “I’ll be somewhere downstairs, find me when you’re ready.”

“Yes dear,” I say mockingly and stick my tongue out at him, but he just laughs and leaves me to my own devices.

I’m smiling as I reach for a cotton pad and makeup remover, spilling the liquid on the pad and smudging my makeup even further as I try to remove it. Aiden and I are going to the movies, and once more, I’m thankful he decided – unlike Blane – to say close to home when he went to college. I have no idea what I’d do without his daily visits.

I finally manage to take all of my makeup off and I toss the black streaked pad into

the trash. I sigh and try once again to make myself look presentable.

Mascara first, and this time, I don't fail so badly. My eyelashes are a little clumpy, and I'm not happy when I look into the mirror.

Staring back at me is a willowy blonde, too tall, with awkward long limbs. But I have a pretty face – and I'm told that at every corner, so I've started to believe it myself. And I guess I am pretty, if you have a thing for too big eyes, too full lips, and a too small nose. I smirk at myself, but end up hopefully staring at my chest.

I'm flat as a board.

Mom says eventually they'll grow. I'll be a late bloomer, just like her.

But that isn't much consolation when you're 16 and you start gaining an interest in the other sex.

I blush at the mere word and shake my head to get rid of the thoughts, scrambling in my drawer to find some rouge.

I layer some on my lips and finally, I'm satisfied with my appearance. I get up and reach for my favorite fragrance – a gift from my stepfather. It's made in Grasse in France, custom to my liking, and it's probably my favorite object I own.

I spray it on myself and inhale the well-known, beautiful scent.

I imagine him kissing me on the spot where I just sprayed it. Imagine a world where we could be together, where that would be acceptable. Whisper his name softly.

“Blane ...”

I'm so afraid someone will hear me I actually clamp a hand over my mouth, looking around in panic. But there's no one here – no one but me knows about my dirty, forbidden crush.

And it better stay that way.

Finally, I grab my purse and head for the door.

Aiden is waiting for me.

Aiden is nowhere to be found.

I've been to the kitchen, living room, and the lounge, and he's just nowhere.

So I finally head to the garage, thinking he might be admiring his new car, as he so often does.

But when I come to the polished white doors, I hear laughter from the inside. And it belongs to a woman. I grit my teeth, because I hate seeing the girls Aiden likes to hang out with. They're always jealous of me – which I find pretty much ridiculous, since he's my brother. Though if we were talking about his twin ...

I blush violently and realize I shouldn't intrude, but nonetheless find myself pressed to the wall, peeking into the garage.

And it's not Aiden in there with a pretty brunette.

It's his brother, the very object of my fantasies.

I gasp ever so quietly and lower my eyes.

But I can try all I want, they keep escaping to the scene only a few feet away from me.

I'm in a storage room that leads to the garage. And they're in there, with Blane's car parked in Mom's usual space, like he owns the place. I gri

t my teeth. He thinks he's all that ...

I want to march out right away and give him a piece of my mind, but I know right away I don't have the guts. Instead, I just stare at them.

She's on the hood of his car, and his hands are all over her.

She's moaning, giggling, saying his name over and over again.

I focus my eyes on what's happening. She's wearing a skirt, but he slides it over her legs until it lands in a heap at their feet. My heartbeat quickens.

He reaches for her hair, pulling out the elastic that is holding her brown locks in place, and her silky waves tumble down her back as he undoes her ponytail.

Her shirt is next, and he unbuttons it so slowly I moan right along with the girl, eager to see more, feel more, pretend she's me and those moans are coming from my body.

My hand finds its way between my legs and I push away the fabric of my summer dress, pushing my fingers against the panties I'm wearing as I keep watching. I've never done this before, never pleased myself. I always thought it was wrong somehow ... But now I can't seem to resist.

He's finally done with her shirt and it ends up with the skirt on the floor. He unclasps her bra and her breasts spring free, full and so unlike mine.

"Blane," she whispers just loud enough for me to hear and I push my panties aside, gasping as I enter my own body. This is so wrong, but it's so fucking hot ...

She puts her legs around his body and I can see him fumbling with his zipper, but try as I might, I don't see anything other than his hands guiding himself into the girl. She curses out loud and I lick my lips expectantly, all the while imagining that's me on the hood of the car.

My stepbrother is moving inside her now, clutching her with both hands as she writhes and moans, and my fingers are strumming my clit even harder. I'm just about to come, but I can't, not without seeing his face when he does.

Blane fucks the girl and I fuck myself, and I can see from his expression he'll be there soon.

"Fuck," he moans against her chest. "Fuck, Emme."

Suddenly, the world stands still.

Did I just hear that right?

My finger comes out of my pussy, my first orgasm forgotten before it even happened. Instead, I just stare and stare at them.

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The girl just came, I'm pretty sure, but something seems wrong. Between her moans, she's glaring at Blane. "Emme?" she asks furiously. "As in, your little stepsister, Emme?"

Blane is quiet. The girl pushes him off violently, and I'm sure he could have stopped her, but he just lets her. She picks up her clothes, humiliated and throws him a disgusted look.

"You could have at least called me by another name, you sick fuck," she spits out at him, and then she storms out of the garage, while I stare with my mouth open.

What just happened?

Before I have time to think, Blane raises his gaze and his eyes meet mine.

Fuck, fuck, fuck.

I turn around and try to run off, but he reaches me in two seconds, grabbing my hair and pulling me back. It hurts and I yelp with pain.

"Let go of me," I say angrily.

He doesn't, instead he uses his free hand to turn me around so I'm facing him, his other hand still tangled in my blonde mass of hair.

"How long have you been standing there?" he demands, and I blush like a beet.

“Long enough,” I reply, not sure why I’m being such a brat.

He just stares at me, hard. I don’t know why, but I can’t seem to look away.

“Emme ...” he starts softly, and I’ve never heard him use this voice on me. He’s always rough, never paying me any mind, like I’m a portrait on the wall he’s not particularly fond of.

“Leave me alone,” I whimper, and then I do something I regret in a split second. “You’re sick to the bone. Let go of me.”

