



# Exposed (MAC Security 2)

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**Category:** Romance, Dark, War

**Description:** SECRET ~ NOUN

SOMETHING THAT IS KEPT OR MEANT TO BE KEPT UNKNOWN  
OR UNSEEN BY OTHERS

Keeping a secret was hard.

Especially from the one person you never wanted to keep secrets from.

When that secret turns up out of the blue, bringing back all the painful memories.

What would you do?

Reveal your secret? Or keep it as long as you could?

I thought what she had done to me was unforgivable, but that was nothing to what she had planned.

A storm was brewing, about to rain down everything that I had kept locked away.

Once all the secrets were revealed, would it bring me and Kay closer?

Or tear us apart for good?

**Total Pages (Source):** 92

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 2:09 am*

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**\*\*WARNING\*\***

This book may contain scenes which some readers will find upsetting.

Someone had their hands gripped around my heart, squeezing with all of the strength they could muster. The noise in the room quieted and the people started to slowly disappear. The only people here were me, Ty, and her.

Staring at her with wide eyes, I watched as the smirk on her face grew. In that moment, her whole face turned evil and her eyes slanted slightly away from her nose as she looked at me. There was something behind her eyes, I couldn't place it but I saw it.

My eyes flicked from her then back to Ty, I expected him to say something. Anything. But he just stood there, mouth hanging open and eyes as wide as saucers.

I watched in slow motion as she moved closer to him, her perfectly painted red lips whispering something to him. This was where he would pull away and tell me that she was mistaken.

I waited. Any second now, he would clear this all up. It was one big misunderstanding.

He leaned closer to her and with that one move, all the noise came rushing back.

There was no way I could stand and watch this, I was a spare part, an extra wheel. I spun on my heel and pushed past Daley who was also staring at them in shock. His hand came out to stop me and I moved away from him, I didn't want to be touched and definitely not by him. I didn't want to be anywhere near any of them. The further I moved away from them, the louder the room became. By the time I was on the stairs, I registered that most of the noise was coming from my ear piece and not the people in the room.

They were all shouting different things at me. I couldn't keep up with what they were trying to say, but I still strained to see if I could hear Ty. Holding out hope that he

was calling out to me, to stop me from leaving, but I couldn't hear him.

"Stop," I croaked. They didn't listen and I still couldn't hear Ty.

Leaning my head against the wall, I heaved a giant breath, closing my eyes and trying my hardest to not freak out.

"Kay?" Luke's voice came through the ear piece the loudest. I shook my head and pulled the ear piece out of my ear.

I needed to catch my breath, I needed to think. I had to... I didn't know what I had to do but I knew that I couldn't stay here any longer.

The sound of the door opening had me panicking. Pushing off the wall I rushed down the stairs and through the reception area, straight out the front doors.

Valet parking stations sat outside with men dressed in suits taking Keys and driving off in elaborate sports cars; the kind of cars that they would never own and only got to drive to a parking lot.

Looking left, then right, I walked towards the course green. I followed the twinkling lights on the trees, only stopping when I couldn't hear the noise coming from the country club. The only noise I could hear now were the thoughts swirling around in my head.

A lone tear traveled down my cheek, that one tear was the most heart breaking tear that I had ever let slip.

Why had I given myself to him so freely?

I seriously had the worst luck with men.

I should have made more of an effort to get to know him, to know his past. I didn't even know what his favorite food was.

I laughed at that thought. Why would I need to know that? It was so small and inconsequential but inside my head it made perfect sense. I should know what it was.

I'd walked that far that I couldn't see the country club at all now. Part of me was relieved that I was so far away from it but there was another part, a small voice in my head that told me, that it was dangerous to be this far away from anybody. Especially in the dark.

Coming to a stop, I plopped down on the ground, my dress fanning around me.

I wasn't stupid. I knew that Ty had a past, but that back there was a very big part of his past. One that he should have told me about.

I wiped furiously at my face, not caring that I had probably smudged the makeup that Kitty had spent so long putting on me.

I'd been through worse. Physically.

But my heart was breaking. Breaking so much more than I ever thought possible.

"Kay?" I jumped at Luke's voice, spinning around while scowling at him.

"Jeez, Luke, you scared me!" Huffing, I turned back around and studied the lights straight ahead of me.

I didn't want to talk to him, I didn't want to talk to any of them. I watched out the

corner of my eye as he sat down and rested his arms on his knees.

## Page 2

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“You shouldn’t be out here alone,” he murmured.

I blew out a breath, not wanting to answer him.

He knew, they all knew and none of them had thought to tell me. I felt betrayed. Kitty had the opportunity to tell me several times, and now that I thought back to our conversations, I was sure that there was at least one time that she was going to.

“Kay?” I shook my head and pushed up off the grass, about to walk away. Seeing him lift up at the same time. “Come on-”

“No!” I stepped back, crossing my arms over my chest. “You knew-”

“Darlin’.” He reached out to me, stepping back another step, I refused to let him touch me. “Wasn’t my place, Kay.”

I looked away, watching the lights as they sparkled off the water, mesmerized by the way they twinkled and getting lost in my thoughts.

I’d never felt like this about anybody. Ty made things better, easier. He made me whole, but now I was broken in two. I desperately wanted to talk to him, but I couldn’t get the image of his face out of my head.

The way he looked at her like all of his dreams had just come true.

He never looked at me like that.

“Come on,” Luke said as he placed his hand on my shoulder and squeezed gently.  
“Let’s get you home.”

“I don’t have a home,” I whispered.

Turning to face him, I looked up into his ice blue eyes. So much softer now than they had been the first time I’d met him. His blond hair was a mess of waves from him running his hands through it and his face was full of concern.

“Luke?”

“Yeah?” He frowned.

“What’s wrong with me?”

“Darlin’...” He lifted his hands to my face, his fingers curling into my hair. “Nothing is wrong with you.”

“Then why?” I hiccuped a sob. “Why is this happening?”

He shook his head, shuffled closer and whispered. “If I had someone like you, I’d never let them go.” His thumb swiped away a tear that trickled down my cheek, “Don’t cry darlin’.”

“I...I...just...”

“I know,” he said, pulling me into his chest. I burrowed closer as he wrapped his arms around me, letting the tears soak into his t-shirt.

It wasn’t the same as when Ty held me, but it still made me feel safe. Ty made the butterflies take flight and he had this one place, just in the crook of his chest, that



seemed to fit my face perfectly, kind of like a jigsaw being put together.

Luke's one hand rubbed up and down my back while his other hand gripped the back of my head. After several minutes, I finally got my sobs under control.

Pulling away, he placed a kiss on the top of my head and smiled down at me. "Let's get you home and to bed, yeah?"

"Yeah," I whispered, and smiled up at him.

"You better take your Motherfuckin' hands off her!"

We both spun around, surprised.

"Boss-" Luke didn't move an inch, still keeping me safely tucked under his arm.

"Get. Your. Hands. Off. Her." Ty thundered, clenching his fists at his sides.

I noticed his unruly hair and his shirt that was no longer tucked into his dress pants. Those few feet that stood between us felt like miles, it was almost like I didn't even know him.

## Page 3

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“Kay?” Luke looked down at me with a raised brow, silently asking me what I wanted to do.

Shaking my head, I turned into Luke “I want to go back.”

Luke nodded, his arm slung over my shoulder, steering me away from Ty.

“Sweetheart?” Ty whispered as we walked past, holding his hand out in the air.

I stopped; looked at his hand and followed the path up his arm, the collar of his shirt and up to his eyes. They begged me to stay. I rubbed my chest, not wanting to feel what I was feeling right now; they sang their way straight into my heart in a way that I never thought was possible. I was about to move toward him when the light caught his shirt and sat there, on the collar, was lipstick.

The exact shade that she was wearing.

Flicking my eyes back to Ty, I let him see the hurt that he had caused.

This was so much worse than what Max had caused.

I could heal from the wounds that he gave me, but this? This was something I wasn’t sure I could heal from.

For the first time, I had given my heart over, completely and freely, and he’d taken that and shattered it.

Four years.

That's how long it had been since I had seen her face.

I can remember the day like it was yesterday. How she walked in with her arms full of shopping bags; spending my money again as if nothing had happened.

As if it was the same as every other day.

But it wasn't, and she saw that as soon as she walked in the door and saw my face.

I knew where she had been and what she had done but I was too late to stop her.

Little did she know, that I had connections everywhere. It wasn't like I had her watched, because believe me, she was only ever in two places. Spending my money in a bar or spending it on the strip of shops in town.

And now she was here. Standing in front of me, as if none of that had happened. Pretending that she hadn't ripped my chest open, hurting my heart so much that it would never beat the same.

Frozen to the spot, I couldn't move, she was meant to be the other side of the country. Definitely not standing three feet away from me.

"Did you miss me, baby?" she cooed, leaning closer to me.

"What the hell are you doing?" I growled.

"I think you have missed me." My stomach turned as I watched her lips pout. To think I used to love those lips, love the way she pouted them but now they made me feel physically sick.

Pulling away from her, I raked my eyes up and down her body. She hadn't changed one bit, still dressed in designer clothes with her hair and makeup done to perfection. There had been a time when I would have wanted to rip that dress off her, now I couldn't even stand the site of her.

Her red painted fingernail ran along my neck as she moved closer and before I could pull away, she was targeting my lips.

"What the-" Pulling away just in time, she only managed to connect with my shirt.

"Aww, come on baby. For old times' sake?"

"Not fuckin' likely." Spinning around, I went to grab Kay's hand but all that was left was an empty space and Daley watching the interaction with narrowed eyes.

"Don't go!" she said in a whining voice, causing everyone around us to look our way.

"Dude, I didn't know she was your wife." Daley held his hands up in the air, his face as white as a sheet.

"She ain't my wife," I growled at him.

## Page 4

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“That isn’t what the law says, baby.” Shaking my head, I searched the room, not being able to spot Kay anywhere.

Dammit! I shouldn’t have taken my eyes off her.

“She left,” Daley murmured.

“Fuck!” Running my hands through my hair, I tried to listen on the ear piece, but with the thumping of my heart, I couldn’t hear a damn thing.

“You don’t want to go home with that mousey girl,” Serena sneered, coming up behind me.

My nostrils flared as I turned back to face her. Taking two big steps I got as close as I could without physically touching her. “You listen, and you listen fuckin’ good,” clenching my fists, I backed away a step. “You stay the fuck away from her, and me.”

She opened her mouth to reply but I didn’t bother waiting around for anything else that she had to say. Instead, I pushed through the

growing crowd and headed straight out the door. Taking the stairs two at a time, I scanned the area for Kay, it’s not like I could miss her in that dress.

That beautiful dress that showed all of her curves and soft skin.

“She went that way,” one of the valet guys said pointing to the green. Nodding my head in thanks, I jogged in the direction that he pointed.

She shouldn't be out here alone, not when we still haven't found that dickweed. Ripping the ear piece out, I shoved it in the pocket of my pants and pulled my shirt out as I went.

My breaths came faster the longer I looked for her, I had to find her. My head swiveled all around, searching for her. I squinted at something in the distance, spotting two shadows, I moved towards them.

Two bodies came into view; I knew it was her straight away from the way my heart started to pound in my chest. I walked faster, not being able to see who she was stood with.

"Let's get you home and to bed, yeah?" I heard Luke say to her. I breathed a sigh of relief, knowing that it was only him. Then it registered what he had said.

"Yeah," her soft voice answered him.

Coming to a stop, I tried to hold my temper in. He held her in his arms, the same way that I held her. His hand woven through her soft hair. Then she smiled at him, one of those soft smiles that she does so often. I could never get enough of that smile. But I hated seeing it aimed at him and not me.

"You better take your Motherfuckin' hands off her!" My hands were clenched at my sides, partly to stop myself from hurting him, but also to stop me from grabbing her away from him.

I was constantly thinking about the way that I touched her, there were times when all I wanted to do was throw her over my shoulder and lock us in my room. But I had to keep reminding myself that she was fragile, that I had to take my time, be patient.

I watched as she turned into Luke, her soft voice telling him that she wanted to go.

That killed me even more, I should have been the one that she turned to like that. Not him.

I held my hand out as she walked past, letting my walls slide down so she could see the truth. I only ever did that with her, no one else got to see me unguarded.

But for her, I would do anything. From the moment she stepped foot into my office, I knew that she was mine and that my life would never be the same again.

For a second, when she stopped, I thought she'd come over to me. But her eyes moved down to my neck, I saw the hurt in her eyes for a moment, then she put those shields back up and walked off, leaving Luke behind.

"Give her some time," he murmured.

"Fuck." I scrubbed my hands down my face, not wanting to let her walk away but knowing that I needed to. For now.

"You watch over her, Luke," I scowled at him.

"I will, boss."

Tilting my head to her, he took that as his queue to leave.

She may have thought this was the end but it was only just the beginning.

Kitty was sat at the entrance of the country club by the time I'd made it back there. Pulling the door open, I grabbed onto the handle to pull myself up into the van, not saying a word to her as I shuffled over to the middle seat.

"Kay-" she mumbled, her voice unsure whether she should say something or not.

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“No.” I held my hand up, turning to face her. “Not now. I just need some time to think.”

She frowned, staring at me. I could see that she wanted to say something else but, instead, she nodded and said. “Right, okay.”

Luke jumped up into the van next to me, slamming the door and grunting at Kitty to go. She pressed down on the gas pedal and sped off down the main road that led into the country club. Leaning back in the seat, I folded my arms around my waist and looked down at my feet.

Neither of them said anything on the way back to the compound, the entire ride was spent in silence. They didn’t even have any music on, which was unusual for Kitty, she always had something on when she drove.

My mind whirled with thoughts that I couldn’t stop, no matter how hard I clenched my eyes shut. All I could think about was her. Why hadn’t Ty pulled away from her?

Was she really his wife?

My gut told me that she was, because if she wasn’t, then Ty wouldn’t have had that look on his face and he would’ve denied it. I didn’t know what the look on his face meant, but I knew that he was shocked. Shocked because she’d turned up or shocked because I’d found out that he had a wife? Either way, I didn’t doubt that she was telling the truth.

Did that mean that I was a home wrecker now?



I held my head in my hands at all the thoughts whirling around in my head. As we went through the compound gates, all I wanted to do was jump out of the van and go straight to bed.

Then I saw the house, his house.

Eli and Miss Maggie were in there along with Henry but I couldn't face walking through those doors. Thinking of sleeping in the same bed that I'd slept in with Ty made my stomach roll. I wouldn't be able to keep it together being around all of his things. Every single thing on this compound reminded me of him.

Kitty pulled up outside the warehouse, turned the van off and we all sat there, just staring out of the window. We were meant to be going back inside the warehouse to debrief, but there was no way I could go in there and wait for Ty to turn up.

I needed space. From everything. It was all too much.

Kitty cleared her throat and pulled open her door. "See you inside, chica," she said jumping out of the van.

I swallowed, not being able to move out of the van. I could easily climb over the drivers' seat, but I didn't want to. I could feel Luke's eyes on me as I took a deep breath.

"I...I..." My hands twisted in my lap as my eyes looked everywhere but the house and the warehouse.

"Kay?" Luke asked, placing his hand over mine. "What's up?" I looked down at my hands, they were almost white with how hard I was gripping them.

Pulling them apart, Luke's hand slid off mine and I looked up at him. "I...don't think

I can go in there, not tonight.”

“In where?” He frowned.

“Ty’s house, the warehouse,” I murmured. “I just need some time and space.”

He would understand that right? There had been so many changes recently, getting out of my relationship with Max moving onto the compound. Then there was whatever was going on with Ty. What that was now, I wasn’t sure of.

A couple of hours ago, I was sure of what we were. Together, the real thing. At least that’s what it had felt like, but listening to my gut hadn’t worked. I didn’t have a clue where we stood now, with his wife back. What did that mean?

Would she move onto the compound? Would me and Eli have to move out?

My head was spinning and it was late, I was over thinking things. What I needed was to take a deep breath and a night away from it all.

Luke huffed out a breath and pushed his door open. “Stay at mine tonight, you can have my bed and I’ll take the couch.”

He jumped down, holding his hand out for me. Looking from his hand to his face and then to his eyes, I scanned them. Looking for...what?

I didn’t know how I felt about staying at Luke’s, sure I had been there with Eli. Never overnight though. I didn’t want to cause any trouble but, at the same time, I couldn’t bring myself to stay at Ty’s. Not tonight.

“Things will look better in the morning.” He moved closer to me, shaking his hand in the air to get my attention.

“Erm...if you’re sure?” I said, biting my lip.

“Yeah, come on.” He smiled.

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I placed my hand in his, slid across the seat and jumped down. Letting go of his hand only when my feet were planted on the floor, I walked next to him. The only sound in the still night was the gravel crunching under our feet.

I followed him up to his door, still worrying my hands together. Pushing it open, he waved me inside. Ducking under his arm as he held it open, I waited at the bottom of the stairs while he closed the door.

I shuffled my feet, looking down, suddenly nervous. “Can I go straight up?” I hooked my thumb over my shoulder, just wanting to get out of this semi-awkward situation.

“Yeah.” He pushed his boots off and walked past me, jogging up the stairs, taking them two at a time.

Following him up and towards his room, I stumbled slightly as I came to the door. Inside, I knew that we were only friends but it still didn’t feel right stepping into his bedroom when it was just me and him. It wasn’t that I didn’t feel safe with Luke, because I did. I just didn’t feel right about it.

I took a tentative step inside as he rummaged through his drawers and pulled out a t-shirt. “Here.” He held it out and watched me. “You good, darlin’?”

“Yeah,” I whispered, taking them from him.

“I’m only downstairs if you need me.” He reached forward, planting a kiss on my forehead.

“I don’t mind sleeping on the couch,” I said as he went to the door.

“Nah, you take the bed,” he said, walking out of the room and down the hallway.

“Thanks, Luke!” I called after him.

“No worries!” he shouted back.

Taking a deep breath, I pushed the door closed and looked down at the t-shirt he’d given me. I smiled when I realized what one it was, it was one of his t-shirts, from his time in the Special Forces.

Undoing my dress, which wasn’t easy on my own, I pulled the t-shirt over my head and climbed into his bed.

Wearing one of these t-shirts made me feel closer to Corey, but also close to Ty as well. A double edged sword.

Blowing out a breath, I decided to deal with the whole Corey thing tomorrow as well. I hadn’t spoken to him since I found out he had visited and not come to see me.

Lying my head on the pillow, I closed my eyes, hoping that sleep would come quickly but that the night would go by slowly so I didn’t have to face everything too soon.

I didn’t go straight back to the compound, not trusting myself to give Kay the space she so clearly needed. She was the type of person who had to think things over, she needed time to process. Whereas I was the type of person who wanted to sort things out there and then. It was an adjustment that I had to learn to make. It was hard though, when all I wanted to do was follow her and make t

hings right.

So instead, I drove around the streets, getting my own head together and trying to come up with some explanation as to why Serena was back and what she wanted.

Serena being my ex-wife, or, wife if you wanted to get technical.

After driving for a few hours, no destination in mind, I found my way back to the compound. I looked up at my house and took a deep breath, walking towards the door. My stomach flipped as I went inside and up to her room.

Finding the room empty, I frowned and checked all the other rooms apart from the one that Miss Maggie was staying in. Just putting my ear to the door was enough to know that Kay wasn't in there.

Jogging back down the stairs, I headed for the warehouse but the door was locked. Looking around, I wondered where she was. Luke had said that he'd watch over her. So did that mean he'd took her back to his house?

My nostrils flared as I jogged across the compound and went into Luke's house without knocking.

Tip toeing up the stairs, so that I didn't disturb Kay, I told myself that I'd only check on her and then go back to the house. But as I slipped into Luke's room, I knew that I wouldn't be able to leave.

Her mouth hung open slightly and soft snores sounded around her. I couldn't help the smile that came across my face, I loved watching her sleep. It was rare that she slept without a nightmare, and knowing that she was sleeping soundly made me happy. But the fact that she was in Luke's bed had my fists clenching.

My eyes followed the length of her leg that was thrown over the sheet, the t-shirt she was wearing sat precariously at the top of her thigh and my eyes landed there. Continuing up, I noticed that it was one of Luke's t-shirts; that didn't help me keep my cool. My jaw clenched and I had to take a step back so that I didn't take it off her. She shouldn't be wearing his t-shirt; it should be mine that she was wearing.

"Boss?" I spun around to the door as Luke opened it, his head coming through the small gap and his eyes finding Kay.

"Out," I grunted and pushed him back out the door. No way was he seeing my woman like that.

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“I thought I heard you come in,” he said leaning against the opposite wall.

“I had to check on her.” Clearing my throat, I shut the door and leaned on it, facing him.

“You should have told her,” he said, arching a brow at me.

Yeah, I should have told her but I could never find the right time. I couldn’t just come out with, ‘hey, I have a wife’, she would have pulled away even more. That’s not what she needed, she had to have someone who was there for her, who she knew she could come to.

Scowling at him, I grunted, “I fuckin’ know.” I scrubbed my hands down my face, willing the throbbing in my head to stop. I had too many thoughts spinning around in there, and all I wanted to do was slip under the covers with Kay and forget all about them.

“What’s Serena doing back anyway?”

“Fuck if I know,” I growled. She couldn’t have come back at a worse time. I had so much shit going on; finding these girls and finding the people responsible for taking them were high on my list of things to do. To add to that, I was still trying to find Max while still doing my best to keep up with everything. I was being stretched thin and it was starting to take its toll.

Kay was the only one who could calm the noise down. The only one who truly saw me and there was no way I was letting her get away. I couldn’t. I wouldn’t.



“I don’t trust her.”

“Yeah...” Looking up at his frowning face I replied, “Me neither.”

It wasn’t until after I left Serena that I found out how much she had schemed and lied about everything. I couldn’t believe that all my friends had known what she had been doing and not one of them had told me. Would I have believed them? Probably not.

But that wasn’t the point.

Shaking the thoughts from my head, I pushed up off the door.

“You stayin’?” Luke asked, smirking. His eyes flicked from his bedroom door and back to me.

Running my hand through my hair and down my face, I winced at the whimper coming from his bedroom.

“Yeah.” I turned around and was pushing on the door knob just as he said, “What was that?”

Flicking my eyes back to him, I growled. “Nothing.” There was no way that I would be telling him what Kay went through every night.

Shutting the door behind me, I walked straight to the bed and sat on the edge, my hand finding her face without even meaning to. She automatically leaned into it, even when her brain had told her to walk away, her body stayed firmly by my side.

I sat and watched her, making sure that her nightmare was over before moving off the bed.

Undoing my top two buttons, I sat on the chair in the corner of the room. Leaning my ankle on my knee, I drummed my fingers on my leg. It was one of the only other things that calmed me, that consistent beat. Predictable.

I hated change, I hated not being able to control what was happening.

There has only been two times that I've felt out of control.

The day that I had walked away from Serena and right now. Not knowing what would happen when Kay woke up had me on edge.

Settling down in the chair, I watched and waited. I wanted to be the first thing she saw when she woke up. I wanted her to know that I wasn't going anywhere.

That I was always here.

Because I would be, there was no way that I would be letting her go.

She was it for me.

I groaned as I rolled over, the sheets tangled around my legs. My arm automatically reached out for Ty, forgetting what had happened last night. As soon as I felt the empty, cold space, it all came flooding back. Her.

His wife. I still couldn't believe he had a wife and hadn't told me. It was time to deal with whatever was going to be thrown my way today, but I didn't want to move out of this bed. I wanted to stay here and pretend the outside world didn't exist.

In here I was away from it all, all the secrets.

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I sat up, rubbing the sleep out of my eyes. I had to get up, for Eli and Miss Maggie, they were probably wondering where I was anyway.