Just like that, his hands, his beautiful, strong hands, are off me. And we keep staring at each other, contemplating what just happened.

I just accused him of being a pervert, when all I want is those hands back on me.

But it’s so wrong. Forbidden. It can never happen.

And as he turns around and leaves abruptly, I know I’ve ended this between us before it even started. Even though it breaks me in half to know that, I know it needed to be done.

Because Blane and Emme?

They can never be.

In a daze, I finally find Aiden in the driveway, the car already running in the front.

“Took you long enough,” he moans as I make my way to the car, but I refuse to look

at him. He looks too much like Blane ...

“Let’s go, babydoll,” he says as we sit in the front and he revvs up the engine. And all I can think about is Blane fucking that girl while I wished it was me on the hood of that car ...

Chapter 4

Surprisingly, life goes on.

Slowly, painfully, but it moves forward, without a single call from Blane.

I spend a lot of time with Aiden, to the point where he’s practically living with me. He’s so sweet, so worried, always next to me, holding me when I cry, consoling me when I feel like I might break in half.

Today we’re in my living room, because I’m refusing to leave the house. It just feels safe here, even though some might think I’m a little bit morbid for staying in the place that housed too much pain, so many people who aren’t here any more.

Aiden’s stretched out on the couch, playing some kind of violent video game, as I’m engrossed in my book.

I’ve always been a big reader, ever since I was a child. It’s just easier to get lost in the world of fiction sometimes – when it all gets to be too much ...

“Aiden,” I ask softly, closing the finished book with a thud.

“Yep,” he responds, his eyebrows knitted together in concentration. He can see I’m hesitating, and I’m surprised when he puts down his controller and focuses his attention on me. When did he start caring? I wonder. Sure, we were always close, but

I never thought he would treat me like this ...

“Tell me,” he says and offers a nice, albeit a little impatient smile, his eyes flickering back to the TV screen where his game is paused.

“Well,” I begin nervously. What I’m about to suggest would send Blane in a rage a few weeks ago, and while I’ve offered before, I’m not sure how Aiden will accept my proposition. “You’ve been staying with friends now for how long?”

“A few weeks,” Aiden answers non-committally. “You know I can’t go back there. Not now that I know what he wanted to do with you.”

I nod slowly. He refuses to talk to Blane, and while I understand, I feel awful for breaking their bond. They used to be thick as thieves, and now it’s all gone to hell because of me.

And I can’t help it, but I don’t share Aiden’s sentiment. Every time the phone rings, I still wish it was him ...

“You know I appreciate it,” I say sincerely, and we share a secretive smile. It’s always been like this between me and Aiden – like we were actual siblings, not just related by marriage. We just click.

“Well, I was thinking,” I finally say, offering a shy smile. “You’ve been here a lot, right? I thought ... maybe you’d be more comfortable if you stayed here for a while?”

This is the moment of truth and my eyes are glued to my stepbrother’s face, searching for answers. I’ve wanted them both in this house since everything with the inheritance went down, but Blane outright refused to even discuss it. He was bitter about losing all the money, and too proud to let me help him.

But Aiden ...

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His forehead is creased, but I can tell he's considering the possibility of what I've offered him.

"No pressure," I say softly. "It's just that I'd like some company." And family needs to stick together. What's left of it, anyway, a painful thought reminds me.

He looks up at me and I can see him considering his options. I know he's been sleeping on couches, skipping classes, just so he could spend time with me. And I want to help. All I've ever wanted was to help them.

"Okay," he says quietly and my heart skips a beat. "I'll stay here for a while."

I can't help it – I rush from my side of the couch and envelop him in a bear hug. "Thank you," I say sincerely, and for once in the past few weeks, I'm genuinely happy. We're what's left of this broken family, and we'll carry on the legacy.

With or without Blane.

Chapter 5

It's a few days later and I'm fast asleep when I hear a commotion outside.

Sleepily, I get up from my queen-sized bed and push the silk sheets off of me. My eyes are bleary and I feel so sleepy I can barely stand, but as I get up, the noises get even louder, even more aggressive.

I quickly grab my robe from the closet and wrap myself in its silky softness before

softly opening the door and emerging into the hallway.

As I'm making my way down the stairs, Aiden's door opens with a thud and we exchange sleepy, confused glances.

He's been here for a few days, and I'm so thankful. I don't have to stay in the enormous house all alone and it's probably the first time in a year and a half that I've had a few peaceful nights of sleep, instead of waking up every half an hour, plagued by nightmares.

It's always the same – a masked man has me tied up, torturing me. I never see his face.

I focus on Aiden.

“What's going on?” he asks me, ruffling his dark hair with his hand. He looks disoriented, and I do too, I'm sure – so we make our way down the stairwell together, and the banging and yelling gets louder and louder.

“What is that?” I wonder out loud as we come to the front door. “Sounds like we're being attacked by Vikings.”

Aiden smirks and steps in front of me protectively before reaching for the door knob. I can't help but smile, because he still treats me like I need protection – and honestly, I love it.

He flings the door open and is immediately tackled by his brother.

It's a repeat of the scene from a few weeks ago. Blane and Aiden fighting as I scream my head off in terror.

But this time, it's not Aiden who's got the upper hand.

Blane is driven by r

age, and he hits him so hard blood spurts my soft pink silk robe.

I scream.

"Get out!" I yell at Blane, tears already obscuring my vision. "You have no right to be here. None! Just leave, right now!"

He looks at me. He actually has the nerve to look me in the eye.

"So he lives here now?" he asks bitterly, stepping closer to me as I shiver from the night's breeze coming in through the still open door. "You should be careful who you trust, Emme," he snarls.

And it's so wrong, but all I want is for him to take me into his arms and carry me away from all this ugliness that he's caused. Take me away, comfort me, kiss it all better.

Because if he's done it once, he can surely do it again, right?

"I agree," I say coldly. "My judgement must be impaired, because for a while, I thought you were trustworthy." I can see my words hurt him, because he steps back. Aiden is moaning on the floor, wiping away the blood from his face, dealt by Blane's blow.

"Leave, Blane," I say softly, the tears pricking my eyes.

He doesn't move.

I step closer. “Didn’t you hear me?” I poke a finger into his chest and even though it’s meant to be a threatening gesture, it still feels me with so much need, so much wanting. “Just leave us alone. You’ve hurt me, you’ve hurt your brother. You’re not welcome here.”

I move my hand away from him and press it to my chest. “You’re not welcome here, either,” I whisper softly, and as soon as the words are out, the silence that follows is deafening.

Blane stares at me hard, as if wishing I’d take the words back, but I’m standing my ground this time. He can’t just barge in and hurt us like this. He’s done enough.

Finally, he turns around, tucks his hands in the pockets of his coat and walks away. My eyes are on him until he rounds the corner, and only Aiden’s cry of pain reminds me I have other priorities now.

So I kneel down next to me stepbrother. I clean his wound, ask him to get stitches for his lip, try to convince him it’s necessary as he refuses time and time again.

I tuck him in and I even sleep next to him, because I’m too afraid, too broken to be by myself.

That night, the nightmares come back in full form.

But this time, the man who is torturing me isn’t wearing a mask. He has that familiar face, the well-known dark mess of hair, those steely eyes.

The problem is this – I don’t know whether my tormentor is Aiden or Blane ...

Chapter 6

2 years ago

It's my nineteenth birthday. There's cake. There's a party. There are presents.

Yet I'm sitting on the floor in my closet, bawling my eyes out.

I know they're looking for me, but I'm too upset to let anyone know I'm hiding from my own friends. And it's all because of Blane, just like it always is.

Because he didn't show up. He didn't even have enough sense to come to his own stepsister's party, and once again, I feel like he's pushing me away right along with the rest of the family.

"Emme?" I hear someone call out and I whimper, not sure whether I want them to find me or leave me alone in my misery. I know it's stupid I'm this upset over one person, especially when everyone else has been trying so hard to make this day special for me. But still, as my tears fall, I can't help but feel sorry for myself – all the while knowing my anger should be directed at my stepbrother.

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“Emme?” someone repeats and the door to the closet creaks as I look up, panicked.

And here is the face I most want to see – steel grey eyes, dark hair, muscular build. Those lips, saying my name like it’s the most important thing in the world.

But there are two people with that face, two people with that voice.

And right now, I don’t want Aiden. I want Blane. Only Blane.

“Oh, Emme,” Aiden sighs, making his way to where I’m slumped on the floor. He sits down next to me and cradles me in his arms as I sob pathetically. “You have to stop getting so upset over the smallest things,” he says softly, stroking my hair.

“I know,” I whimper. “But it’s ... it’s my birthday.”

We were always together on our birthday. Had birthday cake, celebrated. This is the first year Blane missed it, and even though we’ve been growing distant for years, it still hurts like hell.

“It’s okay,” Aiden comforts me. I look up at him gratefully, thankful for having him at least. He’s always there to make me feel better, always making up for his brother’s absence.

But this time, the Blane shaped hole in my heart just won’t go away.

“Here,” Aiden says with a mysterious smile. He produces a bottle of vodka from God knows where and I stare at him with surprise.

“I’m nineteen, remember?” I ask him, raising my eyebrows.

“Whatever,” Aiden says. “Better you have your first drink with me than someone else. I’ll take care of you, you know that, right Emme?”

I nod, because I trust him – always.

He opens the bottle and we proceed to get mind-blowingly drunk right there, on the floor of my closet. I forget all about Blane – or at least pretend to – and have a blast pretending to be sober when we return to the party, greeting guests and ignoring my mother and stepfather’s worried glances.

Aiden’s next to me the whole time. Like he always is.

I have a great birthday.

When it starts getting late, we hear a car honking in the driveway, and moments later, the front door flies open and in comes the guest of honor – Blane himself.

My heart hitches in my chest and pummels to the ground when I see a brunette draped over his arm.

It’s not the one from the garage all those years ago.

It’s a new model, complete with fake tits that make me insanely jealous and angry at the same time.

“Where’s the birthday girl?” Blane asks with a wide smile and I step forward as everyone looks on happily, some people even clapping, glad he showed up.

It’s only when he comes closer that I smell his breath – and it reeks of booze. Blane

stares at me, hard. Doesn't offer a birthday kiss, not even a friendly hug. Instead, he thrusts a box in my hands and I inspect it while he moves away.

It's all torn and the edges are coming apart, but it means so fucking much, because he remembered. He didn't forget about me. He's here, and he cares.

I smile widely at him and Blane smirks, holding the brunette close.

"Open it," he encourages me.

And just for a moment, I forget he's late, forget he's clutching another woman close, forget he's probably drunk out of his mind. I let myself be blissfully happy.

As soon as I open the box, I realize my mistake.

"What have you got there, honey?" my mother asks and steps closer.

I'm in too much shock to respond or hide what's in the box.

My mother pulls out a bottle of tequila and an enormous purple dildo.

"Thought you might want to have some fun," Blane smirks. "Didn't think you'd get laid anytime soon, so I got you a little toy. And the booze is for drinking your pain away, little sis."

His voice cuts into my heart and I whimper again.

This is different than the alcohol I shared with Aiden.

This isn't meant to comfort me.

All he wants is to hurt me.

The room is silent as my heart breaks again, and when my stepfather throws Blane out, I'm already numb. I only let myself cry that night in Aiden's arms, which is always where I end up.

Chapter 7

Our days pass. Not slowly and not fast either. But they go by, and sometime later I realize both Aiden and I are stuck in the house.

We don't go out.

Not even to grab lunch or see a movie. We just stay inside, ordering takeout, playing games, pretending like everything's okay and this is our own little haven in the midst of all the madness.

&

nbsp; It's a week or so later after the faceoff and I've finally had enough.

One morning, I get ready and purposefully wait until midday, which is when Aiden drags himself down the stairs and sits to breakfast/lunch, his eyes bleary.