“Mornin’, sweetheart.” A gruff voice said from the corner.

I squeaked, my hand flying to my chest. “Ty,” I breathed.

What was he doing in here?

My head and my heart were in a war. My head was telling me that I shouldn’t trust him, he had lied. Well maybe not lied, but he didn’t tell me and it wasn’t like it was a little thing to just not tell me. Having a wife was a big thing, such a huge part of his life that he should have told me about.

But my heart?

That was telling me to trust him, to hear him out. He wouldn’t hurt me; he’d done nothing but protect me since I’d walked onto this compound.

Right now, my brain was winning the war and I knew that he could see that.

“Just hear me out,” he said as he stood up, holding his hands up in the air as a sign of peace making.

Shaking my head, I pushed the covers aside, slid off the bed, and made a beeline for the door. Pulling on the handle, I flung it open and walked as fast as I could but compared to his giant leaps that he calls steps, I didn’t make it far in front before he

was right at my back.

“I don’t want to hear anything, Ty.” Stomping down the stairs, I turned into the kitchen.

“Kay,” he growled. “Just listen.”

“What? Listen to how you turned me into a home wrecker?” I pushed the button to start the coffee pot and spun around, leaning against the counter. “Don’t you think that was something you should have told me before we...you know.” I waved my hand in the air to get my point across.

He smirked. That insufferable smirk that always made me smile. This time was different though, I wouldn’t allow him past my walls. Nope. He was staying firmly in front of them.

“When we slept together?” he stepped forward.

“Yeah.” Clearing my throat, I turned to

pull a cup out of the cupboard.

“Let me get that for you, sweetheart.” His breath fanned across my neck, causing a shiver to roll through my body. Why did he always have this effect on me?

I watched his hand wrap around the cup and bring it down to the counter. He didn’t step back, instead he pulled the coffee pot off its holder and poured me a cup.

“I should have known to wait until you’d had this,” he chuckled.

I released the breath that I had been holding when he stepped back, hanging my head.

How did he do that?

He could disarm me without me even knowing. Damn it, I could never stay mad at him, it wasn't fair.

"Fine," I huffed, turning to face him. "I'm listening."

Waving his hand to the small table and two chairs that sat in the kitchen, he said, "Let's sit."

Blowing out another breath, I stomped forward and slumped into the seat that he had pulled out for me. Ever the gentleman.

"First, I want to say that I never intentionally lied to you. I didn't tell you because...well...shit." He ran his hand through his hair then dropped it onto the table.

I could see that he was struggling to tell me. Scanning his face, I noticed the dark circles that had appeared under his eyes. He looked worn out and I hated seeing him like that.

"Ty..." I was in two minds. It was true, he hadn't intentionally lied but he still hadn't told me.

But then, I still had secrets. Things that none of them knew about. Could I really be mad at him for not telling me?

"No, let me get this out," he said, looking anywhere but at me.

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“Okay.” I lifted my cup to my lips and took a sip of the sweet nectar.

“Me and Serena were married right out of high school,” he said, not bringing his eyes to mine. “I thought I loved her, I really did. But when I went away, I didn’t know half of the things that went on.”

So that was her name. Serena.

His fingers started drumming on the table, the beat relaxing me slightly. I’d become so used to hearing it that when Ty wasn’t doing it, it felt strange.

“It wasn’t until that day,” he croaked. “That day changed everything. I saw her for what she really was and then I started to find out all the shit that she had been doing while I was away. All the men she was sleeping with.” He looked up, his brown eyes flashing as he said “In my bed.”

“Ty.” I leaned forward, placing my hand on his. “I’m sorry.” I never expected that to come out of his mouth.

He laughed. “The men didn’t bother me, it’s what else she did...” I watched as he swallowed, his Adams apple bobbing up and down. and his chest moving as he took big breath.

“What happened?”

“I can’t...” he said, his voice cracking.

Frowning at him, I gulped down the lump that was forming in my throat. Was this what it felt like when I told him I wasn't ready to talk about Max? Because right now I hated the feeling that was rolling through me.

"I understand," I whispered, although what I really wanted to say was 'tell me'.

"I walked out on her," he said, his eyes a mixture of anger and sadness. "I asked for a divorce but she wouldn't sign the papers."

"So...she's only your wife legally?"

"Yeah." He turned his hand so his palm was against mine and squeezed lightly. "She means nothing to me, sweetheart. I swear."

Nodding, I tried to take it all in. I was a hypocrite. I'd walked off, not allowing him to explain while I still held so many secrets. Secrets and lies that he never pushed to know.

"What about that?" I said, pointing to the lipstick on his shirt.

"What?" Pulling away, he looked down at his collar and rolled his eyes. "She tried to attack me." My brows flew high on my forehead. "With her lips."

"And..."

"I pulled away, sweetheart. There's only one person's lips that I want to touch." I squirmed in my seat. His eyes flashed with desire as I moved. Realizing that all I had on was a t-shirt, I tried to pull it down a little.

"I'm sorry," I whispered, bringing his attention back to my face.

“What for?” He frowned.

“I walked away and didn’t give you chance to explain. I know there’s still things that you don’t know about my past and I want to be able to tell you. But...”

I looked around the room, scared to look him in the eyes and find that he wanted me to tell him right then. I still wasn’t ready. I didn’t know whether I ever would be.

“It’s okay.” He pushed up out of his chair and walked toward me. Crouching down so that he was the same level as me, he cupped the side of my face. “When you’re ready, I’m here.”

“I’ll try.” I swallowed. “I’ll try to open up to you.”

“Okay, sweetheart.”

“But, you need to try too.” I raised my brows in challenge. If I was going to open up, then so was he. I wasn’t stupid enough to believe that there wasn’t more to that story. Much more. But I knew that to get him to open up about it, I needed to as well.

It was only fair.

“Okay,” he huffed.

Smiling, I leaned into his hand. I hated not being able to talk to him last night. Knowing that he had sat in that chair all night, probably not getting a wink of sleep, had butterflies swarming in my stomach. He was always watching over me and that in itself, made me feel safer than I ever had.



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He moved forward, closing the distance between us.

“We good?” he asked against my lips.

“We’re good,” I said on a breath and closed the distance between us.

I could have pulled away from Ty completely, been mad at him for not telling me. But what about what I wasn’t telling him?

He didn’t know half of the things that went on with Max, he didn’t know what the daily struggle that was involved with living with him. He had no idea of the number of scars I carried on the inside, not just on the outside.

There was no way that I could criticize him for not telling me when I was doing exactly the same.

Knowing that there was more to the story than he had told me, made me wary. I hadn’t been given the full story and I was doubting that I would be told what had actually happened.

But as I sat here at the meeting table, looking at Ty, I didn’t doubt what he had told me. I trusted that when he said she hadn’t been his wife for years, that he meant it.

One thing that I did doubt was me, whether I would be able to tell him my secrets.

I had been dreading this meeting since I came back on the compound after the charity function. Miss Maggie had kept my mind off things while she had been here but as

soon as she went home last night, my stomach rolled.

Knowing that we would have to talk about her, Serena, made me feel sick. I knew that we all had a past but I needed to digest the information that I'd been given. I hadn't been able to do that just yet.

I couldn't stop my eyes from flicking down to Ty's left hand, imagining the wedding band that would have once sat there.

That, at least, was one thing I hadn't done. Max was all up for getting married but having Corey away gave me an excuse to wait. At least that came in handy for something.

"Ready?" Ty said to all of us, although his eyes were on me.

They had all been distant with me since the charity function. I understood that they didn't know what was happening, or how to take the news that Ty's wife was back in town. To be honest though, I was glad they had kept their distance yesterday. I just wanted to spend time with Eli and Miss Maggie and forget about everything that had happened. Now, it was time to face the music.

"Yeah," I said, nodding my head and picked up my pen that sat on top of the notepad.

"Where do you wanna start, boss?" Evan said from above his laptop screen, his eyes flicking to me and then back to Ty.

Rolling my eyes, I said, "Let's start with Serena." May as well start with the one subject they were all scared to talk about around me.

You could have heard a pin drop with the silence that greeted me.

“Seriously? It’s fine. We’re fine,” I said way too high pitched to even remotely come across as ‘being fine’.

Ty leaned over, his hand resting on my knee and whispered, “You sure, sweetheart?”

“Yeah.” I gritted my teeth from saying anything else.

What they didn’t realize was, they were making it worse. If they didn’t make a big deal out of it, and just got on with what we needed to discuss, then it would be fine. I kept saying that word ‘fine’, but I really was fine.

At least, that was what I would keep telling myself.

“Right,” Luke said, clearing his throat. “So, Serena and Daley are working together?”

“Seems that way,” Ty said, pulling back away from me.

“So is the charity even a real charity? Or is it just a front?” Kitty asked, leaning forward in her seat.

“That’s what I’m trying to find out,” Evan answered. He was still tapping away at his laptop, his face in deep concentration.

“If it is just a front, that means that they’re working together. But if it’s not a front, then it could just be Daley.” Ty looked to all of us, gauging our reaction.

There was no point in them speculating, we needed hard evidence one way or another. Without it, we hadn’t got a clue who was behind it.

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“I think we need to find out if the charity is real before we start speculating, we won’t know until then.” I leaned back in my chair, not looking up. I couldn’t cope with the sympathy in their eyes when they looked at me.

“Yeah, but if it’s Daley using Serena, then should we tell her?” Evan asked.

My nostrils flared as I listened to Evan. Why was it, that he automatically assumed Serena was the one who didn’t know? I saw the look in her eyes when she told me she was Ty’s wife.

I saw that same look in Max’s eyes every day for years. There was no way that I could have been mistaken, I’d seen it too much.

“W

ow.” I lifted my eyes to him, “Really?”

“Wh-What?” Evan frowned.

“Why are you so quick to think it’s him and not her? Maybe she’s the one using it as a cover and he has no idea what is going on right in front of him.” My voice became louder the more I spoke. I was starting to feel out of control and I never felt out of control anymore, at least not like this.

“Yeah, alright then.” Evan snorted, rolling his eyes.

He’d dismissed me completely. I’d never thought that Evan would do that, he’d

always listened to me.

I pushed back slowly on my chair, the legs scraping against the floor.

“Kay-”

“No!” I ground out. “I can’t deal with this; I need to...” I took a deep breath and looked around the warehouse, I didn’t know what to do with myself.

I had no idea what I was thinking, what I was doing, or what I was feeling. It was obviously too soon to be talking about her.

“Why don’t you take a break? Go back to the house for a while?” Ty said, standing up. He placed his hand on my lower back, trying to steer me away from the table.

Sparks shot through me at his connection. I gritted my teeth and pulled away, not being able to cope with him touching me at the moment. Nodding my head, I stepped away from the table. I needed to get out of here.

“Want me to join you, chica?” Kitty asked as I rounded the table.

“Sure,” I puffed out and pulled the door open, not waiting for her.

This was one of those times that I just wished I could pick my phone up and call Corey. He’d be able to get through to me, help me sort through all of these whirling thoughts going around in my head.

“She’s right, you know,” Luke said once Kay and Kitty had left the warehouse.

I watched the door, willing my legs to not go after her. I needed to give her time and space, but all I wanted to do was hold her, touch her. That wasn’t what she needed

right now and I was constantly reminding myself of that.

“You really think Serena is behind all of this?” Evan asked, his incessant typing stopping for just a moment.

“I don’t know,” I said, squinting my eyes at him and shaking my head. I walked back to my chair and slumped down in it. “I think it’s too much for her to do on her own. I don’t think she’d do that to girls, not after what she went through.”

If Kay knew what Serena had gone through as a teenager, then she probably wouldn’t have been so quick to think that she could be behind it. But she didn’t know, not many people did. I only knew because it was me who picked up the pieces every time.

“So, where do we go from here?” Luke asked, leaning back in his chair and chewing on the end of his pen.

I could see the fire burning behind his eyes, he didn’t like Serena being back in town. He hadn’t liked her from the first time that he met her, but at the time, I didn’t know why. He told me after I left her that it was because she had come on to him. When he told her no, she threatened to tell me that it was him that had come on to her.

“We need to find out where she is, start to follow all of her movements.” I leaned my head back, blowing out a deep breath.

“Will Kay like that?”

I brought my head back up, my eyes moved to Luke and I raised my brows at him. “It’s the job.”

Shrugging, he pushed back in his chair and stood, “Just asking, boss.”

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Hanging my head in my hands, I stayed at the table as Evan and Luke went about their work day. I had so many things to do but all I wanted was to go to the house and talk to Kay. Time. I had to keep remembering that.

Pulling my hat off my head, I stood and walked over to the office. I had to get out of here, I needed some space too. Shoving my arms into my jacket and putting my hat back on, I picked my keys up and walked through the warehouse.

“I’ll be on my cell today,” I said to Evan as I walked past him.

Keeping my eyes on the house as I went to my car, I looked for Kay. I thought she might be on the porch. That’s where she usually went when she needed time to think, but she wasn’t there, which meant she was still inside. Kitty still hadn’t come back to the warehouse so at least I knew she had someone to talk to.

Hesitating, my feet took a step in the direction of the house. Shaking my head, I stepped back and jumped into my truck. I started the engine and span out of there, heading straight for the precinct to see Charlie.

It only took about ten minutes to get there, the compound was out of the way from any other houses and completely out of town, just how I preferred it. It wasn’t too far from the town center, close enough to still be a part of the community, but far enough away not to be disturbed.

Parking outside, I pushed my keys into my pocket and pulled my coat around me tighter to ward off the chill in the air.

“Good morning, Mr Mackenzie,” Geena said when I came through the main doors.

“Mornin’, Geena.” I leaned against the front desk and smiled wide, making her blush.

Geena was a kind woman, curvy and full of life. She looked like the motherly type but there was a wicked gleam in her eyes; the fun kind. I always loved to hear her jokes, she really did make the whole place brighter. She wasn’t much younger than me. I’d never asked because you just don’t ask a woman that shit. But, if I was to guess, I’d say she was in her early twenties.

“Here to see your brother?”

“Yeah.” I crossed my arms and waited as she dialled upstairs to get Charlie. Waiting and watching the cars go past, I scanned the main area to check out how many people were waiting to be picked up. You could always tell how busy they were by how many people were sat waiting. Looked like today was a slow day. There was always the same guy, obviously homeless, that sat in the corner to get in from the cold.

A couple of minutes later, the side door beeped and he appeared. “Geena.” He nodded in greeting and winked at her.

He swung his face to me. “I’ve heard.” Stepping back, he waved me inside.

Charlie was the eldest of all of us, and as the eldest, he always knew everything that was going on. He had eyes and ears everywhere but still not as many as me. But together, we had the widest network around. Most of the time I hated that he always knew what was going on, but this time, I was glad that I didn’t have to explain the whole situation to him.

“I don’t know what to do,” I grunted as I walked into his office and sat down.



“Do you know why she’s back?” he pushed the door shut and sat behind his desk. I turned to face the wall of windows that looked out onto the main room, able to see all of the other officers and detectives sat at their desks. They were all milling about, looking at the main board that had pictures of all the missing girls on. This wasn’t just a case for us, it was a case for the P.D. as well.

“Haven’t got a fuckin’ clue,” I said. “If I knew why she was back, then I wouldn’t feel so out of control.

“And Kaylee?” He raised a brow. “What does she think of all of this?”

I’d denied to Charlie that me and Kay were together at first. From the moment that we took that step further, he was the first person that I told. He wasn’t just my big brother; he was also my best friend.

He’d told me that I was in for a world of pain when Corey found out, but I didn’t give a damn. She needed to be shown what a real man could do for her, how she should be treated and I would try my best to be that man. But after this weekend, I was doubting myself.

“Shit, man.” I leaned back in the chair, blowing out a breath. “I didn’t even tell her about Serena.”

“Thought as much.” I flicked my eyes to his, knowing that he didn’t like this one bit. “What you gonna do?”

“Watch her? Keep tabs on her?” That was all I could do. I needed to treat it like any other case. Treat her like any other suspect and not as my wife. Ex-wife. Was she even that? She still hadn’t signed the papers so technically we were still married. I needed to get that shit sorted, and soon.

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“You think she’s involved in all of this?” He asked, waving his hand to the board in the main room.

“I don’t know, after what happened with her dad?” I shook my head. “I’d like to think not.”

Nodding, he leaned forward. “Forget who they are, forget about how Kay might feel about it. You need to work this case like you would any other.”

He raised his brow as I said, “I know.”

“Those girls are still out there,” he reminded me.

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I needed to keep that in the front of my mind. Whatever was going on in my life, there were still girls out there who had been taken and we didn't have a clue where they were or who had taken them.

"Now, we need to sort a meeting out. All of us, gather all the information that we've all got and go over it all together. We need to find them."

"Thursday," I murmured. "Compound at nine."

"See you then." He nodded.

I pushed up out of the chair and pulled the door open, walking through the precinct and handing the homeless man a couple of bucks before I left.

I had to sort this with Kay and then I could focus on the case.

Me and Kitty spoke for a couple of hours before she had to get back to the warehouse. She apologized over and over again for not telling me, breaking some kind of girl code, she kept saying.

I understood, for how upset and angry that I had been, I really did understand why she hadn't told me. It wasn't her place; it was none of their places.

If someone had told Ty about my past I wouldn't have liked it, so I was sure that he wouldn't have either.

It wasn't that I was jealous. Well...Okay, maybe I was a little jealous. She had him in

a way that I never would and that was harder to swallow than I liked to admit.

The fact that they thought it was only Daley that was behind it really annoyed me. Don't get me wrong, it was totally possible that it was him. But to just push aside the possibility that it could be her as well? That wasn't what we should be doing, we should be looking at all avenues and making a decision that was based on facts, not on personal feelings.

My head was spinning and when Kitty went back to the warehouse, I went out to the porch swing. I loved coming out here, the air that swept through the trees calmed me, but at the same time, I felt safe sitting out here while still being in the middle of the compound.

I sat on the swing for over half an hour before I heard the whirl of the compound gates opening. Seeing Ty's truck pull up outside the warehouse had butterflies swarming in my stomach. He stepped out of his truck, his eyes finding mine immediately. I smiled, letting him know that I was good.

His face was taken over by the smile that he returned as he sauntered toward me. His jeans pulling at all the right places on his legs and his arms straining in the sleeves of his t-shirt. I was fascinated with watching him walk, it was such a small thing and something that I never thought I would find mesmerizing. But I did.

"We need to talk," he said as he walked up the steps. Nodding, I moved over on the swing, making space for him.

"Yeah, we do."

"Look, I know that it ain't easy." He pulled his hat off his head and leaned forward, his arms resting on his legs. "But we need to find those girls."

“We do.” I nodded and placed my hand on his back. “It’s just that we need to explore all possibilities. We don’t know what’s going on, and I know that she’s your wife-”

“She’s not my wife,” he growled and turned to me.

“Okay.” I swallowed, my hand rubbing his back unconsciously. “But-”

“No, Kay.” He sat up and turned, his hand coming up to cup my face. “Whatever happens, know that I’m on your side. I will always be on your side. You’re it for me, sweetheart.”

I swallowed at the intense look in his eyes. “Always?”

“Yeah, always,” he whispered, his eyes dipping to my lips.

“Let’s just find those girls,” I said, my chest rising and falling harder as he stared at me.

“Yeah.” His eyes flared and I tracked his tongue as it came out to lick his lips. We both moved closer and met half way.

Moaning when his lips met mine, my hand fluttered up to his arm, clutching at his bicep. He was soft at first, testing, teasing. His hands moved down to my butt, deepening the kiss as he pulled me onto his lap, his erection digging into my hip.

I did that, I made him feel like this. There was no feeling in the world like that, knowing that you were wanted.

Sparks flew as his tongue met mine, he gripped my butt harder as he stood, my legs wrapping around his waist automatically. I felt my skirt rising up my thighs but I

didn't care, instead I just held on tighter.

Pulling back slightly, I murmured. "We have to get Eli in an hour."

"Then we better make use of that hour." He smirked, pushing open the door and flipping the lock behind us.

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He lay me down on the couch, his hands running down the length of my legs.

“Are we not going upstairs?” I asked, the heat on my face rising at the thought of doing it here. Anyone could walk over at any time, look through the windows and see what we were doing.

I watched his chest lift with his hard breaths, my eyes taking in the length of him. He was magnificent, chiseled to perfection and when he pulled his hands to the edge of his t-shirt and pulled it up and over his head, I couldn’t stop the groan that came out.

He crouched down and rested on his knees, gripping my legs and spinning me around. Goosebumps trickled over my whole body as he caressed my skin and pushed my skirt up to my waist.

“Not enough time,” he said, his voice deepening with his lust. He pulled my legs open and looked down, his eyes almost turning black with arousal.

“Ty,” I croaked as he moved his hand around to my bare butt, bringing me even closer to him.

“Fuckin’ perfect,” he said on a breath, bringing his nose between my legs and inhaling. “You won’t be needing those.” He smirked and ripped my panties clean off me and threw them over his shoulder.

His eyes didn’t leave mine as he leaned down, his tongue licking the length of me. I relished in the feel of his fingers that were holding onto me with a bruising grip.

My hand went straight to his head, gripping his hair. I didn't know whether I wanted to push him away or pull him closer.

"Ty...It's too--"

"Watch me," he said when he pulled back.

I squeezed my eyes tight, not wanting to see what he was doing.

"Sweetheart..." He chuckled. My eyes clashed with his when I opened them. "Watch. Me."

I watched as his tongue came out and he licked me from top to bottom, the sensation out of this world. But coupled with watching him do it, made it all the more intense. His mouth closed over my clit, taking my nub and sucking.

"Oh, oh..."

He groaned, the sensation vibrating through me. His licks becoming longer and faster, sucking every few licks to soak up my juices. Squirming, I couldn't get enough, thrusting to meet his licks, while pulling on his hair.

"I...I'm close," I gasped.

He sucked harder, pulling me even closer and moaned, the vibrations throwing me over the edge. I threw my head back as I moaned his name, my back going ramrod straight as the orgasm ripped through me.

I didn't get the chance to catch my breath as he pushed inside me, slowly. Making me feel every inch of him. I met his eyes as he pulled all the way out and pushed back in again.



His head tilting back as he groaned my name.

I could feel every ridge of him as he pushed back in. Wrapping my legs around his waist, I pulled him closer. My nails digging into his tense ass as he hit that sweet spot.

“I can never get enough of you,” he gasped, pushing back in, faster this time. I clenched as he hit that spot again, knowing that it wouldn’t be long before another orgasm rolled through me.

“Ah, fuck. I can’t last much longer when you do that,” he said as my pussy clenched around him again.

I giggled at the look on his face, I could tell that he was holding back. I didn’t want him to hold back. I wanted him to go faster, harder.

“Fuck me.”

“What?” He stopped thrusting, looking down at me with wide eyes.

“I said. Fuck. Me.”

“Sweetheart-”

“No.” Shaking my head, I gripped his butt harder. “I won’t break Ty, Fuck me. Hard.”

“Are you sure?” His Adam’s apple bobbed as he looked at me, his eyes moving to where we were connected.

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“Yeah,” I clenched around him again. Closing his eyes, his arms tensed beside me.

When he opened them back up, they were full of desire, even more than before. He moved his hand to my hip, the other leaning on the couch beside me, getting the traction that he needed before he rammed inside of me.

So hard and fast that I squealed. My pussy clenched around him again, this time for longer as sparks started to fly. I nodded to urge him on when he stopped, asking if I was okay. My eyes fluttered shut from all the sensations.

Pumping inside of me, each time hitting that spot, meant it didn’t take long before I was screaming his name for a second time.

“Fuck, Kay.” He groaned, pulsing inside me as he found his release. He leaned forward his face burrowing into the crook of my neck.