"Why are you so dressed up?" he asks with his mouth full of Lucky Charms.

"I'm going to work," I say with a purpose, and give him a smile that is way stronger than my will to actually do something. "I haven't been to the office in weeks. It's time."

Aiden just stares at me as he chews his food, and finally, he sets his spoon down. "I

wish I could go somewhere, too.”

His words surprise me.

“But you can paint,” I offer. Aiden’s always been artistic, and he’s been painting and drawing for as long as I’ve known him. He’s quite secretive about his art, but from what I’ve seen, he’s incredibly talented.

“Don’t feel like it,” he shrugs.

We sit in companionable silence when I have an amazing idea.

“You could always work at the firm,” I say hesitantly. The reason I’m a little unsure is because I’ve offered both Aiden and Blane jobs before, and they both shut me down immediately.

There’s a long, strained silence, but finally, Aiden looks up at me.

“Doing what?” he asks.

I contemplate my answer, but I suddenly have another moment of brilliance. “We’re actually going through some changes,” I say quickly, trying to get the subject out as soon as possible. “You know, trying to bring the company to this century.”

Aiden cocks his head to the side.

It’s so awkward talking to him about this – after all, his father helped my Mom build the firm. But it has to be done, we can’t tiptoe around the subject forever.

“We’re designign a new logo, a new image for the brand, that kind of stuff, you know?” I explain and Aiden nods thoughtfully. “We could definitely use someone as

artistic with you to help us with that.”

I neglect to mention our whole creative department, and when Aiden’s eyes light up for the first time in weeks, I know I’ve done the right thing.

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“Sure,” he shrugs. “I could give it a go.”

I wait for him to get ready and that day, we finally leave the house. Together.

Because we’re two now, and we have to take care of each other.

A few days later

“I mean, he’s such a prick!” Aiden exclaims, shaking his head as he laughs, opening a cabinet in the kitchen. He tosses me some Pop Tarts and I place them in the microwave, laughing at his office gossip.

“What would you do differently?” I ask him, knowing he’ll bite. He loves talking about this stuff, and I love seeing him so excited. I sit on the bar stool and drink from my glass of wine.

“Well, I wouldn’t do a shit job,” Aiden grins at me and I laugh loudly, shaking my head.

He takes the Pop Tarts out of the microwave and sits down next to me, digging in. We haven’t gotten round to cooking actual food yet, and we’re trying to sate ourselves while we wait for another batch of takeout – Indian this time around.

We chit chat about the office, and I’m surprised how fast Aiden’s managed to blend in. But then again, I really shouldn’t be as he’s always been a people person.

So unlike me ... so unlike Blane.

My chest is hit with a hard pang as I think of my stepbrother.

No matter what I do, it still fucking hurts, because he hasn't called or contacted me. He's just pretending I don't exist. Like I'm nothing to him. Like Aiden isn't his blood.

I look up, fighting back tears, and my gaze connects with Aiden's. He's staring at me hard.

"What?" I ask worriedly.

He keeps looking at me, but the corners of his mouth curl up. "Do you mind ..."

"Do I mind what?" I wonder out loud after a long pause on his end, but he looks away, like he's embarrassed. I'm suddenly intrigued. "Tell me," I beg.

He complies.

"I want to paint you," he says, looking more animated than I've seen him in ... well, years.

"Draw me like one of your French girls?" I joke around, but as soon as I see he's serious, my smile falters. "Oh," I murmur.

"Do you mind?" he repeats, and I can hear from his tone he's eager for me to say no, I don't mind at all, let's do it right now.

But for some reason, I'm hesitating. I feel like it's such an intimate thing to do, and that it's wrong somehow. But why?

Because I'm betraying Blane.

Stop it, brain, I order silently and I look up at my stepbrother, faking enthusiasm. “Sure,” I say carelessly, even though my heart is pounding in my chest, heavy with the weight of deceit. “Let’s do it.”

And I pretend it’s worth it, even though not even Aiden’s happiness can make up for the emptiness in my heart.

“How much longer,” I groan tiredly, but Aiden shushes me immediately. I sigh inwardly and cringe as I reposition my arm, the tingling in it becoming harder and harder to bear.

When I agreed to him painting me, I thought it would only be hard because I felt uncomfortable doing it. But it’s freaking annoying as well, and every part of is starting to hurt as I sit on the couch in our attic.

And that’s another thing – it’s so creepy in here. The light is coming in through the sun window, but it’s dusty and old and everything’s falling apart.

My stomach rumbles and I steal a glance at the forgotten takeout on the floor. Aiden didn’t let me have any, and I’ve never seen him this concentrated. But there’s a certain slant of his eyes that makes him look ...

Mad.

I shake my head to get the thought out.

“Would you stop moving?” he asks hurriedly, his strokes fast and angry on the canvas.

I mouth an apology and sit there for another hour or forty-eight until he finally puts down his palette and paintbrush.

“You’re done?” I ask excitedly. I get up from the couch in a rush, my robe spilling open in front of me. Embarrassed, I pull it back together, but when I look up, Aiden’s looking at me like I’m ... Prey. There’s that look again.

I rush towards the easel, but he steps in front of it protectively.

“It needs to dry,” he says sternly.

“So?” I squirm, trying to look over his shoulder, but he won’t let me. “Let me see,” I beg.

“No.”

His answer is final and I just look at him in confusion as he puts away his things, always blocking me from seeing the painting. This is so weird.

He shoves me out of the way and I stumble backward, shocked at how violent his push was. But when I want to complain, I look into his eyes, and that strange gaze he had when he painted me is gone. He’s just Aiden again, my sweet, overprotective brother.

“Let’s eat!” he says happily, grabbing my hand and pulling me towards the stairs that lead downstairs, his other hand holding the bags of our food.

I guess it was just a slant of light, I tell myself to calm down my worried nerves ...

We proceed to get drunk.

I'm not an experienced drinker and the wine hits my head pretty quickly, so in about an hour, I'm rolling on the floor in the living room, laughing my head off.

And Aiden's with me, and though he's had much more to drink than me, he's still okay, laughing his head off laughing just like I am.

"And then he said, not on my watch missy!" I manage to stay before erupting in a fit of giggles, while Aiden roars with laughter.

I never thought we'd be able to do this again. Never thought we'd laugh together, share family stories like we're doing right now. But as funny as it all is, I can't help but to look for the missing piece. The other twin. My stepbrother, my lover ...

Blane ...

My lips pout and I look at Aiden sadly. He looks into my eyes, but his gaze quickly falls down to my lips. They tremble with the moment which will be forever lost on our brother. But before I can say how I feel, Aiden's lips crush against mine, his body pinning mine to the floor.

He's on top of me, and he's kissing me hard, the stiffness between his legs demanding more, right now. I lay there in shock, my mouth partially open, my eyes boring into his. But he doesn't even notice.

He just kisses me as I lie on the floor, his mouth hot, his tongue exploring my mouth.

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And I feel ...

Nothing.

It's just as crazy.

Just as forbidden.

Just as wrong.

They're both my brothers.

But I only love one of them.

I let Aiden kiss me until he's had enough and he rolls on his back next to me, his hand finding mine. I let him murmur sweet nothings into my ear, and I nod and smile in all the right places.

But on the inside, I'm more broken than ever before.

I may kiss Aiden. I may let him touch me. I may take care of him.

But there wasn't one second, one moment while we kissed, that I didn't wish those hands he touched me with were his brother's.

Blane ...

Chapter 8

I'm rushing to work the next day. My driver stopped a few blocks away because the traffic was insane, and at this exact moment, I'm cursing every driver in the city as I stumble towards the building in my too high heels.

“Emme.”

One word.

One name.

It stops me in my tracks and I turn around, wobbling on my suddenly shaky feet.

He comes out of a side alley, his hands deep in the pockets of that coat he always wears. His head is down, his eyes hooded with tiredness, sadness, and God knows what else.

But I see right past all of that. I see my Blane.

The man who loved me like a sister, and like a woman as well.

The man who made love to me.

The man who fucked me. Literally, and figuratively.

I whimper, because he's everything and I am nothing and I can't form coherent sentences in his presence.

“Can we talk?” he asks in a husky voice.

And even though all my senses yell at me to say no, even though I know it's a bad idea, I find myself nothing.

Because the ugly truth is ...

I would do anything, give everything, for another minute of time with my stepbrother. My lover.

We settle in a booth at a coffee place not far away from my building – our building – and we order breakfast. I just go for a chai latte, because I can't picture eating anything in his presence. Even opening my mouth to order the drink seems to be giving me trouble.

Blane is silent as he drinks his tea, and my glass just sits steaming in front of me. All I can do is stare at him in wonder. I don't know why he even wants to talk – he hasn't said a word since we got here.

“So?” I ask impatiently, my words sounding harsher than I mean them to. He flinches and it hurts. It hurts so bad, and yet I can't make it better. Only he can do that.

He finally looks at me. “I came to tell you something.”

“Yes?” I ask, holding my breath, my hands crossed in my lap.

He pulls his own hands out of his pockets and I fully expect him to reach over for me. But instead, he pulls out a thick envelope and places it on the table in front of me.

I look down, feeling confused. “What's that?” I wonder.

“It’s for you.” He motions for me to take it.

I do as he suggests and peek inside the paper.

There’s money in there.

A lot of it.

“What is this?” I ask, feeling genuinely confused.

Blane refuses to meet my eye again. “I know you’re taking care of Aiden,” he says roughly. “That’s ... that’s all I have.”

He must feel my confusion, because he clears up what he meant with his next words. “Money for him,” he says. “To take care of my brother.”

And in that moment, rage boils inside me. I look at Blane, and for the first time that day, I realize he looks like shit. His eyes are tired and there’s the faint mark of a bruise on one, the remains of a lip split broken still swelling his mouth.

“You don’t think he can take care of himself?” I ask calmly, even though all I feel is anger.

“Come on, Emme,” Blane shrugs, the corners of his lips curling upwards. “It’s Aiden. Sure, he paints but ... he’s never going to make a living.”

And that makes me fucking angry, even though I have no right to be.

It drives me insane he’s giving me money, when he knows I’m loaded – at his and Aiden’s expense, no less.

It drives me crazier that he sought me out for this. Not for saying sorry. Not to try and win me back.

To give me this blood money and pretend we're done now, he's done his job.

Because that's what Blane does. He clears his conscience, and then he's gone.

Fuck family. Fuck the fact we made love, and I know he felt something, just like I did. Fuck his words telling me he loved me. Fuck it all.

I get up abruptly, the bills scattering on the floor. "Thanks, but no thanks, Blane," I say coldly, and I look him right in his broken eyes.

And there I see the hope, the unasked question, him begging me to forgive him, to make it all better. But I've been making it better all my life, and I've had enough.

Goodbye, innocent little babydoll.

Hello, ruthless vixen.

"Goodbye, Blane," I say viciously, turning around to leave. But I change my mind, turn around and place my hands on the table, looking him dead in the eyes. "Just so you know?" I say innocently. "Aiden's not so much like you."

My eyes sweep his body. "He's a better fuck than you ever will be," I seal the deal. Seal his fate.

And I don't wait around to see him break, because I'm broken enough for the both of us.

I leave with my head held high, and my heart in tatters at my feet.

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Chapter 9

I spend all day at work, and by the time it gets dark outside, I wonder how I even managed to do that. I'm shaking on the ride home, and when I get in the house, I can barely stand up.

I crumple on the bar stool in the kitchen, and I think of Aiden. He had fun at work for a few days, but the excuses are already starting to roll off his tongue. He's tired, hungover, inspired – anything to get him out of doing this.

And it fucking hurts to know there's some truth in Blane's words. Maybe he really can't take care of himself.

For some reason or another, Aiden doesn't come to look at me, and I feel more alone than ever.

But then I have a fleeting thought. I could go in the attic right now. I could look at his painting.