We stayed like that for several seconds until I looked down and couldn’t hold in the giggle that bubbled up my throat.

“What?” He lifted his head, smiling at me.

“I’m still dressed.” I smirked.

Chuckling, he pulled back. “I can change that.” He wiggled his brows up and down.

“Ty...” I snorted. “It’s nearly time to get Eli.”

“Tonight,” he said, pulling out slowly.

A promise, not a question.

On Tuesday morning, I went with Luke to take Eli to preschool, smiling the whole way there at how Eli was acting. Now that we were out of the apartment and away from Max, I could see the difference in Eli.

He was thr

iving both at home and at preschool, he was so much more open to talking to people and actually playing, like a child should, instead of always being on guard. It wasn't until he was out of that environment that I noticed how much it had affected him.

He loved the simple things; spending time with Ty and Luke, just being a boy and running through the woods. Sometimes I looked at him and regretted not leaving Max sooner than I'd think, if I would've left him sooner, I wouldn't have found Ty.

Eli wasn't the only one who had changed for the better.

It wasn't the big things, like worrying if I had money for food or waiting for the next time Max would hit me. It was the small things that made me smile; Eli's excitement to come home and tell everyone what he had done at preschool, what he had made or a new person that he had met.

Knowing that when he woke up, he wouldn't have to see me with yet another bruise.

The best part was knowing what waited for me at home and not having that sinking feeling as I heard the door open. That was one of the things that I loved most; knowing what was coming, what to expect.

Walking out of the preschool, I jumped back into the car and looked over at Luke. His eyes flicked over to me as he was talking on the radio.

“Got it, Boss.” He nodded and let the button go, reversing out of the lot.

“Everything okay?” I asked, leaning back in my seat.

“Serena’s on the move. Boss wants me to drop you back at the compound and then check it out.”

Wait, what? Why did I have to go back to the compound? I couldn’t help but think that he was hiding something if he didn’t want me to know what Serena was up to.

“Nope,” I said, shaking my head. “I’m coming with you.”

“Thought you would.” He smirked. “You’ll have to tell boss though.”

Rolling my eyes, I pulled out my work phone and sent him a text.

FROM: KAY

TO: TY

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I'm going with Luke. See you later.

I smiled, pushing my phone back in my pocket and ignoring the buzz of an incoming message. I turned the car radio up, singing along to the song that played on the radio.

He wouldn't cut me out of this, I was as much a part of this company as anyone else was. Which meant that I'd be doing the same work that they did. I loved that Ty wanted to protect me but he couldn't protect me from everything.

We pulled up at Daley's mansion and I furrowed my brows turning to Luke. "I thought we were checking Serena out, not Daley?"

"We are," he replied. "She went inside an hour ago and hasn't come out since."

"So we're going to follow her when she comes out?"

"Yep."

After twenty minutes, I pulled my pad out and started to draw some doodles. This was the worst thing about watching and waiting, it was boring. After a few car games, ten pages of doodles and sixty minutes, the gates finally opened.

She drove through the gates in her bright red sports car with the top down. I nearly snorted with how obnoxious she looked, people like her didn't deserve to drive cars like that. They should be driven in the way they were meant to be, not used to show everyone that you thought you were better than them.

“Let’s see where she’s stayin’.” Luke rubbed his hands together, started the car and went in the direction that she had gone.

We followed her all through town, watching as she would check herself out in the mirror at every opportunity she could get and completely unaware of her surroundings.

“Thought so,” he said as we came to a stop opposite the most expensive hotel in a fifty-mile radius.

“What?” I frowned, writing the name of the hotel down. I really needed to start carrying my camera around with me. If these things were going to come up without any prior planning, I had to be prepared. I didn’t even have my belt or vest on.

“She wouldn’t stay in anything other than luxury, she always was a money grabbing bitch.”

My brows flew to my hairline at the venom in his voice. “Whoa!” I held my hands up. “What’s with all the hating?”

Not that I wasn’t thinking the same thing but I didn’t expect that to come out of Luke’s mouth.

“After what she did to Ty? You telling me you don’t feel the same?” He raised a brow at me and pulled back out onto the road.

“What did she do to Ty?” I knew that she’d done something but what it was, I had no idea.

“I’m not surprised that he hasn’t told you everything,” he said, stopping at a red light. “What she did nearly broke him.”

I gulped, not wanting to comment. I wanted nothing more than to beg Luke to tell me what else had happened but I wanted to hear it from Ty, not anyone else.

“Do we not need to follow her? What if she goes back out?” I asked, deciding to change the subject so that I wasn’t tempted to ask him what had happened.

“Nah.”

“Why?”

“Now we know where she’s staying, Evan can infiltrate the hotel system and we can put a tracker on her car.”

“Ah, I see.”

I stayed silent the rest of the drive back to the compound. Thoughts going around and around in my head. The one positive thing was, I wasn’t thinking of Max. At least not until I thought that.

I jumped out of Luke’s SUV when we arrived back at the compound and walked swiftly into the warehouse. They were all waiting for us, sat at the meeting table. So I walked around to my chair next to Ty and sat down.

“Anything?” Ty asked, not looking at me.

“Yeah, she’s staying at LACEY’S.”

Kitty snorted. “Typical.”

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“Evan, get into their system. I want to know everything. When she comes and goes, everyone she talks to and even when she fuckin’ eats.”

“On it,” he replied, already typing away on his laptop.

I pulled my notepad and pen closer, about to write the date when Ty said, “Kay.” I looked up to him, finding his eyes. “Office.”

He pushed up out of his chair and stormed off, leaving me wondering what was up with him. I looked at the rest of the guys, each of them wearing a smirk. They obviously knowing something that I didn’t.

“This is gonna be good.” Evan rubbed his hands together, leaning back in his seat.

“What?” I mumbled. “What did I do?” Pointing to my chest, I looked at all of them in confusion.

“You’ll find out.” Kitty winked.

Pushing out of my chair, I pulled my t-shirt down and adjusted my hair. Why was I in trouble? I hadn’t done anything wrong. Had I?

My legs felt like jelly as I walked to the office. Gripping my hands in front of me, I cleared my throat when I got to the door. “Ty-”

“Close the door,” he said. Sat behind his desk, he looked furious. He didn’t look up at me, keeping his eyes fixated on a spot on his desk.



I closed the door and walked over to the desk, sitting opposite him in the same chair that I sat in all those months ago for my interview.

“You ignored me,” he gritted out.

“I-”

“No.” He sliced his hand through the air, his eyes coming up to meet mine. “You don’t do that. Ever.”

I scanned his face, feeling my own blood boiling. Was this why he wasn’t happy, because I had gone with Luke?

“You cut me off!” I swear, stood and threw my hands up in the air. “You told Luke to bring me back to the compound.”

“Because I don’t want you having to follow her.” He blew out a breath, shaking his head at me.

I shoved my hands onto my hips and squinted my eyes at him. “Am I still a part of this company? Not just in the office but out on surveillance jobs as well?” I said, stepping forward and leaning my hands on the desk.

“Yeah,” Ty murmured.

“Then it’s my job,” I said softly, pointing at my chest, not giving him the chance to speak. “You can’t pick and choose what cases or people suit you.” I raise

d a brow and waited for him to say something, when he didn’t, I pushed up off the desk and walked away. “I’ll follow who I damn well like,” I said when I pulled the door open.

“Kay?” Ty said when I stepped out of the door.

“What?” I said, spinning back around to him.

“I love it when you get like that.” He smirked.

“Like what?” I huffed.

“Like that.” He pointed to the chair and winked.

“You’re insufferable.” I rolled my eyes and slammed the door behind me, his laughter following me out.

I smiled at the sound.

He loved it when I stood up for myself? That was something I never thought I’d do, let alone hear someone appraise me for it.

I woke up early the next day and went for a run around the compound. I was determined to get as fit as I could, I wanted to show them all that I could do what they did. That way, there would never be a time that they could say I couldn’t go on a job. But with Serena back in the picture, it made it even more important. I didn’t trust her, there was something about her that didn’t seem right. She set off my alarm bells and I couldn’t stop seeing the look that she’d had in her eyes.

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I'd tried to bring it up with Ty a couple of times, but each time he'd shoot me down. Luke though, seemed to be on the same wavelength as me, maybe talking to him about it would assure me I wasn't just being jealous.

I didn't know what to do because every time I would bring her name up, no one would listen. At least, that's what it felt like.

When I finished my run, I stood in the middle of the compound and stretched out, watching the sky as it lit up from the rising sun. No matter where you stood on the compound, the view was always breath-taking. As a little girl, I had always imagined living in the middle of the woods, this wasn't quite what I imagined but it was close.

Walking back to the house, I headed straight for my room and stripped off my clothes, turned the shower on and stepped inside, letting the cold water spray over me. I'd slept in Ty's room last night but I always came back to my room to shower because my clothes were still in here. Ty had mentioned moving them into his room but I didn't know how I felt about that. I wasn't quite ready.

I may be ready at some stage but not just yet.

I braided my hair to the side and shoved my jeans, MAC security t-shirt and combat boots on. Then I grabbed my belt, vest and the bag I had packed last night.

After yesterday, I told myself that I would be prepared for any situation, I wouldn't be caught out again. I'd packed my camera, a few snacks, and a notepad and pen. Always be prepared was my new motto, especially when it came to this job.

I woke Eli up, got him ready for preschool and was giving him breakfast by the time Ty came into the kitchen.

“Mornin’.” He walked past Eli, ruffling his hair, reminding me that he was due a haircut, and met me at the kitchen counter.

“Morning.” I smiled, taking a sip of my coffee.

“Where were you earlier this morning?” he asked, checking the coffee pot.

“Went for a run.” I shrugged.

“What? Why didn’t you wake me up?” He pulled a cup down from the cupboard, my eyes tracked the sliver of skin that showed as his t-shirt to lifted slightly.

I felt a blush rising up my cheeks. Looking away, I cleared my throat and said, “needed time to think, and it surprisingly helped.”

“Yeah?” He leaned against the counter opposite me, and smirked. “How long did you run for?”

“I don’t know.” I walked over to Eli and picked up his empty bowl, and checked his cup for juice.

“Really?” he asked, skeptical.

“I didn’t time myself.” I did but I wasn’t telling him how long I had run for.

He chuckled, probably already knowing that I only managed ten minutes before I felt like I was going to die. Full on, couldn’t breathe with my hands on knees, dying.

“Time to go, sweetie. Go and get your shoes,” I said, turning back to Eli.

“Okay, mama.” He jumped down but stopped at the door and looked back at us. “Is Uncle Luke taking me today?”

“Yeah, sweetie. Me and Luke today.”

He smiled wide, nodding, and pushed through the door just as Ty was picking up my bag.

“What’s this?” he asked with a raised brow.

“My camera.” I walked over to him and picked up my belt, clipping it around my waist.

“You don’t need all of this just to take Eli.”

“I need to be prepared, you don’t go off the compound without being suited up. Why should I be any different?” Picking up my vest, I put my arms through it. Sure, I may only have been taking Eli to preschool but if I was prepared for anything, then I wouldn’t be caught out.

“Kay-”

“Ty,” I mocked.

“You-” The ringing of his cell stopped what he was about to say. Huffing, he pulled it out and answered, “Yeah?”

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I leaned back and waited for him to finish his call. He listened to whoever was on the line, nodding and not saying anything.

“Yeah, tomorrow.” Pocketing his phone, he moved closer to me, his eyes taking me all in.

“You look hot in all of that.”

“No, I’m fine.” I waved my hand in the air.

He threw his head back and laughed. A deep throaty sound, his face completely relaxed.

“No,” he said, trying to catch his breath. “I meant, you look h-o-t. You know, sexy.”

“Ahhh.” I looked away, heat rising in my cheeks as he watched me.

“I love it when you blush.” He reached up and swiped a piece of hair off my face, tucking it behind my ear.

I didn’t, I hated blushing. He always made my body go haywire when he was around. I felt like I had no control over it.

“Mama!”

“I...I’ve gotta go,” I stammered.

“Uh huh.” He leaned forward, pressing his lips against mine in a quick, gentle kiss.  
“I’ll be out when you get back.”

“Okay.” I cleared my throat. I loved how he always did that. He wouldn’t go off the compound without telling me.

Picking up my camera, I walked to the door and turned back to him asking, “I’ll see you later?”

“Yeah.” He winked. “Oh and sweetheart?”

“Hmm?”

“Good thinking on always being prepared, you never know what could happen.” His face turned serious, something concealed in the shadows of his eyes.

Swallowing, I nodded and pushed through the door.

I walked through the living room and watched out of the window as Eli got into the car. They’d become my whole world in such a short amount of time, and I constantly feared that they would be taken from me. I couldn’t cope with any more losses.

That’s why I had a tracker put on both of them. Eli had one in his school bag, one in the sole of his shoes and one sewn into his coat. Kay’s was in the sole of her boots and in her vest. It wasn’t that I wanted to control them or make sure I knew where they were, it was for their own safety.

If anything ever happened, I knew that I could always find them.

Grabbing my own belt, I clipped it on and picked up my vest. Today I was watching

Daley and Serena. Evan had found out that they had a business meeting at the hotel she was staying at, but we didn't know what room it was being held in so Evan had hacked into the whole system.

"Boss?" I lifted my head as Evan came through the front door, tablet in hand.

"Yeah?" I said, picking my keys up.

"I've set it all up. Whichever one they have it in, if you click on the little icon, it will make it full screen." He pointed at the tablet, tapping the screen to show me.

"Got it," I said, taking the tablet from him and walking out the door.

"You need to be within a mile radius to pick up the signal," he continued, following me out and shutting the door behind him.

"Okay." Walking over to my truck, I pressed the button on my key fob, all the lights flashing. "Meeting, when I get back," I told him.

"Sure," he said, waiting until I was in the car.

"Keep digging."



“On Daley?”

“Both of them,” I ground out. “I told you yesterday, we’re working this case as if we don’t know them personally.”

“Boss, I still don’t think Serena would do this. Not after...”

“I know but opinions mean nothing, I want facts.” I stared at him, letting him know with my eyes that it wasn’t a subject that he had any say on.

Slamming my door, I started the car and drove out of the compound. I didn’t want to think that she had anything to do with kidnapping those girls but I had to look at it objectively.

My mind was whirling with the possible outcomes from this business meeting. I couldn’t discover if they were working together or alone; if they were working together, then I was certain they would discuss it.

Pulling up far enough away from the hotel to not look suspicious, but still close enough so I could get a signal, I pulled out my headphones and plugged them into the tablet.

The meeting was meant to be at nine and it was already a quarter to. Settling back, I waited and watched the camera at the front of the hotel on the tablet.

For fifteen minutes, all I saw were two people leaving, and one of those tiny dogs try to attack the doorman.

Dead on nine, Daley arrived in his Bentley. His driver opened his door and he stepped out, looking around him discreetly. That was one of the first signs, he wouldn't be scanning the area if he wasn't worried about something, or someone.

I watched him go into the hotel and walk down the corridor to one of the suites.

'Gold Suite'. Figured. I shouldn't have expected anything less.

When he sat down at the table, I pressed the icon so that it would fill the whole screen. He sat down and pulled his cell out, tapping away on the screen for several minutes until Serena came waltzing in, followed by a couple of men. Big, tall, beefy men, all dressed in black combat gear.

My brows raised at that. Why were they with her? They stood at the door and nodded to Daley. Were they there with h

im, or her? I couldn't work it out.

"Good morning." She smiled at Daley, taking a seat opposite him. Her movements slow and measured. She'd always been like that, always aware of her body and how to have the greatest effect on people. Mainly men, that was something that I realized after I had left her.

I sat and listened but all they talked about was the charity and the new building that they had drawn plans up for. By all accounts, it was a normal business meeting, and by the time Serena left the room, I didn't know anything more than I already did when I had arrived.

The only thing that I was sure about, was that they weren't working together. They would have mentioned something surely? Even if it was a small detail. That meant that it was either Daley or Serena.

The two men exited the room after Serena and I was about to swipe off the screen to see where they went when Daley's phone rang.

"Yo." I snorted at his greeting, he was an obnoxious piece of shit.

"Yeah, is the next shipment ready to be picked up?" He asked with a smirk on his face.

Whatever they said on the other end, he didn't like it, because his face started to go red and his hands clenched into a fist at his side.

"Tomorrow night, I mean it. Don't let this one get away," he growled down the phone. "I want it taken straight to my safe place. No stops in between."

He pulled the phone away from his face and tapped the screen before shoving it into his pants. He closed his eyes, composing himself, then did the button on his suit jacket up and opened his eyes.

You'd have never known he had just lost his cool if you saw him then. Pulling the door open, he walked out of the room as if nothing had happened.

Pressing the screen to take me back to the icons, I watched him walk back through the hotel, the henchmen followed him and he gave them a slight nod as he got into the waiting Bentley. Looked like they were there for him after all.

It seemed there was more to Daley than what we had originally thought.

While we waited for Ty to get back from his surveillance job, I decided to be productive.

I collected the files of information that Evan had gathered on Daley and Serena and

spread them out on the floor in the office.

Evan had said that they had gone through them and couldn't find anything, but it didn't hurt to go over them again. Especially when I had a gut feeling about Serena.

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All of the information on her was the basic stuff, she came from a good family, was one of the top kids in her class and married Ty right out of high school. It read like the perfect life but I knew there was no such thing.

Everyone had secrets that they tried to hide. It was finding out where they were that was the hard part. When I came across their marriage certificate, I had to cover it with another piece of paper, I couldn't bear to look at it.

Was it childish? Probably. It was better than burning it though, which is what I really wanted to do.

I carried on reading her file, noting all of the charities that she had worked for since Ty had left her. She'd been all around the world helping these charities and I kind of hated her for that.

The more I read, the more I started to doubt myself. Maybe I had imagined the look in her eyes?

Maybe it was jealousy.

My thoughts were whirling in my head, and it didn't ease up any by the time Ty came back.

"Kay?" he asked, coming to stand next to me. "What are you doing?"

I tilted my head right back and looked at him upside down. "Just looking through these. Seeing if I can find something that we might have missed."

He nodded and held his hand out to me. “Ready for the meeting?”

I turned around, pushing all the papers back a little and making sure that I didn’t step on any of them. Placing my hand in his so he could help me up.

He wrapped his arms around me, a soft smile on his face. His brown eyes swirled with so many emotions that I couldn’t pick one, he looked torn, like something was really bothering him.

“Ty?” I lifted my hand to his face, the scruff rough on the pads of my fingers. “You okay?”

Dipping down, he pressed his lips to mine. His tongue swiped along my bottom lip and I opened up, leaning closer as his tongue caressed mine. His arms tightened around me as he deepened the kiss, our chests bouncing off each other as our breathing deepened.

Pulling away, he leaned his forehead against mine. “Yeah, I’m good now.” Chuckling, I pulled back and tapped him on the chest.

Grabbing my hand, he led me into the main part of the warehouse and pulled my chair out for me.

Once we were sat down, he told us everything that he had heard, none of it meaning much apart from Daley’s phone call when Serena had left the room.

“Why has he got protection?” Kitty frowned. “He must think something is about to go down.”

Ty nodded and blew out a big breath.

“We need to look into Daley more. I want him watched every hour of the day.” Looking to Luke and Kitty, he said, “You two are on night duty. I want to know everything that goes on with him, phone calls, where he goes. Everything.”

“When do you want us to start?” Luke asked.

“Tonight.” They nodded at him in reply.

“Me and Kay will take the day shift.” Ty looked at me, asking me with his eyes if that was okay.

“How long will the shifts be?” I asked. However, as much as I wanted to do a full shift, I still needed to think of Eli.

I wanted to be a part of the team and I wanted to be doing the same thing as everyone else, but I still had to think about Eli. Sure, things were much better now that we lived at the compound but that didn’t mean I was going to be any less of a mom. I still wanted us to have time, just me and him. It was too easy to have one of the guys watch over him.

I had to make sure that I didn’t get too caught up in work or Ty.

“Ah, shit.” He hung his head, tapping his fingers on the table, realizing what I meant without having to say anything.

“Does it need to be two at a time?” Kitty asked. “If we’re just watching and waiting, then we could split it into four shifts.”

“No, Kay can’t be on her own-”

“Good idea,” I said, interrupting Ty before he said what I thought he was about to.

There was no way that he was going to make special precautions just for me.



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“Kay,” he said, reaching over and placing his hand on top of mine. “It was only a few weeks back that you wouldn’t go out on your own. What makes you think that this will be any different?”

My nostrils flared as I listened to him. I couldn’t believe that he’d said that in front of everyone.

I wasn’t stupid, I knew that they had suspicions about me not going off the compound but they didn’t know for sure, at least they didn’t until this moment.

“Tyson.” I gritted out. His eyes widened at the use of his full name. “Have you trained me in self-defense?”

“Ye-”

“Do I have a radio and weapons?”

“Yeah but-”

“No buts. I can do this. You need to trust me.” I kept my eyes connected to his, trying to get my point across. I needed to do this, he had to let me be me again. The me I was becoming before everything happened.

He blew out a big breath and watched me, his eyes scanning my face. I knew he could see it in my eyes, I was practically screaming it at him. Was I scared to go out on my own? Damn straight I was but if I didn’t start now, then when would I?

Before I knew it, it would be ten years down the line and I still wouldn't be able to go anywhere without one of them with me.

I didn't want to live like that.

"Fine," he conceded. "You'll do nine until three, then one of us will take over from you. Six hour rotations," he said the last part to everyone, waiting for their nods of confirmation.

Putting a plan in place, I wrote down everything that he said and planned the routes in my head. I didn't allow myself to feel the fear that desperately wanted to overtake me. Instead, I got stuck in with what I needed to look out for and what photos I might need to take.

I'd hardly slept at all last night. I couldn't stop thinking of Kay being out of the compound on her own. Rationally, I knew that she would be fine, I had trackers on her and on the cars, but I couldn't quieten that little voice in my head that told me this wasn't a good idea.

That she was going to get hurt.

When Kay left to take Eli to preschool on her own, I headed straight for the warehouse and to my desk. I switched the computer on and tracked her all the way there, then to Daley's house. I'd toyed with the idea of following her there and watching her as she watched him. Then I remembered that Charlie was coming in this morning so I had no choice but to let her do it on her own.

I knew it sounded stupid but I just had this feeling in the pit of my stomach. I'd never worried about anyone the way that I worried about Kay. Maybe it was because I'd seen her get hurt and couldn't bear to see her like that again.

Whatever it was, I couldn't stop worrying about her. I knew Eli was safe. I had all the security measures in place at the preschool that I could possibly have. But Kay? She had no protection around her whatsoever.

I was going out of my mind.

It wasn't that I didn't trust her because I did, I really did. I just hated the thoughts that ran through my head; all the possibilities of what could happen to her if I wasn't there.

"Boss! Charlie's here!" Evan shouted through the warehouse. Shaking the thoughts from my head and looking at the screen one last time, I shoved my chair back.

They were all sat around the meeting table waiting for me when I walked out of the office. My eyes flicked to Kay's seat and my stomach dipped. It didn't feel right, her not being here.

"Hey," Charlie greeted when I sat down.

"Hey," I huffed, slumping down in my seat.

"Whoa, little bro, what's with all the enthusiasm?"

"He's stressing out," Kitty spoke up. "Kay's gone out on her own."

"Holy Fuck." I lifted my eyes to Charlie. "Never thought you'd let her out on her own, on the account of...you know."

"Let's get this over with," I growled, I wasn't in the mood to hear all of his sarcastic remarks. "What have you found out?"

“Nothing much.” He shrugged. “Serena has been doing charity work since she moved out of the state. Nothing suspicious so I think she’s just caught up in the cross hairs with whatever is going on here.”