And somehow, that simple thought makes me feel better. Like seeing what Aiden seems me as might negate the fact that I'm a coldhearted bitch.

So I do exactly that.

I tiptoe to the attic, knowing exactly where to step from years of playing in here with my stepbrothers. The stairs don't creak and I make my way up, carefully opening the latch door when I get to it.

It lets off a tiny sound and I cringe, waiting for Aiden to come storming from his room. But nothing happens. I smile a little and finally climb up until I'm in the room.

The ceiling is slanted and it's so different than yesterday. It's dark and gloomy, and kind of scary. It gives me the chills, but I'm not about to back out now.

My eyes find Aiden's painting, which is covered with a white sheet, and I make my way over to it.

I only hesitate for a moment, knowing he would not want me looking at it. But then I tear the sheet off.

And I stare.

There I am, painted in beautiful watercolour, my hair like liquid gold, my blue eyes glowing like sapphires. But my mouth is twisted in a strange way, and so are my hands. And I'm not lying on the couch, I'm on my knees. And I'm on a leash.

I stare at the painting in horror.

Aiden's painted me with an expression of such profound sorrow and hurt, it pains me to just look at it. My robe is split down the middle, but instead of revealing my breasts, all there is is a gaping, bloody hole exposing my chest. A leash is leading from my neck to an arm which is tugging me along, and I know it's his arm.

Aiden thinks of himself like some kind of deranged puppet master.

I stare and I stare and I stare.

And then I hear his footsteps coming up to get me.

And I'm scared.

I refuse to look at Aiden when he comes in, all the while hoping he'll comfort me. We went to bed separately last night, contrary to what Aiden wanted and not what I told Blane at all.

And despite what I've just seen, I want him to pretend like it's all okay.

It's the first time we're seeing each other since our kiss, and for once, I long for the touch of my other stepbrother. I want Aiden to comfort me. Make it better.

"Had a nice day?" he asks viciously and I look at him in confusion.

"I've been at work-" I start to say, but he doesn't let me finish.

"Sure!" he interrupts immediately. "I'm sure work was great fun. Just like the drink with my brother."

I want to argue immediately when I'm hit with the shock – how does he know? – but instead I keep my mouth shut and my head down. Which probably makes me look even more guilty, even though I have no reason to be.

It's then that his eyes see his painting, the sheet lying on the ground, the fact my eyes are still glued to the scene on the canvas.

"Fuck, Emme!" Aiden yells, slamming his fist into the wall. I look up in shock to see a hole in it, and his hand bleeding. But he doesn't even seem to notice the pain as he strides closer to me.

Before I have time to get up, Aiden scoops me up in his arms and places me on the couch. He forces my hands apart and I cry out in pain when he twists them behind my back, hurting me.

“Stop it!” I whimper, tears already making their way

down my face. “What is wrong with you, Aiden?”

“What’s wrong with me?” he asks angrily, his eyes shooting daggers at me. “What’s wrong?”

With a single movement of his arm, Aiden flicks my legs apart as I gasp when the cold air hits my bare skin. He reaches between my legs and rips my panties in two.

“No,” I whimper. “Please, don’t!” I cry out.

“You’ll always choose him,” he snarls at me. “I take care of you. I protect you. I make it all better, don’t I, Emme?” he taunts me, his hand positioned before my pussy like a warning.

I whimper through my tears and nod, feeling more scared than ever.

But that doesn’t stop him.

With a roar, he forces three fingers inside of me as I cry out in pain. He holds my wrists with one hand while he ravages me with the other, and I cry. I cry so much.

“There we go,” he says triumphantly. “You like that better, don’t you? Is that better than my brother?”

I nod, because it’s all I can do.

When he's done, he licks his fingers and lets go of me like I'm a piece of trash. I'm shocked and I can't even cry anymore. I just stare off into the distance.

He tips my chin up and forces me to look at him.

"You know what I'm going to do now, sweet little Emme?" he asks me.

I don't respond, but he keeps going.

"I'm going to find that bastard, and I'm going to kill him," he promises me, sealing the deal with a sloppy kiss on my swollen lips.

And then he leaves me on the couch, storming downstairs as I whimper in pain and shock. All the while, the painted image of me mocks me with its disturbing cry for help.

Chapter 10

2 years ago

Only weeks after my birthday, the doorbell rings when we're sitting down for Sunday lunch. Aiden and I look at each other in confusion, while my stepfather clears his throat and goes to answer the door. The rest of us chatter absentmindedly, while I'm sure all of our thoughts are still on my disastrous birthday party.

I can't get my mother's face out of my head, the slap that followed stinging Blane's cheek. I cringe at the mere thought of my stepfather throwing his own son out, me crying, Aiden comforting me. It was a nightmare.

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I hear my stepfather murmuring and arguing with someone, but then Blane walks into the dining room, followed by his enraged father.

“You’re not welcome here,” he hisses and I blush at the thought of tearing the two men apart.

“I’ve come to apologize,” Blane says softly, and I finally risk taking a look at him.

He looks good – better than a few weeks ago, that’s for sure. He’s cleaned up, looks healthy, and – the most welcome of all changes – there’s no trashy girl hanging from his arm.

“Say what you need to say,” his father sighs, but his eyes are stern. “And then get out.

Blane, Aiden and I all flinch at his harsh words, but finally, Blane nods, coming over to where I’m sitting and pulling out a chair next to me. I look up at him through my thick lashes, my heart beating wildly in my chest.

“Emme,” he begins, the one word melting my hear immediately. I could listen to him murmuring my name all day long ... I shake my head to get the thought out. It’s not right.

Instead, I look up questioningly, not saying a word. I don’t think I could get anything out, anyway. Suddenly, the chicken we’ve been having has dried up my throat and it’s getting harder to breathe.

“Emme,” Blane repeats, finally rasing his gaze to meet my hurt eyes. “I know what I

did was wrong. I thought it was just something fun, a little tease ... Something to take the tension off.”

I’m mesmerized by those steel grey eyes ... I could stare into them forever. So cold, with warmth spreading through them when he looks at me – only me.