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“Yeah, that’s what we’re thinking,” I said, leaning forward. “I listened in on their meeting yesterday. Daley had two bodyguards and there was a suspicious phone call. We’re gonna have eyes on him twenty-four-seven from now on.”

“Good, good. I think we need it. We’ve found out he’s got some contacts that are known cartel members.”

“Yeah?” Luke asked. “Which ones?”

Charlie pushed five folders into the middle of the table, pointing at them and saying. “There’s one for each of you, all the information we could find on Daley and his contacts.”

Reaching forward, I pulled one towards me and opened it up. It was full of his contacts and had information on each of them. My lips lifted in a small smile, this was it. This was how we would catch him. If one of them was in on it, then we could get to him through them.

“Another missing girl was reported missing last night.” Charlie said into the silence.

“Didn’t you say Daley was talking about a package being delivered, boss?” Kitty said, lifting her head and placing the folder on the table.

“He did?” Charlie looked from her then back to me.

“Yeah,” I said, nodding my head. “Now it makes sense, he must have been talking about the girl.” I pulled my hat off, running my hand through my hair.

This wasn't good. Why hadn't I put it together? Now that I thought about it, it was obvious. How he got so angry over not having the 'package' when he wanted it. That package must have been the girl.

"One of the top girls in her class." Charlie shook his head, looking at me, fire blazing in his eyes. "Only five miles from here."

"They're getting closer," Evan said, turning his laptop around to face us with a map on the screen. "The bigger the dots, the more recent they've been."

The map had loads of dots on and they were all getting closer and closer to the compound. There was no mistaking it.

"How did you get that?" Charlie asked, leaning forward in his seat to see it better.

"I've got contacts." Evan shrugged and smirked at Charlie.

Shaking my head at him, I squinted at the screen. He was right, they were getting closer.

"What is their end game?" I mumbled. What were they trying to achieve?

"I don't know," Charlie said, standing up. "But we need to find out, and fast."

We did need to find out fast; not knowing where those girls were, not being any closer to finding out, was frustrating the hell out of me. I needed to run. I needed to think.

Charlie stood up and looked at his phone. "I'll be in touch," he said, making his way to the door.

“Later.” I nodded.

We all stayed silent for a while, each of us looking through all of the information we’d just been given.

“Luke, keep track of Kay. I need to run.”

“On it,” he answered, not lifting his head from the folder.

Huffing, I walked out of the warehouse and straight to the house to get changed into my gym clothes. A good run and some exercise on the equipment in the clearing is what I needed.

Watching somebody’s house on my own, was the most boring thing I had ever done. I’d been sat here for over five hours now and not one person had come in or out.

Taking Eli to preschool on my own was scary but once I had done it, I was so happy. Not only that, but I was proud that I had done it all by myself and I couldn’t keep the smile off my face. There was a time not long ago when I thought I’d never be able to take him on my own again but I’d done it and I finally felt like the last piece of the jigsaw had slipped into place.

I’d managed to find Daley’s place pretty easily and I was ready and pumped for some action.

Then... nothing happened. Ty had told me that Charlie was coming to the compound today, he’d text me earlier to say that he left my folder in the kitchen at home.

Home.

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That was a word that I was getting used to hearing.

He hadn't said anything else but I knew that he wouldn't because, although our lines were secure, he always said that you could never be too careful.

He was due to take over my watch any second now but whether we would be able to talk, I didn't know.

Pulling my phone out when it buzzed, I swiped the screen and opened up the new message.

FROM: TY

TO: KAY

5 mins away. When I pull up, drive off.

See you at home.

I smiled and kept my eyes on the rear view mirror, looking out for him. A couple of minutes later, he drove up behind me and I pulled my seatbelt around me, switching the engine on. Making my way to Eli's preschool, I thought about how much my life had changed.

A few months ago, I would have never gone out of that compound on my own, and now I was out on my own, not only taking and picking up Eli, but doing surveillance jobs as well. Everything was perfect. Well...as long as you didn't count the wife that



had turned up out of the blue and not talking to Corey.

I hated not talking to him. I really needed to confront him, especially knowing that he was video calling tonight. I was just so hurt, I still couldn't wrap my mind around him being so close and not coming to see us.

Pulling up to the preschool, I took a deep breath and got out of the car. I scanned the area as I walked to the door, making sure I knew what and who was around me.

When I pulled the door open, Miss Cooper was sat in the waiting area. She stood and smiled kindly at me, meeting me in the middle of the foyer.

"Miss Anderson? I was wondering if we could have a quick chat?" She waved to the little office opposite, a reassuring smile lighting up her face.

"Sure." I nodded and walked into the office as she followed behind me and shut the door, closing us in the tiny space.

I watched as she shuffled around the small space, which was covered with stacks of folders and boxes of spare clothes and books. You'd think for a preschool that was so busy and catered for so many children, that they would have a bigger office.

"I wanted to talk about how Eli is getting on," she said, once she squeezed behind the desk and sat down. "I'm aware that there have been a few changes at home and wanted to talk about going forward."

"Okay..."

"I've got to say, Miss Anderson-"

"Kaylee, call me Kaylee," I said, lifting my hand and waving it in the air.

“Oh, right.” She cleared her throat and continued. “Kaylee, Eli has improved so much in such a short amount of time. He’s more confident and progressing really fast. I’d like you to consider what you will do when he’s ready to start school.”

“School?” It wasn’t time for him to start school yet, we had a year before he would start.

“I know it’s early to start thinking about it but I feel like you should try and get him in the best school around. He’s such a bright boy.” She smiled, leaning forward and almost knocking over a pile of folders.

Clearing my throat, I shifted in the chair. “So there isn’t a problem with Eli?”

“Oh, no, no. Just the opposite of what you were probably thinking. I’m sorry Kaylee, I didn’t mean to give you the wrong impression.” She frowned, her face going red.

“That’s fine,” I said and pushed up out of the seat. This office was too damn small and was starting to make me sweat. “Was that all?”

“I have some great options for you to discuss with...” She caught herself before she said anything else and I looked down, feeling embarrassed. Who would I discuss them with? I could talk to Ty but he wasn’t Eli’s father, it wasn’t his responsibility.

“Right,” I mumbled. “Well, do you have leaflets, or...”

“Oh! I have them here somewhere.” She started to look around the room, but it was obvious that she wouldn’t find anything in the piles and piles of folders and papers.

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“Don’t worry about it, Miss Cooper, I’ll have them when you can find them, no rush.” Smiling, I walked through the door and waited in the foyer for Eli, glad to be out of such a small confined space.

“Mama!” Eli shouted as he ran through the door, his coat being dragged along the floor as well as his bag.

“Eli!” I shouted back and crouched down with my arms open wide. This felt good, this felt beyond good. Knowing I was doing this on my own again was such an incredible feeling.

“We on our own, mama?” he asked when I took his bag and coat from him and held my hand out.

“Yep” I grinned down at him. “Want to get burgers and take them back to the warehouse for everyone?”

“Yeah!” he shouted and practically dragged me to the car.

They all scoffed the burgers down as soon as we got back to the warehouse. I had to separate Ty’s from everyone else’s and managed to get them back home safely. I didn’t know when he would be back but I knew that Kitty was taking over his shift tonight.

Luke had asked me if he could come over and read Eli a bedtime story, I couldn’t say no. He was so used to seeing Eli twice a day and since I’d taken Eli on my own, he hadn’t seen him all day.

I cleaned the house, tidying any mess that we had made and making sure the kitchen counters sparkled, all before Luke left. Once he was gone, I jumped in the shower and tried to mentally prepare for my video call with Corey.

This was the first one since we had spoken about Max. He'd tried to video call a few times after but each time I refused to talk to him. It was time that I pulled up my big girl panties and asked him out right, what the hell had gone on?

Stepping into Ty's home office, I switched the computer on and typed in the password that he'd had me memorize. Twisting my wet hair, I pulled it into a bun on the top of my head and crossed my legs on the giant comfy office chair, waiting for the call to come through.

He always gave a rough time that he would call but it could be at any time if something came up. The ringing sound came from the speakers at the exact time that he said that he'd call. Taking a deep calming breath, I put my hand on the mouse and clicked the accept button.

"Corey?" I mumbled.

"Lil' sis?" His face came onto the screen, his smile completely taking over. "Ah, it's good to see you."

"Yeah," I ground out, all of my anger coming back full force.

"Hey." He furrowed his brows, moving closer to the camera. "What's that tone for? Something happen?"

"Yeah," I said, moving closer. "You came back to visit nine months ago?"

His eyes widened as he stilled. His body language and demeanour told me all I

needed to know, without him having to say a word.

“Listen-”

“What the hell, Corey!” I threw my hands in the air, shaking my head. “I can’t believe you would do that!”

“Kay-”

“I mean, telling me that you had come back to the country, but couldn’t see me because you were doing specialized training, is one thing.” I uncrossed my legs and planted my feet firmly on the ground. “But being this close and not even bothering to come see us?”

My hands were waving around in the air, and if I was honest, I probably looked like a mad woman. But I had every right to be like this with him, he always droned on about the importance of telling each other the truth, when he hadn’t been telling the truth.

“Kaylee, if I’d had known what that sick fuck was doing to you-” He tried to reason, his head hanging down.

“That doesn’t matter!” I leaned forward even more, resting precariously on the edge of my seat. “It doesn’t matter what he did to me...” My voice broke as I tried to hold back a sob.

I covered my mouth with my hand and squeezed my eyes shut tight. I didn’t want to bring all of that back up again or get into that head space. It wouldn’t help anything; it would just make things worse.

“Ah, fuck!” he shouted, making me jump and open my eyes back up.

“You should have wanted to come and see us.” I managed to get past the lump in my throat.

“It wasn’t safe,” he said, bringing his face back up to the camera. “I was there for Ty’s help.”

“I don’t understand,” I sniffled.

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He held his head in his hands. “I had some trouble and I needed Ty and the guys to help me out.”

“But...why couldn’t you come and see us?” I asked, still not understanding.

“I had some really dangerous people after me, it wasn’t safe for me to come and see you and Eli.” He leaned back and placed his hands on top of his head. “I wanted to, fuck, I drove past your apartment block and nearly came in.”

His face was torn; I could see how much this had affected him. “So...you wanted to see us?”

“Of course I did. You’ll never understand what it is that I do, Kay, it’s dangerous. I have enemies, enemies in so many countries and if they knew about you then they would target you...and Eli.”

Nodding my head, I thought that I finally understood why he’d stayed away and had minimum contact throughout the years.

“But now that you’re there, you’re safer with the guys and I know they’ll protect you.”

“Yeah,” I mumbled, looking away. “So does this mean we’ll be able to see you soon?” I asked, hopeful.

“Hell yes! As soon as I’ve finished what I’m doing over here, I’m straight back to the states.”

“Really?” I asked. A smile spreading on my face.

“Really.” He nodded.

We were both silent for a couple of minutes, not the awkward kind where you don’t know what to say, but the kind where you’re just thinking.

“Right...” He clapped his hands and smiled wide. “Now that is out of the way, tell me how things are going.”

Blowing out a big breath, I considered how much I should tell him. He must have known Serena, I mean, him and Ty had known each other a long time according to Ty.

I didn’t know how much Ty had told him about the case, or if he had even told him at all. But I thought it was best not to mention that. I cringed when I realized that he didn’t know about me and Ty but that was a conversation for another day.

“I may as well start from the beginning,” I said, getting comfortable in my chair.

I could hear Kay’s laugh as soon as I walked into the house, and when I heard Corey’s laugh follow after, I realized what she was doing. I was glad that she’d finally got to video call with Corey, I was fed up with him harassing me to get her to talk to him. There was no way I was going to push her to do anything that she didn’t want to do. I knew that when she was ready to talk to him, that she would.

Leaving her to finish her video call, I walked into the kitchen, noticing a bag from the burger joint with a note sat in front of it. Picking it up I read it.

Picked you up a couple of burgers.



Kay x

Opening up the bag, I found a couple of burgers and went to warm them through. I was constantly telling Kay that she didn't need to do this, she always had a hot meal or something for me to eat when I came home. I knew that she was used to doing it, and I really appreciated it, but she didn't have to.

Pulling the burger out of the microwave, I took a bite and reflected on my afternoon. As soon as Kay had drove off, Daley came through the gates in his obnoxious car and took me all around town, going on a shopping spree. I didn't know how he did it. I hated going to the supermarket, and for me, shopping for clothes was a ten-minute activity ordering the same pair of jeans several times, online.

I couldn't deal with shops and the assistants who always wanted to...well...assist.

After he had lu

nch with whom I assumed was a business associate, he came straight home and was still there when Kitty took over from me.

Throwing my rubbish in the trash, I walked through the living room and up the stairs, trying not to disturb Kay. We still hadn't told Corey about us, that was gonna be a fun conversation. I had no doubt that he wouldn't like it one bit but he'd have to deal, because I wasn't going anywhere.

"Love you too, lil' sis," I heard Corey say when I got to the top of the stairs.

I looked at my bedroom door, then over to my office. I desperately needed a shower but the pull Kay had on me was too strong, my feet were already taking me in her direction.

Pushing the door open, I leaned on the door frame, watching her. Her legs were pulled up to her chest and she wearing one of my t-shirts pulled over her knees. I smiled at that, I loved it when she wore my clothes. My eyes followed the path of her legs up to her face, buried into her knees.

“Kay?”

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Squeaking, her head shot up and she looked at me with wide eyes. “Oh! You scared me!” she said, her hand going to her chest.

I frowned as I saw her face and puffy eyes, she’d been crying, and seeing her like that always hit me straight in the gut.

“What happened?” I gritted out, moving forward. If he’d upset her-

“Nothing,” she said, shaking her head. “I just miss him.”

“Yeah?” I said, softer this time. “Did you sort everything out?”

She puffed out a breath and leaned her head on the backrest of the chair. “Yeah, it’s all sorted.”

“Then what’s with the tears, sweetheart?” I asked, sitting on the edge of the desk, facing her.

“I just...I...I wish he could come home.” She looked back at me, her eyes so sad. I couldn’t bear to see that look in her eyes.

“Did he say when that would be?” Moving closer to her, I swiped away a lone tear as it rolled down her face.

“He keeps saying soon but he’s been saying that for so long now.” She rolled her eyes, looking back down at her knees.

Nodding my head, I understood, he probably wouldn't know when he was coming home until a day or two beforehand. It was an unpredictable life and I was glad that I got out when I did. If I hadn't, I'd probably still be over there with him.

"I'm sure you'll see him soon."

"Yeah," she whispered and looked up to me. Her beautiful eyes so open and sad, all I wanted was to change that look in her eyes.

"Come on," I said, holding my hand out to her.

She placed her small, soft hand in mine and let me pull her up. Opening my legs for her body to fit in between, she moved closer, and I wrapped my arms around her, inhaling her sweet scent.

"He's got good men behind him sweetheart," I said to ease some of her upset.

It was true, he did have good men behind him, but I couldn't tell her that he'd be safe, because no matter how much he trained, or how many men he had at his back, that could never be a certainty.

I felt her nodding against my chest as I rubbed my hands up and down her back in a soothing motion.

"Let's go watch a movie," I said pulling back. "Take your mind off things."

"Okay," she whispered, wiping her eyes.

I hated seeing her like that.

We'd all got into a good routine and for the last three weeks, we all did the same

shifts and watched Daley. I always did the morning shift after I had taken Eli to preschool, then someone would take over when it was time for me to pick him up.

I learned a lot from following Daley around. He had many acquaintances but I never saw him with a genuine friend. I watched as he always had a car follow him, though it was done discreetly. Not discreetly enough for me not to notice, but still discreetly.

We hadn't got any further with the investigation, the only plus was that there hadn't been anymore kidnappings. That was a huge win but we didn't know how long it would be until another girl was taken, we were on borrowed time. At least, that's what it felt like.

I pulled up next to the warehouse and helped Eli out of his seat. Ty had taken over from me today, which meant I wouldn't see him until later tonight. We had started to get a good system going, and by the time he would come home, I'd have all the housework done and his dinner ready for him. He kept telling me to stop doing it but I felt it was only right as I was living here now as well.

"Uncle Luke!" Eli shouted as soon as I opened the metal door to the warehouse, running straight at Luke who was on the treadmill.

Smiling, I looked around for Evan, knowing that Kitty was probably still sleeping after her early morning shift. I didn't know how they did those sort of shifts, I'd freak out if I had to sit in the car for six hours at night.

"Hey, Evan." I walked over to his corner, he pushed his chair back and stood up.

"Ready for some training?" He smirked.

"Me and you?" I pointed between us, my eyes going wide.

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We hadn't trained together since it had been a secret, I loved training with him and the possibility of getting to do it again, sent thrills through me.

Out of all the guys, he was definitely my favorite to train with. His size didn't intimidate me like Luke and Ty, although Evan was just as tall as them but he had an athletic build rather than the humongous muscles that Luke and Ty had.

"Yep." He walked past me, opening up the cupboard and pulling out his pads, and my gloves. "Can't forget these baby's." He wagged his brows up and down, smiling manically.

I giggled and said. "Pass 'em over." Crooking my finger at him as I walked forward.

Pulling my vest and belt off, I lay them on top of the cupboard and pushed the gloves on. It felt good to have them back on, I'd missed them. Something I thought I'd never think, I hated exercise but this was different. This was for my safety.

Following Evan to the middle of the mats, I scanned the warehouse to see where Eli was. I smiled, but cringed at the same time, when I saw him sat with Luke next to the treadmill, both watching me with smiles on their faces.

I gulped at the audience. Although I didn't want to expose Eli to violence, this was self-defense. I needed to know this, but I didn't want him to think that it was okay either.

"Right, left, right. To start with," Evan instructed me, holding up the pads.

I threw a right hook, then a left, and finished with a right.

“Good. Again,” he said in a gruff voice.

I did it again, and again, and again, until the sweat was dripping off of me, and I could barely breath. The burn in my arms felt good and I was starting to become slightly addicted to the way it made me feel.

Evan was always a happy go lucky guy but when it came to this, he was dead serious.

I sat out on the porch swing most nights, just basking in the view and partly waiting for Ty. That’s when I started to notice Evan would go out at the same time, on the same day, every week. After the third time, I asked Ty where he went, and that’s when I found out that Evan taught women’s self-defense and boxing at the local gym.

It all made sense then, why he had pulled me out of the office the first time we met, he must have seen something. He was trying to teach me how to defend myself and I didn’t even know it at the time.

Finding that out about Evan made me realize that there was still so much I had to learn about all of them. That then lead to me and Ty getting to know each other more. Just general things, like which side of the bed we preferred to sleep on, our favorite colors, that sort of stuff. I went to sleep that night feeling like we had taken a major step in our relationship. That’s if it was even a relationship. I really should clarify that.

With my chest heaving for breath, I held up a hand, signaling that I needed a minute.

“I need water,” I gasped. Walking into the kitchen, I pulled a cold bottle from the fridge and gulped the majority of it down. The sound of small footsteps following me in.

“Mama?” Turning around, I watched Eli lift up onto the chair.

“Yes, sweetie?” Sitting down next to him, I wiped the sweat off my face and tried to catch my breath.

“What you were doing out there?” He pointed back to the warehouse and continued. “Can I learn that?”

I stared at him with wide eyes, I didn’t know what to say or think. I didn’t want him thinking that it was okay to go around hurting people, but at the same time, I wanted him to know how to defend himself.

It was one of those moments where I genuinely didn’t know what to say, I sat there with my mouth opening and closing like a fish.

“You know mama only does that for her job, right?” I said, finally getting myself together and placing the bottle of water on the table.

“Yeah, but it looks fun.” He shrugged and looked away.

Gulping, I reached over, taking his hand in mine and drawing his attention back to me.

“Let me think about it, okay, sweetie?”

“Okay, mama.” He jumped down and ran back into the warehouse as if he hadn’t just asked me the hardest question that he had ever asked, while I sat staring at the empty doorway in shock.

The first thought in my mind was that I needed to talk to Ty. That made me both happy and sad. Happy that I could talk about it with someone, but also sad that it



wasn't Eli's dad I could do that with.

Before I could think about it anymore, I finished the rest of my water off and got up, throwing it into the trash. Ready to go back and do some more training, I walked back out into the warehouse.

Driving off when Luke took over for his shift, I made my way to the precinct. Charlie had called earlier to tell me that he had some new information that he'd been given and to meet him there when I got the chance. I hadn't managed to get back to him until I was about to finish my shift because Daley had been out and about all evening. I was getting really fed up of watching him eat in a restaurant while I was sat in my truck with nothing.

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After shooting a text off to Charlie, telling him I

was on my way, I pressed the buttons on the steering wheel to dial Kay's number, the sound coming through the speakers in the car.

"Hello?" Her soft voice sounding across the line made my lips lift into a smile.

"Hey, sweetheart." Stopping at the lights, I checked my mirrors for any cars, always aware of what or who was around me, it was essential.

"Oh, hey." I frowned at the tone of her voice, immediately on alert.

"What's up?" I asked, turning right when the lights hit green.

"I...Well...Eli asked me something today and I wanted to see what you thought?"

"Hit me with it." I smirked as I pulled up to the precinct, leaving the car running.

"I was doing some training with Evan," she started. I knew that he had planned to do some training with her, Evan was one of the best people for her to do it with. I mean, sure, we all had combat and fighting skills but he specialized in women's self-defense.

"Uh huh."

"And when I took a break, Eli asked if he could learn how to do it." I heard her big intake of breath over the line before she continued. "I mean, I know he's not your

responsibility, but I just thought--”

“Kay, its fine. I like that you want to discuss this with me. What is it that he wants to learn?”

“I don’t know,” she huffed. “I didn’t think to ask that. I’d just been doing glove work.”

“Ah, so he wants to learn how to box?” Noticing Charlie standing outside, I unfastened my seat belt and leaned forward. “How about this? I’ll pick us up something to eat on my way home and we can talk about it then?”

“Are you sure?” she whispered down the line.

“Of course I am, sweetheart. I’ll be home in about an hour.”

“Okay, see you in a while,” she mumbled, the line going dead before I had a chance to respond.

Turning my truck off, I pushed out of the door and made my way to Charlie.

“Hey.” I nodded.

“One of Daley’s guys have come forward.” He grunted as a greeting, and opened the door.

“Hello to you too.” I smirked.

“Yeah, hey.” He nodded, putting the pass code into the door that separated the front desk from the rest of the precinct.

“So, what’s this guy sayin’?”

“A shit load, we’re gonna get this motherfucker.”

Nodding, I tried not to let anything show on my face. It sounded too good to be true but if he was who he said he was, then we’d finally be able to take this guy down and find those girls. Following Charlie into his office, he pointed to his chair indicating for me to have a seat.

Furrowing my brow, I sat down looking at the computer screen. He never let anyone sit in his chair.

“Press Play,” he said.

For the next half an hour, I sat and watched a man, dressed in the same gear that Daley’s henchmen wore, telling them all about Daley’s secret sex slave business.

The more I watched, the more apparent it became that this wasn’t real. He was just saying what he thought we wanted to hear. Feeling my blood boil, I clenched my hands into fists and pushed up out of the chair.

“That’s not fuckin’ real,” I fumed, shaking my head.

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“What? It’s one of his guys,” Charlie grunted back, his hands going to his hips.

“No, it’s not.” I said walking past him and to the door. That shit was a waste of my time.

“It is, look, he’s wearing the uniform.”

Turning back to him, I squinted my eyes. “Really Charlie? For a cop, you can be real dumb sometimes.”

“What the fuck?” he growled, stepping forward.

“He ain’t one of his men. We’ve been watching him for weeks now. There’s four different guys and they take shifts in twos.”

“Yeah, and?”

“I could pick each of their faces out of a thousand different people. He. Ain’t. One. Of. Them.”