So different from Aiden’s, yet so alike.

“It was nothing but a bad joke,” Blane finished. Finally, he takes my hand in his and I try hard to stop my hand from shaking, but it’s trembling like a leaf. Reassuringly, Blane places his palm over mine and smiles at me. And I’m a goner, because that smile has always managed to charm me into oblivion.

“It’s okay,” I whisper softly, offering a weak smile.

“Well then!” Aiden exclaims all of a sudden, and all our eyes go to him. “Shall we proceed with lunch?” he asks sarcastically, refusing to look at his brother and focusing his burning gaze on me instead.

I fidget in my seat, feeling uncomfortable all of a sudden.

“Yes,” my stepfather says, a certain softness in his voice. He places a heavy hand on Blane’s shoulder and father and son exchange glances.

“Will you join us for the meal, son?” he asks gruffly.

I hold my breath and steal a glance at my mother, who seems utterly gobsmacked. Aiden has been having Sunday lunch with us for ever, but Blane hasn’t been around for years.

So we’re all taken by surprise, when he nods with a small smile.

“I would love to.”

Quickly, another place is set by the housekeeper, a plate placed in front of my stepbrother, filled with delicious food.

I think I’m the only one to notice Aiden’s displeasure at the sight of his brother. I sigh inwardly – he’s so protective of me, he even worries about his own twin hurting my feelings ...

But I can’t worry. I’m blissfully happy in this moment, and I let myself experience the feeling, my yearning gaze fluttering to Blane every so often ...

After lunch, everyone settles in the day room, but Blane asks me if I’d like to go for a walk. I check with my mother to see if she agrees, and she gives permission, albeit reluctantly. I follow Blane out of the door, trying to ignore the burning sensation of Aiden’s eyes boring into my back.

Blane and I walk wordlessly along the strip of beach next to our home, enjoying our companionable silence. As nice as that is, I can’t ignore the unsteady beat of my heart, the want for him to touch me, kiss me ... Do all the wrong things in all the right places.

“Emme,” he says after a while, when we come to a stop next to the deck.

“Yes?” I whisper softly, looking up at him.

Blane fidgets nervously, his hands in the pockets of his jeans. He can’t quite meet my eye.

“Why don’t you look at me, Blane?” I ask softly, and he slowly, so slowly, raises his eyes to meet mine like it pains him to do so. And when we finally look at each other, he lets me see all the pain, the regret, the hurt he’s suffered.

I gasp.

I don’t know why, but with a single look, he’s bared his entire soul to me.

And I can tell he’s hurting.

Hurting bad.

My hand finds his cheek and I stroke it softly, whispering sweet nothings to make him feel better. It seems to help somewhat, and he soon relaxes into my embrace.

“You know I didn’t mean to hurt you, right?” he asks desperately and I nod in his shoulder. “I would never,” he continues fiercely.

“Why did you do that then?” I ask.

“I was stupid,” he sighs. “There’s no good reason. I wanted to get a reaction from you. Wanted to see your face flush.” He steps away from me, grinning widely, and it’s so good to see him smile. “I always liked seeing you blush,” he says wickedly, pulling on one of my long braids.

We stare at each other, smiling softly. And I wish, just for one moment, he could forget about me being his little sister, that he could pull me close ... Pull on my hair in an entirely different way.

He leans closer.

“Emme,” he whispers again.

“Mmm,” I reply, too stricken to form complete words.

His hand finds the small of my back, touching it softly, hesitantly. Our touch is so electric it almost makes me bounce back, but I force myself to stay in the same spot, savouring it.

His lips are so close to mine ...

“Emme, it’s getting dark!”

My mother’s voice cuts through the moment and my eyes meet Blane’s. The moment is over, and I think I see a flash of regret in his eyes ...

But then he moves in and gives me a peck on the cheek. So brotherly.

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We return to the house, my desire for my stepbrother put out like a summer fire, but hope wildly growing in my chest, like a spark that refuses to go out.

“Emme, a moment?” my mother calls me when we get back. She smiles softly.

I nod and follow her into her room. I have a good relationship with my mother, always have. She’s softspoken, but strong minded. She’s the rock of this house, and don’t we all know it ...

“Yes?” I ask, a wild smile growing on my face.

My mother is facing the window and I can’t see her face, but I can hear her sigh.

“Is something wrong?” I ask worriedly.

She sits on her bed and motions for me to come closer. I join her, but she still refuses to meet my eye.

“Is everything okay?” I ask again. I need to know. I can’t take another blow.

“Listen, Emme,” my mother says softly, her voice caring, but stern. “I’ve been meaning to talk to you for a while.” She looks up at me. “Do you have a boyfriend, dear?”

I blush violently. Even though we have a good relationship, my mother and I don’t share these kinds of conversations. I think of the boys at college and shake my head. None of them hold my interest.

The only one I want is closer to home ...

“Emme,” she continues. “I married your stepfather because I wanted you to have a father. I loved him very much, and the fact that he had a family played a big part in that as well. I wanted you to grow up with siblings,” she says.

I nod vigorously and start to speak up, but she silences me with a hand in the air.

“You have to understand we are a family. First and foremost,” she says, now even more serious. My brows furrow and I look at her questioningly. “I’m talking about your brothers, Emme.”

I look away.

“Exactly,” she sighs. “You don’t see them as your brothers, do you?”

I don’t answer.

“But that’s what they are, Emme.” My mother takes my hand, stroking it softly, my fingers shaking again. “They are your brot

hers, and they love you very much. But they are boys, and you are a girl ... A woman. A beautiful one.”

I know where this is headed and it’s killing me inside.

“Emme, I don’t want Blane and Aiden to fight because of you. Always remember. Family comes first.” With that, she tips my chin up so I’m forced to look at her.

“And Aiden and Blane are your brothers. Nothing else,” she finished.

I nod like a robot, a single tear rolling down my cheek.

When Blane gets ready to go, I can't quite meet his eye.

He tries to get me alone, but I can't do it. Can't face this, because it's breaking my heart.