Furrowing his brow, he flicked his eyes to the computer and then back to me. “So he ain’t one of them?”

“No,” I said, shaking my head. “Someone is trying to stall the investigation. They’re playing us.”

Charlie stood there, his eyes blazing with anger. “Who would-”

“Fuck if I know, Charlie, but I’ve just pulled a shift watching Daley and all I want right now is food and my bed.”

Spinning around, I walked out the door, through the precinct and straight to my car.

Tomorrow, I’d think of what this meant. But for tonight, I was going home, eating some food with my woman and then going to bed.

Driving home from the preschool, I was too occupied with my thoughts from last night. Ty had come home late with food and we sat and ate while discussing the pros and cons to Eli learning how to box. Discussing it with Ty made it so much easier, and in the end, we came to the conclusion that it would be good for him but we were going to ask Evan to teach him. That way we had control over what he did and didn’t learn.

“What’s that mama?” Eli shouted as we were turning into the road that led to the compound.

“What’s, what, sweetie?”

“That, there!” Looking in the rear view mirror, I tried to see where he was pointing. Turning my head in that direction, I noticed what looked like a big ball of fur. So big, that at first I thought it was a bear, then it lifted its head and I realized that it was a dog.

Pulling over to the side of the road, I sat and watched him as he watched our car.

“Is it a dog, mama?”

“I think so.” I pulled my phone out and found Ty’s name, my eyes not moving from the dog.

“Hey,” he answered.

“Hey, erm...I think we’ve found a stray dog?” I squeaked down the line as the dog moved closer.

“A what?”

“A dog? But it’s like...really big.” I watched as it came even closer, pawing at the door. Unbuckling my belt, I leaned over the seat and met his eyes. They were so sad, and as soon as I saw them, I knew I couldn’t leave him there. Not like this.

He was holding his paw in the air so it was obvious that he was injured.

“Kay? Kay!” Ty shouted down the line, whatever he had said, I hadn’t heard a word of it.

“I’m gonna let him in,” I said to Ty.

“No, Kay don’t-” Pressing the end call button, I turned to Eli and took in his excited face.

“Don’t make any sudden movements or noises,” I said, turning the engine off and pushing my door open, the dog moved back cautiously.

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I stepped out and walked slowly to the dog. “Hey, there,” I cooed. He whined and hobbled closer to me, sensing I wasn’t a danger to him. “What’s wrong?”

He whined louder as I moved closer, lowering his head, but still watching me with his eyes. Holding my hand out, I let him sniff me, letting him know that he was safe now.

I moved my hand closer, stroking his head. “That’s it, I won’t hurt you.”

Tilting my head, I tried to get a better look at his paw. All I could see was what looked like dried blood, matted into his fur and he looked way too skinny. Made even more obvious by the fact that he was such a big dog.

Still stroking him, I looked up to the passenger window and saw Eli’s face pressed against it, his nose squished to the side of his face. I chuckled, the noise startling the dog, I looked back down to him so that I could settle him and found him staring at Eli, his head tilted to the side.

It may not have been the best idea but my gut told me that he wasn’t going to hurt us so I made a snap decision.

“Get back in your seat, Eli.” I watched as he scrambled back over the seats and sat in his booster seat.

Walking around the back of the truck, I pulled the tailgate down and waved at the dog.

“Come on,” I urged him. He limped around, looked at me and then at the truck. “Up



you go.” I waved.

Whining again, I went closer to him and tried to help lift him. Even though you could see that he w

as underweight, he still weighed a ton. I didn’t know what made me think I’d be able to lift the giant thing, but I put all my strength into it and didn’t even manage to lift him an inch off the ground.

“Kay!” I startled at Ty’s voice, the dog turned around and growled, bearing his teeth. “Whoa!” Holding his hands up in the air, Ty stopped where he was with Evan behind him.

“He’s fine,” I said to them and turned back to the dog. “It’s okay.” Holding my hand out to him again, he let me stroke him.

Trying to keep the dog calm, I kept my hand on his back and turned to Ty. “He’s hurt,” I said. “I need to get him to a vet.”

“And you were just gonna lift that giant dog all on your own?” Evan laughed.

“I was trying,” I huffed and stood up straight. “I didn’t think he’d be so heavy?”

“Here.” Ty moved forward, holding his hand out to the dog in the same way that I did. “Come here, boy.”

“How do you know it’s a boy?” Evan asked, his eyes wide. He hadn’t moved from his spot from over twenty feet away.

“Can you not see that?” Ty shook his head and moved closer, his hand stroking the dogs head. “Help me lift him up and we’ll go and get him checked out.”

“You want me?” Evan pointed to his chest, his eyes wide. “To help lift that mammoth?”

“Just get over here,” Ty grunted.

“Nope.” He crossed his arms over his chest and looked away.

“Come on, Uncle Evan!” Eli shouted from the truck.

“Fine!” He threw his hands up in the air, shuffling forward. “But if he eats me, I’m gonna sue your ass.” He pointed at Ty.

“If he eats you, you won’t be here to sue me.” Ty smirked.

“So, you want him to eat me?”

“Jesus, Evan, just help me lift him.” Rolling his eyes, he waited until Evan was closer and together they lifted him into the back of the truck.

Once I knew he was safely in the back, I walked around to Eli’s door and strapped him in. “Is he hurt, mama?”

“I think his paw is, sweetie. We’ll go and get him checked out. Okay?”

“Okay.” He turned in his seat, looking into the back of the truck.

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Shutting the door, I got in the drivers' side, did my belt up and turned the engine on.

"Let's go," Ty said, jumping into the passenger side.

"Huh?" I looked at him confused.

"To the vets?" I just sat there and stared at him. He was coming with us?

"Yeah," he said with raised brows.

"Oh, right." Clearing my throat, I wiped my hands on my jeans and did a U-turn. I'd never drove with Ty sat in the passenger seat and it made me nervous. Made me more aware of how I drove, I felt like he was watching my every move.

"Where's Evan?" Eli asked.

"He's gone back to the warehouse, bud."

"Oh." Looking into the rear view mirror, I watched as Eli turned in his seat trying to see the dog again.

"Will he be okay?"

"He should be, bud, let's get him to the vets and they will know," Ty told him.

"Where is the vets?" I asked, not knowing where I was going.

“Take the next left and go to the end of the road and then take a right,” he said, waving his hands about in the air. Why do people do that? They could never just say it, they always had to act it out with their hands as well.

“Okay.” I followed his directions and looked at him confused when we got there; thinking that was the end of his directions.

I was wrong, so wrong.

Fifteen minutes later, we finally got there after many, many more directions. I should have just let him drive, it would have been so much easier.

“I’ll go inside and get someone to help us,” Ty said and pushed out of the car as Eli undid his belt.

“Can I go see him, mama?”

“Yeah.” I nodded.

We got out and walked around to the back of the truck, pulling the tailgate down. The dog hobbling closer to us and lay down.

I stroked the dogs head when he moved closer, trying to comfort him as he whined. It broke my heart to see him in so much pain. Looking down at Eli, his face marred with a frown, I said. “It’ll be okay.” Not knowing whether I was talking to Eli, me or the dog.

Ty came back out a couple of minutes later with someone following behind him. Stepping back, I pulled Eli with me while we waited for them to get the dog down, before following them inside.

They went straight into a private room so we stayed back and waited in the reception area. Picking Eli up, I sat him on my lap and we waited.

I could hear his whines from out here and each one was more upsetting than the last. Finally, they stopped and that's when I blew out a relieved breath, hoping that he would be okay now.

It was dark by the time Ty came out of the room, he stood with his hands on his hips and I watched as his chest moved on a deep exhale. Lifting his head, he met my eyes and smiled gently.

"He'll be okay," he said to me as he moved closer, then crouched down to Eli. "All stitched up."

"He better now?" Eli asked wriggling in my arms. Letting him down, he sat on Ty's knee and wrapped his arms around his neck.

"Yeah, bud." He smiled.

"What happens now?" I asked.

"He'll probably go to the nearest animal shelter when he's better."

“Oh.” I frowned. “Can I see him?”

“Sure.” Ty stood up, taking Eli with him. Following behind, we walked into the room. My eye scanned the space looking for the dog and found him laying down in the corner, his paw bandaged up, and a bowl of half eaten food next to him.

Going straight over, I leant down and stroked his head. A lump formed in my throat, for some reason I felt sad at not being able to see him again. I’d only found him at the side of the road a couple of hours ago but that didn’t stop the connection that I felt with him.

“He’ll be right as rain in no time,” a soft voice said from behind me.

Standing up, I spun around and faced the voice. “He will?” I asked.

“Is he your dog, hon?”

“No,” I said shaking my head. “We found him at the side of the road.”

She walked forward, her chocolate brown eyes looked so familiar. She was dressed in a white coat with scrubs underneath. She pulled the hair tie out of her light brown hair, the silky strands flowing down her back.

“I think he likes you.” She nodded over to the dog and smiled. “Elena,” she said, holding her hand out to me.

I placed my hand in hers and replied, “Kaylee.”

“Ah.” She turned to Ty and then back to me. “You’re the infamous Kaylee”

“I... erm...” I looked to Ty for some kind of sign as to what to say.

His eyes flicked to her, “Ma,” he huffed.

“What?” she asked, letting go of my hand as she smiled wide.

“Kay, this is my ma.” He rolled his eyes and placed Eli on the floor.

His ma? He brought me here, knowing that we’d see her? Dammit, he should have prepared me. I twisted my hands together and shuffled my feet on the spot, feeling the nerves flow through me.

“You’ve made her nervous now,” he said to Elena, walking toward me.

“Ah, hush now, boy. I’ve been asking you to bring her around for ages.” Turning back to me, she said. “It was about time we met.”

“I...” Clearing my throat, I closed my eyes trying to get myself together. “Nice to meet you.” I finally said.

“It’s okay, sweetheart. Just breathe.” Ty’s hand rubbed circles on my back, in what I think was an attempt to be soothing but him touching me had the opposite effect. Especially in front of his mother.

“Nice to meet you too, hon.” She walked past me and Ty, straight to where Eli was sat stroking the dog.

“Monty,” he said looking at each of us in turn. “Can we call him Monty?”

“I don’t know if you can name a dog that you’re not going to keep, sweetie,” I said.

He frowned and turned back to Monty then started to talk with Elena.

Nudging Ty in the ribs, I tilted my head to the door and walked out, feeling him behind me.

“What’s up?” he asked when we were alone in the corridor.

“What’s up?” I huffed. “You could have told me.” I said pointing back to the room.

This wasn’t how I wanted to meet his mother, I wanted to impress her the first time I met her. Maybe bake her a pie and bring her some flowers. Not turn up at her place of work, not having a clue who she was and covered in dog hair.

Way to make a first impression.

“If I would have told you,” he said, stepping forward and framing my face with his hands. “You would have freaked out.”



“I-”

“Just like you’re doing now.” He smirked, bringing his face down and brushing his lips against mine.

“Now, what do you say?” he said, his lips only centimeters from mine. I frowned up at him, completely distracted by his soft but firm lips. “Shall we keep him?”

“Who?” I asked.

“Monty.” He laughed, planting another kiss on my lips and turning around and going back into the room. Why did he always do that?

He could distract me so easily and I both hated and loved it at the same time.

After another week of following Daley, we still weren’t any closer to finding the girls and it was frustrating me to no end. Monty had taken a turn for the worse when they tried to get him to eat so he was still with ma at the vets.

Covering for Kay after my night shift, I pulled a double watching Daley so that she could catch up with some of the office work. Once Luke had pulled up behind me, I took a detour on the way home; driving past Kay’s old apartment block.

I’d started to do this once a week, just to check if Max’s car had turned up. It hadn’t yet but there was no harm in checking. He’d disappeared after what he did to Kay and I couldn’t find a trace of him anywhere. He’d disappeared off the face of the earth and I’d come to the conclusion that he must have had some help, no one could go that

dar

k without help.

Spotting an old lady struggling to carry her bags, her wild gray hair flying in the wind, I smiled. Only Miss Maggie would carry all that shopping home on her own.

I pulled up outside the building, turned the truck off and jumped out jogging towards her.

“Miss Maggie?” I asked when I was closer to her. Speeding up, I stepped beside her.

“Oh!” she startled. “Hi there, Tyson.”

“Let me get those for you,” I said, taking the bags from her. She huffed and told me she could manage just fine, but I smiled and followed her through the building door and up the stairs.

“Ooh, these stairs are getting worse and worse for my poor hips,” she moaned when she got to the second set of stairs.

“They should really have some elevators,” I said.

“They wouldn’t spend that kind of money.” She laughed, shaking her head.

When we came to her floor and walked past Kay’s old apartment, I kept my eyes on the door. Just because Max’s car wasn’t outside, didn’t mean that he wasn’t in there.

“He ain’t been back,” Miss Maggie announced, pushing her keys in the door.

“He hasn’t?” I asked, following her inside.

“No.” She shook her head and shuffled through to her kitchen. “Want some tea?” she asked when I put the bags down on the table.

“Err...”

“Have some tea,” she said, putting her kettle on.

“Okay...” Looking around the apartment, I stared with wide eyes when her cat hissed at me. Kay had told me about that thing and I’d had the pleasure of meeting it once. Needless to say, I never wanted to cross the thing again.

“How’s my girl getting on?” Miss Maggie turned and watched me with knowing eyes, assessing me.

Shifting on the spot, I cleared my throat. “She’s doing good.” I nodded and took the cup that she handed me, looking down and frowning at the green liquid.

“You making sure she’s being taken care of Tyson?” She raised her brows. “That poor girl has been through enough.”

“Yeah, Miss Maggie, she’s taken care of.” Shifting uncomfortably on my feet, I looked anywhere but at her. Why did she make me so nervous?

“How’s Eli getting on? School okay? Is he watching the new series?”

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I chuckled at that. Never in my life had I met an old woman who was obsessed with cartoons in the way that she was. She started to shoot so many questions at me that it was hard to keep up.

“Yeah, him and Luke have been watching them.” I took a sip of the tea, grimacing at the taste. How did she drink this stuff?

“Well?” she said, shuffling into the living room. “When will I get to see them next? I can’t get there with it being so far away and all.”

“You’re welcome any time, Miss Maggie,” I said, emptying my cup into the sink and walking into the living room. “Anytime you want to come over, just say the word and one of us will pick you up.”

“Does now suit you?” she said, lifting back out of her chair and picking her purse up.

“Well...sure?” She was out of the door and waving me back out within seconds. For an old lady, she sure could move fast when she wanted to.

“No time like the present.” She smirked, walking back down the stairs. “Don’t tell them I’m coming, lets surprise them,” she cackled.

Shaking my head, I wondered what I had just let myself in for.

After helping her into the truck, I drove us to the compound while fidgeting in my seat the whole way there. She always had me on edge and I knew that the other guys felt the same, only one other person could make me squirm like that.

Ma.

Pushing the button for the gate, I drove through and parked in my normal spot.

“Well help me down, boy!” she shouted when I jumped out. Rolling my eyes but chuckling at the same time, I walked around to her and held my hand out. “Don’t know why you need a truck so high off the ground,” she huffed.

Ignoring her, I said, “She’ll be in the warehouse.”

“Show me the way.” She waved her hand in the air. All regal and shit.

Shaking my head, I lead the way and pushed open the metal door, waiting until she was inside to follow her.

“Where’s my girl!” she shouted, I winced at the echo that sounded.

“Miss Maggie?” I heard coming from the office. Two seconds later, Kay came out.

She stood there in shock, her wide eyes looking from me to Miss Maggie. She came running forward and I watched as her chest bounced, liking the way it looked. Then realizing who was stood next to me, I cleared my throat and looked away.

Don’t think like that, not around Miss Maggie. I chanted in my head over and over.

But shit, I couldn’t stop my eyes from wandering back to her.

“What are you doing here?” Kay screeched, looking from Miss Maggie and then back to me with tears in her eyes.

“He was stalking the apartment block again and saw me.” Miss Maggie huffed,

hooking her arm through Kay's and walking off.

"Stalking the apartment?" Kay asked, looking back to me.

Shaking my head, I mouthed, "later" and let her walk off. Loving the sound of her laughter as it bounced off the walls.

"Boss?" Evan called from his station.

"Yeah?" I asked, walking over to him.

"Think I might have found a possible location." He grinned.

"Really?"

He nodded and spun around in his chair. "Yep!" Pointing to the screen, he said. "Abandoned warehouse."

"Let's make a plan," I told him, and pulled the chair out next to him.

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It was so out of the blue for Miss Maggie to turn up at the warehouse but it had made my day. She always brought a smile to my face and knew just what to say to me so that I wasn't stuck inside my own head. Which happened often.

I didn't tell her any specifics about the job that we were working on but I did tell her about Serena. I'd vowed to myself that I wouldn't lie anymore or keep any secrets so when she asked me what had been going on, more specifically, why I was acting strangely the night after she watched Eli, I couldn't tell her anything but the truth.

She'd nodded and listened to me tell her how I didn't trust Serena. I told her time and time again that I wasn't jealous, this was just a gut feeling that I had and that no one seemed to listen to me.

I got it. I understood I could be seen as jealous that she had come back with no explanation. She was Ty's wife, at least legally.

Miss Maggie told me to listen to my gut, to not let anyone else influence how I felt. "Your gut is right ninety-nine percent of the time," she had said.

Decision made, I decided that I'd broach the subject with Kitty. Out of all of the guys, I felt like she would be the one who would listen to me the most with being the only other woman here.

After work, they all came over to ours, apart from Luke who was currently sat outside Daley's house. Evan had fallen asleep in the chair with his laptop perched precariously on his knees. I'd put Eli to bed just before Miss Maggie had left with Ty to go home and now it was just me and Kitty. Oh, and Evan's snoring.

Clearing my throat, I shifted in my seat not knowing how to broach the subject.

“Spit it out, chica.”

“Huh?”

“Whatever it is that you wanna say.” She smirked, turning on the couch to face me.

“You’ve been shuffling around like you’ve got ants in your pants since you came back down. Now, spill.”

“Okay.” I raised my hands in the air and took a deep breath. “I know that I’ve mentioned this before-”

“Serena?” Kitty asked, leaning against the arm of the couch.

“Yeah,” I blew out a breath. “There’s something about her Kitty. Are we really sure that she hasn’t got anything to do with this?”

“Honestly? I really don’t think she would.” Gritting my teeth, I tried my hardest to listen to her

. “I knew her back when she was with Ty, and sure she was a raving bitch and a total slut, but this?” Shaking her head, she turned back to face the TV. “I don’t think she’d do this.”

“What makes you so sure?” I gritted out.

I was getting beyond pissed. None of them would listen to me, I was getting so fed up with talking and not being heard. This was my last resort so if I couldn’t get any luck saying it in a meeting, then this was my final chance to be heard and I was being blown off.



“Trust me.” Kitty cut her eyes to me. “There’s things in her past that tell me she’d never do anything like this.” Her eyes blazed with a warning, and any other time, I would have backed away into a corner and accepted it. This time, I wasn’t going to let that happen, I wouldn’t be backed down by anyone, not anymore.

Nodding my head, I turned away from her. Concentrating on the painting on the wall and ignoring the swirl of anger in my gut, I hated feeling like this, of having no say in anything, yet again. I opened my mouth to give her a piece of my mind and closed it again.

Ever since we’d got back from the vets and I told her I’d met Ty’s mom, she’d been different with me, everything I said she rolled her eyes at and I felt like she was constantly looking down at me.

This wasn’t the Kitty that I had come to know, this was the bitch version and I didn’t like her.

Clearing my throat, I rubbed my sweaty hands on my jeans, deciding this wasn’t the best time to bring it up.

“Okay...” I stood up, slowly. Afraid that if I moved too fast, I’d say something that I might regret. A part of me wanted to shout at her, scream at her, but the me that was still used to holding back, kept that part at bay. “I’m going to bed.”

“Night.” She didn’t look up at me from the TV, instead she just kept her focus on the show that was playing. Frowning, I looked to her and then Evan. My blood pumping that much harder through my veins.

That was meant to be her cue to leave but she just sat there, aware that I was still stood watching her.

“Unbelievable,” I murmured when I walked away.

“Whatever,” I heard her sneer.

Shaking my head, I stomped up the stairs, straight into my bathroom and into the shower. The feel of the water raining down on my body, calming me. Leaning against the shower wall, I heaved a breath.

We were getting nowhere with this case and to top it off, Ty had started to pull away from me and the nightmares were happening more and more often.

I felt lost.

Totally and utterly lost. I wanted to talk to Ty about it, but every time I felt myself get to that stage, something always happened. He'd have a call about the case or one of the guys would have new information. There was never a time that felt right.

Turning the water off, I stepped out of the shower and pulled a towel around me. I frowned at the raised voices I could hear now that I wasn't locked away in the bathroom. I walked out of the room and checked on Eli. Still asleep. That boy could sleep through anything.

"I don't give a fuck!" Ty shouted, I winced at how loud he was.

"Boss-

"No! This ain't your house, this is mine and Kay's home. What gives you the right to think you can stay when she's gone to bed?"

"I didn't think it would matter," I heard Kitty reply.

"The fuck? If I went to bed would you still stay?" Ty growled back.

Stepping closer to the top of the stairs, I held my towel tighter around me and carried on listening.

"Calm down, boss," Evan said softly.

“Listen, I didn’t realize that she was living here permanently. I just thought it was a stop gap,” Kitty said, the bitchy tone in her voice evident.

“What the fuck would make you think that?” Ty growled.

“Well, with Serena back-”

“Don’t,” Evan warned her.

My hand rubbed my chest, a pain shooting through it. They always said be careful who you listen to, I didn’t know who ‘they’ were. But right now? I wish I would have taken that advice after hearing Kitty talk about me like that. It hurt.

“Listen, and listen good Kitty, you don’t know what the fuck went on with Serena. You have no fuckin’ idea. I’d never fuckin’ go back to her.”

“I just thought...”

“Well you thought fuckin’ wrong. If you can’t respect me and Kay, then you know what you can do!” I winced at how loud his voice became. I’d never heard him shout like that before.

“I-”

“Leave it, Kitty, let’s go” Evan said, the door shutting behind them a few seconds later.

“Fuck!” Ty shouted again. I closed my eyes, taking a deep breath and turned back to my room.

I couldn’t be around him when he was like that, no matter how much I knew that he

wouldn't hurt me. I just couldn't be around it.

There was too much going on and my mind was a whirl of thoughts. When I shut my bedroom door, I pushed the chair up against it, locking myself away for the night.

Pulling on one of Corey t-shirts, I snuggled under the covers and closed my eyes.

Everything would be better in the morning. It had to be.

Rolling over in bed, I reached my hand out for Kay, forgetting that she wasn't there. I cracked my eye open just to make sure that she wasn't in the room, because she had a tendency to go and sit on the chair and stare out of the window.

I'd hardly slept last night; all I could hear were Kay's cries. Not being able to get to her killed me, several times I'd debated on breaking her door down. I'd managed to talk myself out of it but that didn't stop me from sitting on the other side of the door.

It was my fault; she must have heard me lose it with Kitty last night. I couldn't believe what she had done, her bitchy tone and face told me enough. There was no way that Kay would have told her that she had to leave and Kitty knew that.

She was pushing it. Something was clearly going on with her, and any other time I'd have been there for her to talk to but I had so much on my plate, I didn't have time for all of her petty bullshit. And I certainly wasn't gonna put up with her upsetting Kay.

When the sun started to come up, I decided to go to bed and now all I'd had was a few hours' sleep. Looking around the room, trying to figure out what woke me up, I saw the door handle turn and Eli's face pop through the gap.

“Ty?”

I sat up, scrubbing my hands down my face. “Yeah, bud?” I didn’t want him to see any of this, as far as he was concerned, everything was good. At least, that’s what I wanted him to think. The reality of it was, things were going far from good. My team were falling apart.

Always having one of us off the compound was affecting the whole team and now this thing with Kitty was just adding to the strain.

“Mama’s crying again,” he said, looking down at the floor. His hair was sticking up in all directions and his spider-man teddy dangled from his hand and onto the floor.

“I know, bud.” Smiling sadly, I patted the bed beside me and waved him in. “Come here.”

He ran over and jumped up onto the bed, slipping in beside me and leaning his head on the same pillow that Kay slept on. This was the first time in so long that we hadn’t slept in the same bed and I hated it. It didn’t feel right, not having her next to me.

“I don’t like it when she cries,” he whispered, turning his sad green eyes to me.

“Me neither, bud.” He fidgeted on the bed, looking up at me before turning away. “What’s up?” I raised a brow.

“I just don’t want mama to get sad again.” He shrugged.

A lump formed in my throat. I knew how he felt and I'd noticed her pulling away from all of us again. She liked to hide her emotions; putting up a wall, she did it well. But I could see past them. I had since that very first day; I saw all of the pain that she was feeling, that she carried around with her on a daily basis.

I didn't want to see her back in that head space again, and whether I liked to think it or not, it was partly my fault. Serena being back didn't make things any easier and I knew that Kay still had nightmares about that sick fuck.

"I'll make sure she doesn't, okay?" I said, ruffling his hair.

"Promise?" He turned back to me with hope in his eyes.

"Promise." I nodded.

"Okay." He held his hand out and said, "You gotta shake on it. Uncle Luke says that when men make a deal, you have to shake on it."

Chuckling, I placed my hand in his, my large hand encasing his small one. "Well, if Uncle Luke says it then it must be true."

"Yep!"

"How about this?" I asked. "Shall we get ready and get some pancakes before preschool? Give mama a lie in?"

"Yeah!" He threw his fist in the air and jumped off the bed.

"You get dressed and I'll meet you in the bathroom for wash and teeth. Yeah?"

"Okay!" He jumped down, running off as fast as his little legs could take him,

completely forgetting about his spider-man teddy.

Maybe that was all she needed? To just get some extra sleep? All I knew was that she was going to tell me what was going on inside that head of hers. She couldn't keep it all locked up inside of her.

That shit didn't do anybody any good.

After eating the biggest stack of pancakes each, we both waddled to the car with full stomachs. Maybe I shouldn't have let him eat that much? I just didn't have the heart to tell him not to eat all that he wanted. I knew food wasn't a substitute but if he wanted to eat his weight in pancakes then I wasn't gonna stop him.

I dropped Eli off at preschool and started the drive back to the compound. Pressing the buttons on the steering wheel, I dialed Luke's number.

"Boss?" he answered.

"Come back to the compound." I stopped at some lights and waited.

"No one has taken the shift over yet."

"Yeah, I know. We're gonna look into a different route. It ain't good to always have one of us off the compound."

"Has something happened?" he asked, his voice becoming deeper.



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The lights changed and I drove forward, debating what to actually say to him. I didn't want to sugar coat it but, at the same time, I didn't want him knowing mine and Kay's business.

His past made him able to connect with Kay and understand her in a way that I was afraid I never would.

I scrubbed my hand down my face and blew out a frustrated breath.

"It's too much," I started. "I don't know what's going on with Kitty, some shit went down last night and I came home to Kay locked in her room."

"The fuck?" I heard his car start in the background. "She okay?"

"Kitty? Fuck knows. I ain't seen her since I told her to get out of my house."

"No," he growled. "Kay?"

"Fuck!" I turned onto the road that led to the compound. "She's still in her room. She barricaded herself in."

"Shit," Luke said under his breath. "This ain't good."

"Your fuckin' tellin' me." I pressed the button to open the gates and drove on through. "We need to get together as a whole team and sort all this shit out."

"Yeah, Boss. I'm on my way."

I pressed the end call button as I parked my truck, then jumped down and heard a car pull up to the gates as I was about to go into the warehouse. Moving closer so I could see who it was, I groaned. I recognized that car.

I looked over at the house, hoping that Kay was still in her room because she didn't need to see this.

I stomped to the gate, my hands clenched into fists at my sides. What the hell did she think she was doing here?

"What the fuck are you doin' here, Serena?" I growled.

"Ah, Ty Ty." She smiled, walking closer to the gates and wrapping her hands around the bars. "You gonna let me in?"

"Hell to the fuckin' no." Stepping back, I crossed my arms over my chest and watched her.

"It's important," she cooed, fluttering her eyelashes at me.

"Yeah? You have my divorce papers signed?" I raised a brow.

"Ah, don't be like that, Ty Ty." She scowled, but schooled her features quickly. Any other person wouldn't have seen it. Me? I saw that shit and I hated it.

She was dressed impeccably; suit dress and jacket to match with shoes so high that I wondered how she could even walk on the things. She pouted, probably thinking that would work on me like it used to.

She was wrong, I was immune to that now. Looking back, I couldn't believe I'd fell for all that fake bullshit. I was a complete sucker. Now my eyes were open to her and

all of her persuasive ways. There was no way that I'd be falling for any of that. Not this time.

"You ain't stepping foot on my property," I gritted out.

"Well, technically, it's half mine." She smirked. I clenched my jaw, trying my hardest not to say anything.

When she saw that I wasn't going to respond to her, she stomped her foot and leaned back. "Why are you doing this!" she screeched, gripping her hair.

That was the Serena I remembered, the one who had no patience and always wanted things to go her way. Hearing the crunch of gravel behind me, I turned and watched as Evan and Kitty came to stand either side of me.

"Go away, Serena," Evan huffed.

"Ah, Evan! Tell Ty to let me in. I have some really important information."

"Yeah?" Kitty asked, stepping forward. "And what would that be? Huh?"

"It's about Daley," she said, looking over at me.

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I squinted my eyes at her, not knowing whether to believe what she was saying. My eyes flicked to the house and then to Evan.

“She’s still in there, boss,” he whispered.

Closing my eyes, I tried to decide what to do. Letting her on the compound could upset Kay and after last night, I didn’t want to make things worse. But if she did have information about Daley, information that could help the case, then it was worth bringing her onto the compound.

The sound of another car had my eyes opening. Luke stuck his head out of the window and I could see the fire in his eyes from here.

“What’s that bitch doing here?”

Serena whipped her head around to Luke and gasped. “Are you going to let him talk to me like that, Ty Ty?”

Chuckling, I stepped forward. “Yep.” Her hand flew to her chest but I knew it was all an act.

“You come in, tell us what you know and then you leave,” I told her, making sure she knew that I was dead serious.

“But-”

“No,” I ground out. “You leave when you’ve told us what you know.” I said turning

back to the warehouse.

“Clear the wall,” I said in a low voice to Evan. She didn’t need to know what we knew, after all, I still didn’t trust her.

He nodded, and I watched him jog back to the warehouse.

“And Serena?” I turned my face back to her.

“Yes,” she said, pulling her shoulders back and facing me head on.

“You mess us about and you’ll regret it.” Spinning around I walked a few steps and shouted, “Let her in!”

I woke up in a panic, seeing the time on my phone and rushed to push the chair away from my door. I couldn’t believe I’d overslept, I never slept in this late. I hadn’t for the last four years.

“Eli!” I shouted, getting no response. “Ty!”

I ran down the stairs, finding a note on the kitchen counter from Ty telling me that he had taken Eli for pancakes and then to preschool.

Breathing a sigh of relief, I looked around me and out into the garden. The woods calling to me in that way that they always did. Only this time, it was louder than ever before.

Running back up the stairs, I got dressed in my gym clothes, deciding that a walk up to the clearing would do me some good. Grabbing a bottle of water, I pushed out the sliding doors into the back garden, slipping out of the gate at the back and straight into the woods.

I was overthinking everything, I felt like I'd taken three steps forward and five back. I didn't want to go back to how things were, I didn't want to be that person again.

I was losing the battle of talking to any of the guys about Serena. It didn't matter how many times I said it. When it came from me, it looked like nothing but jealousy.

I had to come up with a way to still investigate her without the rest of the guys knowing. I didn't trust her and there was a reason why my gut was telling me that.

I just had to find out that reason.

The fuzzy head that I had from lack of sleep started to clear as I got closer to the clearing, the fresh air making me feel a million times better than I had.

By the time I came to the clearing, I was sweating but had a smile on my face. I had a plan, a plan that would mean I wouldn't be seen as the jealous girl.

I needed to put that plan into action, without any of the guys knowing what I was doing.

If the nightmares would stop, that would be even better, but I couldn't see that happening anytime soon. Every night since that day, I had at least one a night. The only time they seemed to settle was when Ty was next to me. It was partly my own fault for locking myself in my room last night.

Gulping down half of my water, I admired the view from here. The woods a magnificent green, flowers lining the entire clearing. Even with all the equipment that Ty had put up here, the view was still breath-taking.

With one last look, I spun around and headed back down to the house. I was determined to get a start on my plan. The ironic thing was that I knew Ty would be

proud of my plan. If only he knew about it.

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Coming back through the garden, I slipped into the house and went to go up the stairs when I saw a car pull up outside of the warehouse. Any other time I wouldn't have bothered to stop, but the obnoxious colored sports car drew my attention. Walking closer to the windows, I watched as Serena stepped out of the car and walked towards the warehouse, Luke following behind her.

My eyes widened at what I was seeing, I couldn't believe that Ty had let her onto the compound.

I watched as she flicked her long blond hair over her shoulder and lay her hand on Ty's arm. My nostrils flared and my feet moved forward of th

eir own accord. Before I knew it, my hand was on the door handle.

I stopped, taking stock of what I was doing. I was still in my gym clothes and I looked awful compared to her. If I was going to go and show her that she wasn't welcome here, then I needed to look bad ass.

My lips lifted into a smirk as I spun around and ran up the stairs. Yeah, it may have been childish but that was the way women like her worked. It was the only way I'd be able to get through to her and to be honest, I'd have fun doing it.

Taking the braid out of my hair, I curled it with my straighteners and applied a small amount of makeup. Not much, I didn't want to overdo it like she did but I still wanted a little on. Pulling out the tightest pair of black skinny jeans I could find, I wrestled them up my legs and lay down on the bed to do the button up. Slipping my combat boots on, I then riffled through my wardrobe for the tank tops that Ty had ordered for



me and Kitty. Opening a new one, I pulled it over my head.

Grabbing my belt, I clipped it on and looked in the mirror.

I gasped at the woman I saw reflected back at me, she was a totally different person to the one that I saw only a few short months ago.

Her eyes were brighter, her hair shinier, standing tall and looking completely confident. This was the me that I'd fought to become again and I wasn't letting anyone take her back to that dark place.

Jogging back down the stairs, I placed my hand on the door knob and took a deep breath.

I'd show her what she was dealing with. Wife or no wife, she wasn't going to worm her way back in here, I wouldn't let her.

When I got to the metal door, I pulled my shoulders back and held my head high. Pulling it open, I walked inside and smiled when all their conversations stopped. I was met with various looks, Kitty looked shocked, Evan smiled and Luke looked at me knowingly.

He knew more than anyone how hard it was for me to do this, we had talked a lot about our pasts and he knew that I didn't want to be that person anymore.

The victim. I wasn't that anymore. No, I was a survivor.

I moved my eyes to Serena, she was sat in my seat with her hand on Ty's arm. Taking a deep, calming breath, I took stock of the situation. If I couldn't sit in my seat, then I'd have to find somewhere else to sit, wouldn't I?

Walking forward, swaying my butt a little, making sure to show off how tight my jeans were, I made a beeline for Ty. I winked as I got closer and he spun around in his chair to face me.

“Sweeth-”

“Hey,” I purred. Then sat straight on his lap, not waiting for him to say another word before I attacked him with my lips.

He gasped, not knowing what was happening at first but when my tongue met his, he grabbed my hips and pulled me closer.

Deepening the kiss, I moaned at the feel of his erection at my hip. Yep, it was so satisfying knowing I did that to him and in a room full of people.

His one hand cupped my butt, squeezing, and the other gripped the base of my neck, turning my head so that he had better access.

What was meant to be a kiss to show her that he was mine, turned into something different. I should have known that a kiss with Ty was never just a kiss. It was always so much more.

“Ahem,” I heard her say. But I wasn’t stopping for anybody.

Pushing closer to Ty, I moved my hand down his chest and across his erection, eliciting a groan from him. The sound so satisfying that I moaned in response.

“Ty Ty,” Ugh. Why does she call him that?

Pulling away slightly so my lips were centimeters from Ty’s, I whispered. “I missed you last night.”

It was true, I had missed him. I knew that it was my choice to keep him out by putting the chair in front of the door but that didn't mean that I missed him any less.

I missed the way he always had one hand on me at all times, no matter where it was. How he always liked to touch my bare skin, whether that be my stomach, my leg or my face.

I wouldn't spend another night away from him, not only because he kept the nightmares at bay, but because I genuinely missed having his warmth beside me.

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“Have I got to watch you and your bit on the side all day?” Serena sneered.

Wincing, I turned on Ty’s lap to face her. “Hi, Serena.” I smiled, one of those sickly sweet, girl next door smiles.

Rolling her eyes, she looked back to Ty and said, “Isn’t it time for the little girl to go now? We have adult things to discuss.”

“Watch your mouth, Serena,” Ty warned, wrapping his arm around my waist and resting his chin on my shoulder. “Kay is an important part of this team.”

“She works for you?” she said, in that screechy voice again. Turning my eyes to Luke, I grimaced at the sounds that she made. He smirked and hid his chuckle behind a cough, making my own smile spread.

“Yes, she works for me, not that it’s any of your business.”

“I’m still your wife Ty.” I turned to face her, catching the tail end of her smirk.

Ty tensed underneath me and let go of my waist, I could feel him try to lift up so I turned to him and whispered in his ear, “She’s just trying to get a reaction.”

“I’m not gonna have her do this, Kay, not in front of you,” he growled into my ear, I shivered from his breath and the soft touch of his lips as they moved against my skin.

“Don’t give her what she wants.” I warned, pulling back and looking him square in the eyes. If he was afraid of upsetting me, then that was the furthest thing from my

mind.

I knew that this day would come sooner or later, I could see that she wanted Ty back but I was confident that he didn't want her.

"Time to go Serena," Ty said, not moving his eyes from mine.

"But...But I haven't-"

"I don't give a shit; you haven't told us anything that we didn't already know." Smiling softly at him, I placed my hand on the side of his face and relished in the scratchy feel of his scruff. "Luke, see that she makes it off my property.

"You got it, boss," he said brightly.

I didn't move my eyes from Ty; not when she huffed and scraped the chair back, not when she shouted at Luke to not touch her and not when I heard all the other chairs scrape against the floor and the warehouse emptying.

I kept my eyes firmly to his.

"Think it's about time we talked," he said, his eyes filling with a mixture of anger and sadness.

"Yeah," I huffed. "Let's start with why she was here in the first place?"

"Or we could start with why you barricaded yourself in your room?"

I raised my brows at him and shuffled on his lap, his erection still poking me in the hip.

“Fine.” He chuckled. “She said that she had information on Daley that we’d want to know.”

I squinted my eyes at him. “And how would she know that we’d want to know?”

Shrugging, he said, “She knows what I do, which means she knows that I was at the charity function for work. She’s probably put two and two together.”

Opening my mouth, I was ready to tell him that there must be more to it but then I remembered my plan; there was no point in saying anything, it’d fall on deaf ears anyway. So I closed my mouth and smiled instead. I’d get to the bottom of this. One way or another, I’d make sure that I found out what she was up to.

I never expected Kay to come into the warehouse like that, especially after last night. When she walked through the door I had no idea what to expect but it certainly wasn’t what had happened.

Even though I knew what she was trying to do, I still got caught up in her lips. I always did. The way her ass rubbed against me, giving just the right amount of friction. Damn.

I’d expected her to go on about Serena when she left, she’d done that a lot lately. Saying that she didn’t trust her, but then again, neither did I. Though Kay had nothing to back it up with, she said she could see it in her eyes that night. I didn’t know what to believe so I stuck with the facts.

We hadn’t found a thing on Serena but we had found plenty on Daley, we even had a possible location that we were gonna check out.

Tapping her ass twice, telling her to get up, I said, “Let’s go home and talk.”

“Do we have to?” Kay murmured as she lifted up.

She knew what I wanted to talk about and there was no getting around it, I didn’t expect her to tell me everything but I wanted to know what had gone on last night; why she locked herself in her room.

“We can do it right here, sweetheart.” I shrugged, standing up and continued, “Why did you lock yourself in your room?”

“I just needed a break,” she whispered and perched on the edge of the table.

“From what? Me?”

“I...I don’t know.” She twisted her hands in her lap, something she only did when she was nervous or on edge.

“Kay.” I took hold of her hands and stepped forward. “If it’s too much, we can cool it off.”

“I... Is that what you want?” she asked, looking up at me with sad eyes.

“Hell no.”

She searched my eyes and blew out a big breath. “I don’t want that either.”

“Good,” I said, letting go of her hands and cupping her face.

“Good,” she mimicked.

“Now, what do you say we finish off what you just started?”

“Ty...”

“Kay...” I tilted my head at her, daring her.

“I need to get Eli in a while, I didn’t take him this morning and-”

“It’s all arranged,” I interrupted. I’d talked to Eli this morning about it, ma said that there was this fair that was on the big field that backed on to the edge of her property. She’d asked to take him but I’d said that I’d talk to Kay about it first.

I may have let it slip to Eli this morning and, once I said it, I couldn’t take it back.

“What’s arranged?” she asked, pulling away slightly.

“Look.” I

held my hands up in the air, not knowing if this would go over well or not. “Ma asked to take Eli to the fair-”

“The one that’s behind her house?”

“Yeah...”

“Okay, continue.” She waved her hand in the air.

“Well, I may have let it slip to Eli this morning and he wants to go. Ma said that if Luke picks him up from preschool and takes Eli to hers, she’ll bring him back by



bedtime.”

“Okay,” she said, and jumped down.

“Okay?” I furrowed my brow, confused. I was sure that she would have been mad that I’d done that without asking her first.

“Here’s the thing, Ty,” she said, backing away from me slowly. “Your ma called me already and asked. She said that she realized she should have asked me in the first place.”

“She called you?”

“Yep,” she said pulling the door open. “I like your ma.” She smiled and walked backwards out of the door. I followed her out and let the door close behind me.

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“You do?” I said, mesmerized by the sway of her hips.

“Yeah.” She stretched her arms above her head, a slither of creamy skin exposing between her jeans and where her top had risen up. “Now the question is...” She smirked, still backing away from me towards the house. “Do you want to finish what I started?”

Licking my lips, I took in the length of her; those jeans were like a second skin and showed every curve she had. There was something to be said for a woman wearing jeans and combat boots with weapons on a belt.

“Damn straight I am.” I picked up the pace. When I was a few footsteps away from her, she squealed and spun around, running as fast as she could.

She’d got faster since she’d started to run, but that didn’t mean she could out run me. Catching up to her at the bottom of the steps, I picked her up and threw her over my shoulder and tapping her ass as I went up the steps.

“Ty!” She laughed, her whole body shaking with the force. “Put me down!”

“Nah,” I said, opening the door and tapping her ass once more. “I like the view from here.”

Kicking the door shut, I carried on up the stairs with her still over my shoulder. I gripped her ass once more, my fingers sliding across her pussy.

“Ty...” she breathed out. Smirking, I did it again then yelped when she slapped my

ass.

“What the hell?” I gasped.

“It’s only fair,” she cooed. “I think I like the view from here too.”

Chuckling, I pushed through my bedroom door and threw her on the bed. She bounced up a couple of times, her chest going in the opposite direction.

“Now, what was it you were sayin’?” I pulled my t-shirt off and threw my beanie across the room with it. “Let’s finish what you started.”

Her eyes were hooded and her tongue came out to wet her lips as they followed the path of my chest and arms. I knew she loved my tats, and it was something I was willing to use to get what I wanted.

Undoing the top button on my jeans, she tracked my movements.

“Yeah,” she breathed out heavily. “Let’s finish what I started.”

Pulling up into the parking lot at the vets, I took a deep breath and tried to mentally prepare myself for being alone with Ty’s mother. Sure, we had spoken over the phone but that was different than being in the same room as her; without Ty.

Jumping out of the truck, I walked through the entrance, the door making a dinging noise as I opened it.

I spotted Elena straight away behind the main desk. She smiled when she saw me and stood up to greet me. She’d phoned the office an hour ago to say that we could pick up Monty. We’d waited for the call all week and I was ecstatic that he was coming home.

I knew that Ty would have wanted to get him but he was out with Luke and Kitty, scouting a possible location. I didn't want Monty to have to stay at the vets an hour longer than he had to so I came straight away, only managing to get lost a couple of times before I found the place.

"Kay!" She came around the front desk, her arms open wide and pulled me in for a hug. I stood there frozen, not knowing what to do so I awkwardly patted her on the back and pulled away when she did.

"Morning, Elena," I said, a blush creeping up my cheeks.

"He's waiting for you." She spun around and went down the hallway so I followed her, not knowing if that was the right thing to do or not but wanting to get to Monty.

We'd been to see him a couple of times, which would make you think I'd know how to get here, but no, I was a nightmare when it came to following directions. Some people would only need to drive a route once and they'd know where they were going. Me? I had no idea, I just about managed to get to the preschool and back without getting lost.

The fact that this was a new area, not the one that I had grown up in, made things worse. At least where I grew up, if I got lost I could just make it back to a neutral spot, normally the grocery store and find my way from there.

Here, I didn't have a clue, it was all new to me and while that excited me, it also scared me at the same time.

"Here he is," she cooed as she opened the door and headed straight to the corner where he was chewing on a toy.

They'd kept him in a room of his own because they hadn't got any cages big enough

for him. He loved it, I wouldn't have wanted him locked up in one of those cages anyway.

His head lifted at the noise, tongue hanging out the side of his mouth. I had two seconds to brace myself before he came at me full force, lifting onto his back legs and resting his front paws on my shoulders.

“Hey there, Monty.” I laughed as he slobbered on my cheek, his tail wagging manically.

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“He’s so much better now,” Elena said, stroking his back and then pulling him down off me. He stood at my side and didn’t move. Even when we went out to the front to get all of his paperwork, he still didn’t move.

“Here you go, hon.” I took the paperwork and riffled in my bag for my purse to pay her.

“Don’t worry about it.” She waved her hand in the air. “I got it.”

“But-”

“Nope,” she said, shaking her head. “Come for dinner at the house on Friday, and we’ll call it square.”

“Dinner?”

“Yeah... You, Ty and Eli.” She walked back around the counter, stroking Monty once more and reaching out for a hug again. This time I was prepared and hugged her back, all the while, Monty stayed pressed against my leg. “Trevor is dying to meet you.”

“Trevor?” I asked with a furrowed brow.

“Ty’s dad.” She smiled. “He’ll just love you,” she said, the wistful smile widening on her face. It was clear that she loved him, just from the way she said his name and talked about him.

I wondered if I looked like that when I talked about Ty.

“Friday,” she said, bringing herself out of her haze. “Eight.” She walked away, turning at the last minute and shouted, “Bring pie!”

Looking down at Monty, I smiled and said. “Looks like we’ve got dinner plans.”

He barked in response and rested his paw on my leg.

“Come on.” I nodded to the door. “Let’s get you home.”

Monty jumped down off the seat as soon as I opened the door, his head turning all around him as he checked out his new home. I expected him to go running off to sniff the place out but he didn’t, he stayed by my side the whole way to the warehouse door. When I pulled the door open, he still didn’t move much, just enough for me to open the door.