Finally, when he says goodbye and gives a hug, I weakly whisper in his ear. "Goodbye, my love."

I shock myself and Blane pulls away, looking utterly confused. But before he can comment on what I've said, he's enveloped in a bear hug by his father. He tries to meet my eye, but I refuse to look at him

As he leaves, I wave from the door. "Bye, brother," I say softly, and he looks so confused, so worried, my heart breaks in half all over again.

And once again, Aiden is the one whose embrace I end up in.

Chapter 11

I get up, because I have to.

I have to warn Blane.

Have to tell him Aiden's calling for him.

I dial his number with shaking fingers and wait as the phone rings and rings and rings. He doesn't answer, and I leave a strange, crazy message on his voicemail.

I finally make my way downstairs, cleaning myself up in the shower. I'm scrubbing at my skin relentlessly when I hear someone in the house. Tripping over my own feet, I wrap myself in my fluffy cotton robe, which feels like heaven on my chafed skin.

I tremble when I come out of the bathroom, and immediately, I'm enveloped in a pair of strong arms.

"Emme," he whispers in my ear and I shake with fear.

He cups my face and brings it to his, looking deep into my eyes.

"I had to come," he says. "I couldn't leave you ... Not like that. I don't care what you did. Don't care what you two have ... done. I just want this, want you."

His hands are holding me up and the tears starting falling again as I crumple in his embrace.

"Blane," I whimper. "Blane, Blane ..." I repeat his name until it makes no sense again, and I let him hold me. I let him carry me to the couch and with shaky breaths, I explain what happened. Watch him check his phone, realizing he came here before he even heard my message. Realizing he cares for me still ... And damning fate because he came here to late. Damning his brother when I show Blane where he touched me.

Another fist slams a wall and another hole blooms in it. They're so alike ...

Blane takes me in his arms.

"I will kill him," he says. And I know he means it.

He cradles me, but he doesn't kiss me. His lips are almost touching mine, but he looks in my eyes first, asking for permission. To see if it's okay. I nod weakly.

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And his touch is soft, but damning. Because I know whomever I choose in this game, Blane will always be the one that I want. As much as I want to forgive Aiden, as much as I want to help him, I want his brother. Always Blane. My Blane.

We wait for hours for Aiden to come back, and I nearly fall asleep in Blane's arms as he murmurs it will all be okay in my ear, over and over again.

And then we forget about Aiden. Forget what he's done to me.

Blane carries me to my bedroom, placing me gently on the silk sheets.

He makes to leave, but I ask him to stay. So he does.

And he doesn't fuck me. Doesn't make love to me.

What he does is caress my body with a thousand soft strokes, like a butterfly's wings flitting across my skin. And somehow, that makes it all a little bit better.

When I'm drifting off to sleep, a sound interrupts my almost dream.

My cell beeping with an incoming text.

Blane grabs it before I even raise my head off the pillow, and he grips it so tightly his knuckles whiten. "Who is it?" I ask sleepily.

He tosses the phone on the bed without answering me, and sits up on the bed with his head in his hands.

I reach for the phone and read the text, my heart pounding.

“I know you’re there, you fucker. And I’m going to kill you for taking her from me. You may have made Emme a dirty slut, but I’m going to be the one to ruin her for you. I’ve only just started ...”

I whimper and then I’m back in Blane’s arms.

I know Aiden won’t come back today.

But I know he’s out there, waiting for his moment.

Waiting to claim me and take me from his brother once and for all.

Chapter 12

I am torn, being pulled in half by the decisions I’ve made, the feelings I have for two forbidden men, both of them my stepbrothers.

I am only 21 and I have gone through so many bad things, I wonder how I haven’t succumbed to the dark side yet. My name is Emme Ford and I am going to break in half.

“You fucker,” Aiden murmurs into his brother’s ear, as I scream my head off. He has his hands wrapped around Blane’s throat. “You stupid fucker.”

Two brothers.

One is light, the other is dark.

They both want me for all the wrong reasons.

They both love me.

And I love both of them.

As I lie in one of the brother's arms, I wonder about the other. Because this is how it has always been with us – The Rule of Three, not one, not two. Always Blane, Aiden and Emme. Always.

We lost our footing for a little while, wandered around broken without each other.

But it is only now that I am realizing maybe two is better than three.

Maybe one needs to be left alone to wander my himself, not in the other two's company.

Maybe, the last one is so broken the two cannot help him.

And even though it breaks me to know this, I know I can only choose one brother.

I replay the events of the last month in my head as my heart beats wildly in my chest, wrapped in the arms of one man I never want to lose. But to keep him is to lose another.

I am an orphan, my parents gone.

All I have left are my two stepbrothers, and I know now my love for both of them will tear us apart. Just like yesterday, when the twins had their first fight because of me. They would kill each other for me. One for love, the other for revenge.

I think of Blane.

Sweet, strong, reliable Blane.

Blane, who lied to me, betrayed me, hurt me, took advantage of me.

Blane, who claimed he loved me all the while breaking my heart.

Blane, who promised me he's had feelings for me since we were both teenagers, but only managed to confess how he felt when he found it would benefit him.

I think of Aiden.

Crazy, wild, laughing Aiden.

Aiden, who has been my best friend since the day I met him. Who comforted me, loved me, even when his brother did not. Who always stood by my side, and protected me.

Aiden, who I knew in some part of my brain has been in love with me for the past few years, but never did anything about it.

Aiden, whom I denied because of his brother, because I was lost in the lie.

I look at my stepbrother lying next to me. They're so alike, they look just like each other. Sometimes it's hard for me to differentiate between the two, and just for a moment, I let myself believe they've morphed into one person, so I don't have to choose.

But staring at the man in my bed, I know I've made my choice.

Whether I chose the right brother, I'll never know. But there's still time to change my mind ...

I can choose a life of happiness and a nagging in the back of my head, or a life of danger, living on the edge, always afraid for my life, but blissfully happy in those rare

moments when the sun shines

through the clouds.

Both decisions will make me happy.

Both will destroy me.

I am lost.