None of the guys were back yet so there was only Evan sat at his computer desk. He turned his head, a smile on his face when he saw me, that soon disappeared when his eyes landed on Monty.

“Holy crapballs!” He wheeled back in his chair as if he was about to be attacked. Even though Monty still hadn’t moved from my side.

“Evan...” I laughed. “He won’t hurt you.” I took a step closer to him but he halted me, throwing his hand up in the air.

“Don’t come any closer,” he screeched. Actually screeched.

“Evan?” I frowned. “Are you really scared of him?”

I looked down to Monty, a confused look on my face. He tilted his head at me as if to say, 'I won't hurt him'.

“Can you not see how big he is? And look at those teeth!”

“Evan-”

“No, Kay. Seriously, don't come any closer.” Looking back at him, I squinted my eyes, taking in his pale face. He was actually scared.

I'd never seen him scared of anything and it was a lot to wrap my head around. They were all fearless, so when I was faced with one of them scared, it was an eye opening experience.

“I'll just sit over here then,” I said in a calm voice. Hoping that would ease him slightly. I was pretty confident that Monty wouldn't go over to him and that he would stay at my side.

I went over to the meeting table and pulled my usual chair out to sit down, Monty sitting next to me like a sentinel.

I reached over and stroked him on the head, his fur so much softer than when I had picked him up off the side of the road. He wiggled closer, resting his head on my leg and closing his eyes.

I was fascinated by him. He brought me the same sensation of peace as the woods did.

His head shot up all of a sudden, his body shielding me, poised and ready for an attack. It became clear why, when the metal door opened and they all walked in. Kitty was first, behind her Luke and then Ty last.



Monty barked, causing all of them to stand still and look over to us.

“Awww, is that Monty?” Kitty smiled, stepping forward.

Monty growled, baring his teeth, causing Kitty to stop and look at me confused.

“Kay-” Ty stepped forward, holding his hands up and stopping when Monty barked again. “You need to tell him to heel.”

“What?” I frowned.

“Tell him to heel, he’s guarding you.”

“Huh?” I looked down to Monty, “Oh. Heel?” He turned his head slightly, not taking his eyes off of them.

“Say it more firmly, like you mean it,” Ty said with laughter in his voice.

“Heel.” He sat back on his hind legs but didn’t stop watching them as they sat down.

“Jeez, that’s one scary dog.” Kitty huffed as she sat down.

Ty reached over and kissed me, Monty growling at the intrusion again. “Monty, stop,” I said looking down at him and patting my knee for him to put his head back.

He looked around unsure, but finally put his head back in favor of a stroke.

“Jesus Christ. Kay won’t need no training with that thing next to her, he’d rip someone’s arm clean off.” Luke laughed.

“Exactly!” Evan said from the other end of the room.

“Evan, meeting.” Ty nodded his head at his chair, signaling him to come over.

“I’ll listen from here!” he shouted.

“Get your ass over here.” Ty huffed out, dropping his head into his hands.

“I take it that it didn’t go well?”

“No.” He lifted his head up, his eyes meeting mine. “Wasn’t a thing to be found. Just an old warehouse with nothing inside it.”

“Damn,” I said under my breath.

I saw Evan move closer, taking slow, measured steps as not to disturb Monty. He lifted his head, looked over to Evan, made a noise in the back of his throat and lay his head back down.

“Just sit down, Evan.” I chuckled. “He won’t hurt you.”

“Pffft,” he said as he lowered into his chair slowly.

Shaking my head, I looked back down at Monty and smiled. I’d always wanted a dog.

“So it was a no go?” Evan asked.

“Fuck!” Ty banged his fist down on the table, causing Monty to look up again. “We

need to find those girls, why are we hitting dead ends?"

I turned to face him, not knowing what to say. Charlie hadn't got any closer either, in fact, we were the only ones providing leads for him.

Reaching over, I placed my hand over his clenched fist. "How about going to see the parents of the girl that went missing last. We may be able to find new leads from that."

"Charlie's already interviewed them," Kitty said from across the table.

I looked up at her, her eyes blazing with...something. I couldn't put my finger on it. She hadn't been herself lately, I wanted to ask her what was going on but I had a feeling she'd shut me down.

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“I know,” I said, trying to stay calm. “But it couldn’t hurt for us to talk to them.” Looking back at Ty, unsure, I asked. “Right?”

“It’s not a bad idea,” he said, nodding and turning his hand over, entwining his fingers through mine. “I’ll talk to Charlie about it.”

“Okay.” I nodded and gave his hand a reassuring squeeze. “What do we do now?”

“Now?” He smirked. “Now we show Monty his new home.”

I smiled back, looking down at Monty.

This was the happiest I’d been in a long time; I was just waiting for the other shoe to drop. It wasn’t normal for things to go this smoothly. Not for me, anyway.

I thought I was frustrated before but now I was beyond that. Way beyond that.

We were getting nowhere. The only thing that may bring new leads, was going and talking to the parents of the last girl who went missing. It was a good idea, one that I should have already thought of but I could see now that I had blind spots when it came to this case, and I admit, that was all down to Serena.

Right now wasn’t the time to think about work though because we were on our way to my parents’ house for dinner. Kay had been back at the house all afternoon baking pies.

“Your ma told me to bring pie,” she’d said.

“Yeah, but from the store. She wouldn’t have expected you to make one from scratch.” She’d just shrugged her shoulders and carried on making the pastry.

Now she was sat next to me in the truck, three pies at her feet, Eli in the back, and Monty in the truck bed.

Yep, Monty had to come too. That dog hadn’t moved from Kay’s side since she brought him home a few days ago. The only time he did was when he was playing with Eli but, most of the time, that was in the same room.

The dog was loyal to a fault and, if I was honest, it put me at ease that he was watching out for her. It meant that when I couldn’t be there that he would.

“Stop,” I said to Kay, reaching over and putting my hand over hers. She’d been ringing her hands since she got in the car, now I understood why she’d made so many damn pies; to keep her hands busy.

“I can’t help it,” she whispered, looking back at Eli and Monty, giving them the ‘mom smile’. The one that all moms gave to reassure her children that everything was fine, even when it wasn’t.

“I know, sweetheart.” Giving her hand a final squeeze, I let go and turned on to my parents’ land. They had acres that surrounded their house, something which I loved as a kid.

Dad had a work shed out back. Well, shed was putting it lightly. It was basically a cabin; he’d built it from scratch with wood that he’d cut down himself.

Mom had a stable full of horses. She loved them, well, she loved any animals, but horses were her favorite. She had a habit of taking in horses that had been neglected or the ones that people didn’t want anymore. She currently had six; two ex-race

horses, three mares and a foal.

“Can I go to Trevor’s house again, Ty?” Eli shouted from the backseat.

“Trevor’s house?” Kay turned to me with a frown marred on her beautiful face.

“You’ll see.” I smirked, and parked on the grass outside the house.

Looking away, a frown still on her face, I watched as she took the whole place in. I tried to see it from her eyes but it was hard to do having grown up here. This would always be home.

“Ready?” Pulling open the door, I waited for her to answer before I jumped down. Spotting Ma as she came out of the house, shielding her eyes from the glaring sun.

“Yeah,” she whispered, not exactly convincingly.

“Come on, mama,” Eli whined from the backseat, already standing up, ready to get out.

She closed her eyes, took a deep breath and then opened them and pulled her door open.

“Let’s do this.” She nodded and bent down to get the pies once she was out.

Pulling Eli’s door open, I helped him down and waited for Monty to jump out. I turned around to tell Eli to wait for me but he was already running towards dad’s work shed.

“Eli!” Kay shouted, each hand holding a pie with Monty at her legs again. “Where are you going!”

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“To see Trevor!” he shouted back, not bothering to turn around.

“I’ll go.” I smiled and jogged after him after planting a kiss on her lips.

“Bud!” I shouted just as he got to the door. “You shouldn’t run off like that.”

“Oops, sorry.” He looked down at his feet, kicking the toe of his shoes in the grass.

“Hey.” I crouched down in front of him and put my thumb and finger on his chin, bringing his face back up to me. “You don’t need to be sorry, bud. It just that mama didn’t know where you were going. You have to ask her first, remember?”

“Yeah.” He nodded. His eyes moved to the door making it clear that he couldn’t wait to get in there.

“Come on.” I chuckled and stood back up, pushing through the door.

“Dad?”

“In here, son,” his gruff voice replied. I followed Eli towards dad’s voice. I should have known he’d be in here filing down some wood.

The last time we came, he’d promised Eli that he’d make him a chair, and from the looks of things, he’d nearly finished it.

“Ah! Eli!” Dad put down his tools and went straight to Eli, picking him up and spinning him around. “How’s it going? You being good?”

“Yeah.” Eli chuckled.

“Ah! That’s no good! We need to get some mischief in you.” He sat him on his work bench and I moved closer, making sure there was nothing that could hurt him. “Did you climb any trees?” he continued on with the questioning. I may as well have not been there.

But I didn’t mind, in fact, I loved that he got on with Eli s

o well.

Dad didn’t have any grandkids yet so Eli was kind of his first. Wait...did that mean I was Eli’s step-dad?

I didn’t know how Kay would feel about that, but I’d got to admit, I liked it.

“So...where is she?” Dad asked, finally looking at me.

“She’s in the big house with ma.” I pulled Eli down off the bench and held my hand out to him. His tiny hand was completely lost inside mine.

“Well? What are we waiting for? Let’s go!” He threw his work apron down on the bench and walked straight through the door.

Elena helped me bring the pies inside and told me what Ty had already said earlier on in the day; that I should have got them from the store but I couldn’t do that, I had to impress her in some way. I knew they were only pies, but they were really good pies.

I’d perfected my mom’s recipes over the years, every time we would have a baking or cooking lesson, I would write every little thing down in my special notebook. I’d used the recipes so many times that I now knew them all off the top of my head.



Telling Monty to sit, I followed Elena into the kitchen, the smell of the food pulling me in.

“Need any help?” I asked.

“Ah, hon, that’s kind but you don’t have to.” She waved me away, trying to manage several pots on the stove at once while simultaneously trying to chop vegetables.

“Here,” I said, stepping forward. “Let me do that.” Taking the knife out of her hand, I started to chop them.

We worked well together and in the matter of ten minutes, everything was under control.

The sound of boots coming through the door had my heart beating out of my chest. This was it. This was where his dad would hate me and then Ty wouldn’t want-

“Well! Kay?” Trevor’s deep voice boomed through the house as he got closer to the kitchen. “Jesus H. Christ! What is that thing?” I heard from the doorway.

Monty’s bark sounded through to the kitchen and I stumbled forward, knowing that no one would be able to get him to stop but me.

“Monty!” I shouted, coming into the living room. “Heel.”

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He sat back down, not moving his eyes from Trevor.

“Sorry,” I said, looking over to him. My eyes widened at what I saw. He was a mixture of Ty and Charlie but with a smattering of gray hair.

“Hi?” I whispered, seeing Eli standing behind him holding Ty’s hand. My eyes connected with Ty’s, looking for reassurance.

“Well?” Trevor smirked and stepped closer, “Am I gonna get a hug?” He opened his arms wide and Ty’s nod of encouragement had me stepping forward.

I wasn’t used to all of this touching. It was so foreign to me but I was slowly starting to like it. His arms wrapped around me, enveloping me in his fatherly hug. He was tall, not as tall as Ty and Charlie, but still tall which meant he towered over me.

“So nice to meet ya.” He stepped back and looked down at Eli. “Got a great boy there,” he said, nodding to him.

“Thanks,” I whispered. Clearing my throat, I replied. “so do you.”

“Yeah, he’s alright I suppose.” He chuckled and slapped Ty on the back. “Now! Where is my food, woman? I’m wasting away here!” Leaving with a wink, he headed into the kitchen.

“Wasn’t so bad, huh?” Ty moved forward, wrapping his arms around me while Eli leaned on Monty where he was now lying down, his eyes drooping closed.

I looked around properly now, not having the chance to when I first came in. The walls were lined with pictures of Ty and Charlie. In the middle of the main wall sat a picture, bigger than the rest and the only one in a different frame. It was clear that this one meant the most to Elena and Trevor.

A woman was stood in the center with Charlie behind her, his hands on her clearly pregnant stomach and Ty stood next to them in his forces uniform.

“That’s a lovely picture,” I said, pointing over to it.

Ty smiled and turned to see which picture I was pointing to. His face dropped when he realized which picture. Clearing his throat, he said, “Dinner done yet?”

Frowning at him, I turned to Eli. “Sweetie, go and see if Elena and Trevor need any help.”

“Okay, mama.” He stood up and went running into the kitchen.

“Ty?” His eyes were still focused on the picture. “Ty?”

“Huh?” He pulled back, looking at me with wide eyes. “What?”

“What’s the matter?”

“Nothing,” he said, trying to shrug me off. But I wouldn’t let him, he’d promised not to do that.

“Ty...don’t keep things from me.”

“Really?” He chuckled. “You keep things from me. You still haven’t opened up about Max.” His eyes blazed with a mixture of sadness and anger.

“Ty-”

“No, forget it.” He huffed, scrubbing his hands up and down his face. “Shit! I’m sorry.”

“It’s fine,” I mumbled. Not wanting to admit how much he’d hit home with what he had said.

He was right, I still hadn’t told him about Max. It wasn’t like I wasn’t ready, because I was. It was finding the right time to broach the subject, getting into that head space took so much energy, energy that I didn’t want to waste. But I knew I had to at some stage.

“Ty-”

“Just forget it,” he said cutting me off a second time, trying to walk past me. Grabbing onto his arm to stop him, I moved closer. He wasn’t going to do that, not to me, he needed to listen to what I was saying.

He looked down at his arm and then back up to my eyes.

“I’m trying to tell you that I’m ready.”

“You’re ready?” he asked wide eyed.

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“Yeah.” I let go of his arm, stepping closer to him. “I’m ready to talk about Max, but you need to tell me too.”

“Tell you what?” He frowned, putting his arms around my waist and interlocking his hands.

“About that woman in the picture,” I said, tilting my head to the picture.

“It’s not my story to tell, sweetheart.” Searching his eyes, I could see that he was telling the truth. I knew just from seeing the picture that it was Charlie’s story, but that didn’t mean that he couldn’t tell me parts of it.

“I don’t want to know the full story, just who she is.”

“Okay.” He leaned down, bringing his lips to mine and kissing them softly. “Tonight?” he asked when he pulled back.

“Yeah,” I whispered. “Tonight.”

Nodding, he pulled me in for a hug. I breathed him in and rested my head on his chest, listening to the steady beat of his heart. Pulling back, he let his arm drop over my shoulders and steered me into the kitchen.

“Now that we’ve sorted that...” He tilted his head down. “Time for ma’s food. Man, I love eating here.”

“Hey!” I elbowed him in the ribs, giving him a mock stare. “I cook for you all the

time.”

“Ahh, sweetheart, I didn’t mean it like that.” He chuckled.

Pulling away, I huffed and smirked when my back was to him.

“Don’t be like that,” he groaned.

Huffing, I swayed my hips that little bit more, aware that he was watching. Purely by coincidence, of course.

Walking out of Eli’s room, I stood at the top of the stairs preparing myself for what I was about to do. I was afraid that bringing all of this up wouldn’t destroy all of the progress I’d made. I was hoping that it would make me stronger but I wasn’t holding my breath.

Things had to get worse before they got better though, right?

Taking a deep breath, I pulled my shoulders back and walked down the stairs.

Ty was sat on the edge of the coffee table waiting for me, his arms resting on his thighs. I took him all in, the way his back was tense and his hands clenched into fists. He was always so composed, I could see that he was dreading this as much as me.

The step I was on creaked and he lifted his head, I gasped at the intensity in his eyes. I stopped on the step that I was on, not wanting to go an

y further.

“Ty?” I whispered.

He closed his eyes, his chest moving up and down as he took a deep breath. I could see that he was trying to get himself under control but I was freaking out over here.

A lump formed in my throat and it was all too intense, just too much. “I...I...” I gripped my hands as hard as I could, my knuckles turning white.

My eyes widened when he stood up all of a sudden, walking straight to me. I didn’t have time to ask what he was doing before he wrapped his arms around my waist and picked me up, my legs going around him automatically.

Burrowing my face into his neck, I clutched my arms around his shoulders as he took us upstairs and straight into his room. Feeling him sit down, I lifted my face out of his neck and pulled back slightly.

He cupped my face, keeping his eyes planted on mine. “I’m here,” he said, his voice rough but soft at the same time. “He can’t get to you anymore, sweetheart.”

“I know,” I whispered, closing my eyes. I had to do this. I’d built it up into this big moment and I didn’t even know where to start. “I don’t know where to start,” I confessed.

He nodded and looked away. “When did it first start?” I knew that he knew the answer to this question but I answered him anyway. It was a starting point and that’s what I needed.

“When I was pregnant.”

“Okay,” he gritted out. “What would he do?”

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Closing my eyes, I told him. I told him everything that he would do.

How he liked to control me, tell me what to do and what to wear. The names that he would call me and that was all before he had started to use his fists.

“The first time he hit you?” he ground out, staring into my eyes.

“He slapped me for not having his dinner on the table when he came in from work.”

“Son of a bitch,” he swore. I felt him tense underneath me and I made to move off him but he grabbed my legs and held me in place. “Keep going.”

“It wasn’t too bad at first, he only did it every now and again. But...”

“It got worse?” he asked. I could feel his fingers tapping that beat on my legs, a sign that he was trying to stay calm.

“Yeah.” I looked down. “I was so alone, Ty.” I sniffled. “I had no one, not until I came here.”

“Sweetheart,” he murmured.

“Then when I came to work here, something changed.” I said, looking out of the window and into the woods. “I don’t know whether it was me, him or both of us.”

“You became stronger.” Ty’s voice echoed around me as I thought about what had actually made me change.



“It was fine for a while, he’d be nice and want to spend time together. He even took me out that one time,” I reminded him.

“I remember.” He smirked. “That was the hottest cleaning closet I’d ever been in.”

“Ty!” I snorted.

“What? You looked fuckin’ hot and those lips...” He looked down at my lips. My tongue came out on impulse as I licked them, I watched as his eyes flared.

His hands moved around to my butt and he pulled me closer. “Stop!” I giggled, shuffling on his lap. My butt was going dead.

“Okay, Okay,” he said, bringing his hands up in the air. “What happened that day?”

“What day?” I frowned.

“Fuckin’ hell, Kay, the day that you came here looking like you’d gone ten rounds in the ring.”

“Oh.” My teeth sank into my bottom lip, scared to go back there. Not that it was hard, I dreamed about that day most nights. If it wasn’t that day, then you could guarantee Max was in my dreams in some way or another, he was never far away.

“Well, erm...you remember Eli was ill that day?” He nodded his head at me. “You brought us back to the apartment and I still had my vest and belt with me?”

“Yeah.”

“Well I hid them when you went-”

“You hid them?” he asked, frowning.

“Yeah, he didn’t know,” I said, biting my lip.

I didn’t want to admit this to Ty, it was just another secret that was being exposed and I felt vulnerable. But at the same time, I could feel a weight being lifted off my shoulders.

“Didn’t know what?”

“That...I was working here.” I mumbled.

“Wait.” He pulled back. “Why didn’t he know that you were working here?”

“He said that my place was at home, looking after Eli and cleaning the apartment.” I swallowed, taking a deep breath. “But with Eli at preschool, I needed something, Ty. I couldn’t stay in that apartment on my own all day. It was driving me crazy.”

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“Sweetheart.” He held my hands in his, squeezing gently. “I understand.”

Those two words meant so much more than he would ever know. His eyes shone with the truth and showed me that he really did understand.

“You do?” I whispered.

“Yeah.” He came forward, planting a soft kiss on my lips. “So what happened then?”

I cleared my throat and looked down at my lap, trying to get up the courage to tell him what had happened that day.

“I set my vest and belt out on the bed before I left to take Eli. I’d put them there so I wouldn’t forget them, but I did. I didn’t realize until I’d dropped Eli off. That’s when—”

“You called me,” he said through gritted teeth.

“Yeah. By the time I got back to the apartment, he was there...sat in the kitchen with...with...” I sobbed, not being able to say anymore.

Squeezing my eyes tight, I tried to get rid of the images that were flashing in my mind. I didn’t want to go back there and I didn’t think I could tell Ty what had happened. Not after this part. It was too painful.

I could almost feel every single punch and kick that he gave me that day. Wincing, my hand went to my leg and rubbed over the spot where my scar was.

“Sweetheart? It’s okay, you don’t need to say anymore.”

Nodding, I opened my eyes. Glad that I could see his beautiful brown eyes, instead of evil green ones.

I blew out a deep breath, and let my head drop to his chest. I was so grateful that I had Ty now, that both me and Eli were safe.

I couldn’t believe that he had stopped her from working. What kind of man did that? Every little thing she told me about her life with him, made me that much angrier.

I pushed it down, knowing that if she saw it, it would make her clam up like she had earlier on the stairs. I hadn’t been able to shield it from her then. I was sat there thinking all kinds of things, but what I was hearing was so much worse than I could have imagined and I knew that the worst was still to come.

She pulled her head off my chest, her eyes filled with so much pain, I could almost physically feel it.

“H...h...he strangled me.” Her hand fluttered across her neck and her eyes drifted off. “It all happened so fast but I fought back,” she said, looking me back in the eyes and making sure that I knew she had.

“You don’t have to-”

“But he was so strong, and then he had me on the floor.” A lone tear slipped from the corner of her eye, trailing a path down her cheek. She was in her own head and I desperately tried to tell her that she didn’t have to tell me anymore but it was no use. “He just kept hurting me and I realized that the more pain I was in, the more he was enjoying it.”

I gripped onto her legs and clenched my jaw. What I would do to that sick fuck if I got my hands on him. I wouldn't be able to control myself, that was for sure.

"I managed to reach for the belt," she continued. "I got the baton and was about to swing it when he stabbed me in the leg."

I covered her hand with mine, she was unconsciously rubbing at the spot where her scar was. She had so many physical scars but I couldn't even imagine the mental ones that she carried around with her.

"Then I knocked him out." She met my eyes, a smirk growing on her face.

"You did?" I asked, shocked.

"Yeah." She giggled. "He fell down like a sack of potatoes." She grimaced and continued. "Only he fell onto me."

"Shit," I murmured. The images that were flicking through my head were making me crazy, imagining her laying there helpless and covered in blood and bruises. Shaking my head to try and rid the thoughts, I shifted on the bed.

"When I finally got him off me, I barely made it in the car and then I came straight here," she said, finally looking back at me.

She smiled, her whole face lighting up with the movement. Although her eyes still held a tinge of sadness, it was almost all gone now. I could tell, without even asking, that this had been good for her.

Me? I was even more determined to find him and show him what someone his own size could do to him. Men like him only ever preyed on women smaller than them. I'd never hated anyone the way that I hated him. From the first time I saw him, that

night that me and Kay had in the closet, I knew that there was something about him.

The way that he had her against the wall when I walked out into that hallway, there was something not right about it. I should have known by the way that she acted as they walked past me. I should have stepped in but when she shook her head at me, I didn't.

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If I had, maybe this wouldn't have happened. She never would have gotten hurt but, then maybe she would still have been with him.

"You know what?" she asked, pulling back.

"What?" I asked.

"I feel so much better now." She nodded, confirming it to herself. "I think that's what I needed. To get it all out and talk about it."

"I'm so proud of you, sweetheart." I leaned forward, planting a soft kiss on her lips, pulling back before I got too tempted to deepen it.

"Your turn." She raised her brows.

Damn, I'd forgot that I said I'd tell her about Emmy. "It's really not my story to tell," I warned. I didn't want to keep anything from her, I already had so much involving my past with Serena that I was keeping from her. As soon as I thought that, the guilt swamped me. She'd just opened up about Max and here I was, still not telling her what had happened to make me leave Serena.

?

??That's okay." She nodded. "Just tell me who she is and her name."

"Was."

“Huh?”

“Who she was,” I said, clearing my throat. “Emmy, she was Charlie’s wife.”

“I don’t understand,” she shook her head, a frown on her face.

“Sweetheart, I really can’t say anymore.”

She stared at me, her eyes flicking all over my face before finally settling on my eyes and nodding. “Okay, I understand.”

After telling Ty everything about Max, completely exposing myself, I felt so much better. Not only did I feel like a weight had been lifted off my shoulders, I also felt so much more confident about my relationship with Ty.

We spent the weekend together with Eli and went up to the woods, we also paid Elena and Trevor a visit and Ty showed me all the spots that he loved as a kid. He even showed Eli his old tree house and promised to build him one in the woods behind the back yard.

Eli had wanted Ty to start and build it straight away, trying to tell him that he had to wait was useless. Ty wanted Eli to be involved in it and help chop down the wood so he said they’d start it on a weekend.

Eli had still been talking about it when I dropped him off at preschool this morning.

Back at the warehouse, it was strange seeing Charlie after Ty had told me that he’d had a wife, it made me look at him differently. He seemed so broody and hard, something bad must have happened to make him like that and it was obvious that it involved Emmy, his wife.



We'd all met up at the warehouse before we went to meet John and Cynthia, the parents of the latest girl who was taken, Lindsey.

"So who's coming?" Charlie asked, looking around us all at the table.

"Me," Kitty said straight away.

"So, you and Kitty?" Charlie asked Ty.

"And Kay," Ty said, standing.

Charlie moved his eyes to me, a look behind them that I couldn't decipher.

"Only two can go, it'll be too much if there's four of us in with them."

Ty scrubbed his hands down his face and heaved a breath. I could see that it was getting to him, having not solved this case yet.

"It's fine," I said, leaning forward and touching his arm. "Let Kitty go; I can stay here."

"No." He shook his head. "It was your idea, you're gonna be there."

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“We need to be leaving,” Kitty moaned. “Just let her stay here.”

“What is your problem?” Evan turned to her, his voice a little louder than normal. I’d never heard him shout before and I had a feeling that was the closest to shouting that he’d ever get.

His eyes shot daggers at her, and if I was honest, it was a little scary to see that look on his face. Evan was one of those people, the kind that took so long to lose his cool but once he did, he went off like a rocket.

“What? My problem?” Kitty screeched, pointing to her chest.

“Yeah,” he said, leaning closer to her. “You’ve been bitchy for weeks now and it’s all aimed at Kay. What the hell?”

Kitty turned her eyes to me and I smiled softly. Letting her know that it was okay, we all had those off weeks, right? Her eyes turned to Charlie, a conversation going on between them that only they were privy to. He must have silently warned her because you could see the pain in her eyes, completely and utterly shattered. I couldn’t bear to see that look on her face, no matter what had gone on the last few weeks, it was painful to watch.

“You know what?” I pushed back the chair and stood. “It may work better if it was just me and Kitty. You know, two women and all that?”

“But-” Ty said, looking at me with a frown.

I turned my eyes to him, trying to tell him to go with what I was saying. “Us four can go and then you two,” I said. pointing to Charlie and Ty. “Can leave the room when we talk to them.”

Not bothering to wait for an answer, I walked over to kitty and waited until she stood, then linked my arm through hers.

“Kay-”

“Just keep walking,” I whispered out the side of my mouth. She looked at me confused but kept on walking.

Once we were outside, waiting for them, I said. “I don’t know what’s going on Kitty, but I know it’s something to do with Charlie-”

“Kay-” I held my hand up to her and shook my head.

“I don’t need to know.” I raised my brow. “Just know that when you’re ready to talk, I’m here.”

Her body deflated on a breath and she nodded. I could see that she was grateful without her having to say a word, she was just starting to relax when the door opened and they came out. They both had annoyed looks on their faces. Something had clearly gone down when we walked out.

Shrugging my shoulders, I walked over to Ty’s truck and went to open the passenger door when Charlie stopped me.

“In the back.” He tilted his head to the back door.

I looked up at him, his face telling me not to argue with him. “Erm...okay?” I said

unsure, stepping to the side.

“Get in the fuckin’ front, Kay,” Ty growled from the opposite side of the truck.

My eyes flew to his and then back to Charlie. They were shooting daggers at each other and I hadn’t got a clue who would come out on top. The back door slammed shut as Kitty got in and I was left there, not knowing who to listen to.

“I’m not sitting in the back,” Charlie huffed. “I’m a grown ass man.”

“And this is my truck and my woman,” he said to Charlie. Bringing his eyes back to me he said, softer this time, “Get in the front, Kay.”

I stood there, unmoving. Charlie stood there, blocking my path, not taking his eyes off his brother.

“Move, Charlie,” Ty gritted out.

Two counts and then he moved, flicking his eyes at me and waving at the door. Once he was in the back, I pulled the door open and jumped up into the passenger side.

The drive to their house was silent and awful, I’d never been so uncomfortable in my life. There was tension between Kitty and Charlie and between Ty and Charlie. Here I was, sat in between them all, not knowing what was going on.

The area we were in was in a run-down part of town, that was a pattern that we’d spotted not long after we got this case. They were all in bad areas and were either in the system or didn’t have very good home lives.

This one was different though, they may have lived in a bad part of town but the girl had lived in the same house all of her life. They never moved around and her mom

and dad were still married. Her case was a mystery because there was nothing that linked it to any of the other girls that had been taken.

Other than the area, there was no similarities with this last girl.

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When we pulled up outside of the house, I decided that I'd had enough.

"Right," I said, turning in my seat to face them all. "This stops right here." I told them, in my 'mom' voice.

Before any of them said a word, I held up my hand and continued, "I don't care what is going on between all of you. These parents have had their child taken from them. We're here to get any more information that we can and reassure them that we're doing all we can to find her."

"She's right," Charlie said, clearing his throat and inclining his head to me.

Looking at Ty and Kitty to make sure they had heard me loud and clear, I pulled open the door and jumped out. Checking the area like Ty had taught me to do. We caught the attention of a group of guys standing on the corner, obviously part of the reason that this was a bad area.

Ignoring them, we walked straight to the gate and up the path to the little house. The only one on the street that was taken care of, grass mowed and flowers blooming in the garden. The pale yellow siding was welcoming, as well as the few chairs that sat outside. This was obviously a well-used garden.

Taking the lead, I pulled the screen door open and knocked on the door.

The door opened a crack and then fully when they saw who it was. "H

i, Mrs Conway. I'm Kaylee, this is Sergeant-"

“Yes, yes, come on in.” She opened the door wide and we all filed in.

“I hope it’s alright that there’s four of us?” I said, unsure now that we had all come inside.

“That fine.” She waved to the couch so me and Kitty sat down, with Ty and Charlie stood behind us.

The swinging door opened and who I assumed was Mr Conway, came through with a tray of drinks and placed them on the table.

“Mr Conway.” I stood, holding my hand out. Taking it, he shook my hand firmly.

“Please, call me John.”

“Ah, okay. I’m Kay and this is Kitty and Tyson,” I said pointing to each of them.

“And of course you know Sergeant Mackenzie.”

“Yes,” he said, taking a seat next to his wife opposite us. “So what is all of this about?” he directed at me.

“We want to get a fuller picture about your daughter, her friends, that sort of thing. Anything you can think of that may help.”

They looked at each other, locking hands.

“She’s a good girl, top of her class.” John started. “She never gets into trouble and is always looked out for. We can’t understand why she was taken, or how. Who would do this?”

I gulped, not knowing what to say from here. How much was I even meant to say,

was I allowed to say we had a suspect in mind?

“That’s what we’re trying to find out, John,” Ty said from behind me, his hand resting on my shoulder. It amazed me at how well he could read me.

They started to tell us more about Lindsey and showed us a photograph that was a couple of years old, explaining that they hadn’t had the money to buy them recently as John had lost his job. They told us that Lindsey only had two friends at school and provided us with their names.

“She wants to go to a good college,” Cynthia said. “That’s why she works so hard.”

Her sob brought a lump to my throat and no matter how many times I tried to clear it, nothing would work.

“Excuse me,” I croaked out and stood. I shook my head as Ty tried to follow me out. He needed to stay here and get as much information as he could. Not try and console me because I’d got emotional on the job.

Stepping out onto the little porch area, I leaned against the side of the house, trying to stop the tears that wanted to flow.

I couldn’t imagine what they were going through. The thought of Eli being taken from me tied me up in knots, and knowing what could potentially be happening to this girl didn’t make it any easier.

“Hey!” Flicking my eyes to the gate, I stared wide eyed at the group of guys that were stood there, the same group that were on the corner when we arrived. “Hey! Lady!” one of them shouted again. Gulping, I moved to the top of the steps.

“Can I help you?” I asked in a confident voice, surprising myself because on the



inside I didn't feel any of that confidence.

“You here to help find Lindsey?”

“Err...” Looking back at the house, I debated whether to run back inside, or answer him. “Yeah.”

“You any closer to finding my girl?” the tallest one who stood at the front said.

“Your girl?” I frowned.

“Did they not tell you?” He chuckled. “Of course they didn’t.” Rolling his eyes, he looked to his friends as they all started to talk at the same time.

“Wait,” I said stepping forward, not one of them hearing me. “Hey!” I said walking down the path.

The tallest one stopped talking and turned to me, his eyes wide.

“You and Lindsey are together?”

“Hell yeah we are.” His jaw clenched as he balled his fist up. “You ain’t gonna find anything out by speaking to them.” He pointed his tattooed hand at the house. I stared, trying to get a read on him. Since listening to my gut more, I was finding that I could actually read people better than I had thought I could.

He wore a big black jacket with jeans and a sweater underneath. All of the skin I could see was covered in tattoos, flowing up to his neck. His face was the only part that I could see that didn’t have them.

“Really? Why is that?” I asked, intrigued.

“‘Cus she never fuckin’ stayed there. She lived with me.” He pointed at his chest with his thumb and raised a brow.

Frowning, I looked back at the house. It looked like the epitome of a perfect home for a child to grow up in. Perfect parents. Maybe too perfect.

“Listen,” he said, getting my attention. “I know that they’re telling you all this ‘we have a perfect life’ bullshit but that’s far from the case.”

Hearing the screen door slam against the house, I jumped and turned around. “Kay? Come over here.” Ty growled.

“Ty-”

“Kay,” he warned.

I turned back around to the group of guys and said, “What’s your name?”

“Josh.” He held his hand out and I placed mine inside of his. I hadn’t expected him to do that and it just showed that we judged people way too much.

“Ty?” I turned back around. “You’re going to want to hear this.”

He looked at all of the guys in turn and stepped forward, coming to stand beside me. His face masked with an expression that said ‘don’t mess with me.’ I almost giggled at how protective he was being.

“This is Josh.” I said, raising a brow. “Lindsey’s boyfriend.”

“Her boyfriend?”

“Yep.” I lifted up onto my toes and whispered in his ear. “I think we need to talk to him. There’s something not right here.”

“Yeah.” He looked down at me, a soft smile on his face. “They don’t seem right, too...”

“Perfect?”

“Yeah.” He nodded and turned to Josh. “Would you meet us in the park at the end of the street in ten?”

“Yeah, man, sure.”

Nodding at us, he walked off, all of the guys following him.

“Jesus, Kay. They could have been anyone,” I said as we walked back up the path to the house.

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“They weren’t,” she said with a raised brow. “I’m telling you Ty, something isn’t right here. She doesn’t even live here, she lives with Josh.”

“Is that what he told you?” I asked, pulling the screen door open for her.

She nodded then said, “Watch this.”

She walked back into the main room and looked at John and Cynthia. “Mind if I go and have a look in Lindsey’s room?”

I kept my eyes on John and Cynthia as their faces paled, John stood up, his hands balling into fists. “No.”

Flicking my eyes to Charlie, I tried to tell him silently that something was up and from the way his brows rose, it looked like he saw it too.

“W...w...what he ...means is...” Cynthia looked at Kay and then to John, standing up and touching his arm. “She wouldn’t want her stuff to be touched.”

I raised my brows at them and turned to face Kay, she gave me a look that said, ‘told you so’.

“Right, okay,” I said and tilted my head at Kitty to come over to us. “Thanks for your time.”

Waving my hand to the door, I waited until Kitty and Kay were out and then followed them.

None of us said anything until we were in the car and I'd turned the engine on.

"What's going on?" Charlie asked, leaning forward and popping his head in between me and Kay.

"Lindsey has a boyfriend," Kay told him.

"We never knew of any boyfriend," Charlie replied.

"Yeah, because they didn't want you to know," I said, looking at him in the mirror.

"What the fuck is going on here?" He leaned back, throwing his hands up in the air.

"We're about to find out," I said, pulling up to the park and spotting the group of guys sat on a couple of picnic benches.

"What are we doing here?"

"Bro, chill the fuck out and let us do our job," I said, pulling my door open and tilting my head to Kay.

Charlie pulled his door open and I shook my head. "You're staying here; they see a cop? They won't talk."

Huffing, he pulled the door closed and sat back, his face turned toward the window. I was sick and tired of all of his moods lately. He was getting worse than usual and was a complete nightmare to be around.

"Come on," I said to Kay and jumped out of the truck, holding my hand out for her when she made her way around to my side.

“You do the talking,” I said. “He’s already opened up to you.”

“Okay.” She nodded in agreement.

I rubbed my thumb across the palm of her hand as we walked closer. Coming to a stop in front of them.

I stared at Josh and all the guys that he had scattered around the park. He waved his hand at the seat opposite him on the bench so Kay threw her leg over and sat down, while I stood behind her with my eyes scanning the whole park.

“Josh,” Kay said. “How about you start from the beginning?”

“Sure.” He shrugged with indifference.

I put my hand on my belt and pressed the button on my device. Over the years, I’d tried different things, especially with Evan always making up some new invention. This one was the best that I’d ever had, one press of a simple, concealed button and you could record any conversation. It was times like this, when you knew people didn’t want to have things noted down, that it came in useful.

“Lindsey has lived there since she was a little girl. Always looked out for her you know?” He looked around at all the guys. “We all have.”

“Okay.”

“I knew that something wasn’t right in that house since she was a kid. They were weird and always making her do shit that she didn’t want to do.”

“Do you know what kind of stuff?” Kay asked softly.

I looked down at Josh, his eyes told me that he knew. He knew what had gone on in that house but there was no way that he would tell us. Loyal to his girl. I respected him for that.

“Look, I know that it looks bad. Me and the good girl together. But I fuckin’ love her and some scumbag has taken her.”

I stepped closer the louder his voice got, it wasn’t that I thought he’d hurt Kay, I just didn’

t want a situation on my hands.

“Her dad is a fuckin’ weirdo and in bed with some seriously fucked up people. The only reason he called the cops in the first place is because I went around and demanded he tell me where she was.”

“You said that she lives with you?” I asked.

“Yeah, man, she has since she was fifteen.”



“And where is it that you live?”

“What do you wanna know that for?” Josh stood up, the guys he was with flanking him on either side.

I raised my brows at him. It didn’t matter how many of them that were here, they still wouldn’t be able to hurt me. “You wanna know when we find Lindsey?” I said, stepping forwards.

“Fuck, yeah,” he growled.

“Then we need to know how to get in touch with you.” I tapped Kay on the shoulder, silently telling her to stand up.

“Oh.” He frowned. “Does this mean that you believe me?”

“Why wouldn’t I?” I smirked.

“Shit, I dunno. ‘Cus I’m me?”

I took another step closer, only the table separating us as I looked him straight in the eyes.

“Know what I think?” I said, waiting for him to acknowledge me. “I think that you’re doing your best to protect the girl you love.” I shrugged. “There’s no shame in that.”

“Yeah, man. I just want her back home.”

I nodded, fully understanding him and listened as he told us how we could get in touch with him.

I smiled at Kay, pleased that she had suggested coming to see the parents. If we hadn't have come here, then we wouldn't have found out what we have. One thing was for sure, we had some more digging to do.

After a full week of investigating, not only Daley, but now Lindsey's parents, it felt like none of us had stopped working.

On Saturday morning, me and Eli took Monty for a walk up to the clearing. He loved being in the woods almost as much as me and Eli did. He ran ahead but not too far, turning back around constantly to check that I was still there.

"Mama? Do you think Monty will be able to go on all of the stuff?"

"All of what stuff, sweetie?" I looked down at him, dragging a stick behind him.

"The wood stuff," he said, like I should know what he meant.

"You mean the training equipment in the clearing?"

"Yeah!" He jumped up and down, the stick that he was holding flying out of his hands. "Will he be able to? I think he'd like it." He was nodding his head emphatically and I couldn't help but smile at how excited he was. He loved having a dog and they'd become fast friends, there was nothing like seeing the bond that they had.

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“Erm...I’m not sure, sweetie. I think it’d be a little dangerous.”

“Oh.” He jutted out his bottom lip and hung his head.

“All the guys will be meeting us up here later though so we’ll have loads of fun!” I said, trying to cheer him up.

“All of them?”

“Yeah, sweetie, all of them.” I smiled at his wide grin and carried on walking behind him.

The plan was for us to all have a barbecue up here and have some proper family time. We hadn’t been getting that lately and we were all in need of it.

Kitty still wasn’t her normal self and I desperately wanted to ask her what was going on. I needed to broach the subject with her because she couldn’t keep going like this, she was pushing all of us away and none of us wanted that.

There was a clear divide between all of us and it amazed me how when one person in the team was suffering with something, it seemed to affect all of us.

I lay on the grass when we made it to the clearing and watched Eli and Monty run around, Eli’s laughter bouncing off the trees.

After a couple of hours, they were both tired out so they lay next to me, Eli’s head leaning against Monty’s back and fell asleep. I closed my eyes and placed my hand

on the top of Eli's head.

I don't know how long we lay like that, but I was woken up by voices.

My eyes sprung open and a shadow came over us. "Hey." Ty smirked.

"Hey." I lifted up onto my elbows, careful not to disturb Eli who was still asleep. Monty lifted his head, looked over at us and then closed his eyes with a groan.

"You look beautiful in that dress." His eyes traced the length of my body before coming back up to meet mine.

I felt my cheeks warm as a blush spread, I was still so unsure of what to say when someone complimented me that I just nodded at him and looked away.

I loved to wear dresses, especially maxi dresses like this, I loved the way they flowed and how free I felt in them. It was something so simple but meant so much.

Extending his hand to me, I took it and let Ty help me up, brushing the grass off my back as I stood.

His arm came around my waist. Smiling, I lifted up onto my tip toes, putting my hands onto his shoulders and planting a soft kiss on his lips. Moaning, he deepened it, his hands roaming down to my butt and squeezing.

My hands roamed his body and up into his hair, leaning into him so that I was closer to him.

"God, I can't seem to get enough of you," he said, pulling back and resting his forehead against mine.

“Good.” I smiled.

Chuckling, he pulled back and wrapped his arm around my shoulders. “Will he be okay there?” He tilted his head to Eli, who was still fast asleep.

“Yeah, Monty’s with him,” I said and wrapped my arm around his waist, leaning my head against his shoulder.

We went over to the picnic table where they were all setting up the food. I moved over to Kitty who was sat by herself, pouring a drink into her solo cup.

“Kitty?” Sitting down next to her, I placed my hands on the table. “Fancy a chat?”

“No.” She lifted the cup to her mouth, not even bothering to look at me.

Taking a deep breath, I turned, seeing all of them staring at us. They knew that this had been coming, it was only a matter of time and none of them were going to ask her what was up so it was left to me.

Tilting my head, telling them to give us some space, they did as I asked silently and walked away.

“Out with it.” I spun on the bench seat, lifting my leg over the one side.

“Out with what?”

“Whatever is making you cranky.” I shrugged.

“You wouldn’t understand,” she warned, her eyes full of sadness.

“Try me.”

Huffing out a breath, she took another gulp of her drink and placed it down on the table.

“It just bugs me how you’ve been accepted into Ty’s family, no questions asked. When I couldn’t even...” She hung her head, stopping herself.

Frowning, I stayed silent, knowing that she needed to get her thoughts together. I had a feeling this was about Charlie, the looks they gave each other, and the way she talked to him, spoke volumes.

“I know he has a past but he wouldn’t even let me tell anyone about us. Ty still doesn’t know,” she whispered the last part.

“Know about what?”

“Me and Charlie.”

“Okay....”

“We were an item, well...” She chuckled. “As much of an item as you can be when he won’t even admit that he’s slept with you.”

“Wait,” I held up my hand, trying to get the full picture. “You and Charlie were an item and no one knows?”

“Got it in one.” She held her drink up, draining the last bit and refilling her cup. “Nine months, we went back and forth, and not once did he introduce me to his parents.”

Leaning back, I listened as she carried on telling me that they were exclusive and how it was fun at first, but when it came to going public, he ended things with no explanation as to why.

“And you come along,” she continued. “Getting accepted straight away while they still don’t know about me and Charlie.”

“Here’s what I think.” I raised my brows, making sure that I had her attention before I

ried on. “If he won’t shout it from the rooftops that you’re together then he’s not the right one for you.”

“I suppose.” She shrugged.

“No suppose, Kitty. You’re fantastic and a real catch.”

“A real catch?” She snorted. “What are we, living in the sixties?”

“Hey!” I giggled. “I don’t know what the right word is.” Rolling my eyes, I couldn’t stop the smile from spreading on my face from seeing her laugh again.

It was a sound that we’d all missed and I wish I would have spoken to her sooner about what was going on.

Watching Kay walk around in that dress all day nearly killed me. All I wanted to do was lift it up and take her here and now. But that would have been really inappropriate in front of all the guys, including Eli and Monty. So instead, I had to watch her walk around all day, her ass swaying from side to side and not able to do a thing about it.

We'd spent all afternoon laughing and running around on all the equipment. We'd barbecued loads of food and sat talking about when we were kids. Which then brought up the tree-house, I promised Eli that we'd get a start on it next weekend.

Once the sun started to go down, Eli sat on Kay's lap and rested his head on her shoulder and promptly fell asleep.

After squirming around for a good ten minutes, trying to get comfortable, she finally said, "I'm gonna head back home and put Eli to bed."

She shuffled on the bench, trying to get up. "Here." I pulled Eli out of her arms and settled his head onto my shoulder in the same way that he had been on Kay.

"I-" she started, but shook her head, thinking better of it. She was slowly getting used to accepting help.

"We're off, guys," I said and was met with a chorus of bye's.

Kay called Monty over and we made our way back through the woods to the house with Monty leading the way.



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Eli didn't stir once all the way home and when I lay him in his bed, with Monty settling on the floor next to him, he just rolled over and carried on sleeping.

I watched him for a couple of minutes while I leaned against the door frame. I never thought I'd ever have this, a family. Not the kind of family that I had built around me with my friends, but this kind. A partner, a child and even a dog. I'd be lost without them, and just watching Eli now, I couldn't imagine not seeing him every day.

The sound of cupboards opening and closing had me moving away from his room and closing the door half way. I jogged down the stairs and walked into the kitchen, stopping dead in my tracks at what I was seeing.

Leaning over the kitchen table, she wiped away all the mess, her dress rising up. My eyes zoned in on her ass and I moved forward, catching her before she stood up.

"Ty," she said breathlessly when I placed one hand on her ass.

"Shh, sweetheart." I pulled her dress up with my other hand, skimming across her soft silky skin.

"Hmmm?" I traced the outline of her pussy, feeling the wetness that was already there. Just waiting for me.

"I..." she murmured, followed by a moan.

"Your so wet," I whispered. I pulled her up off the table and lifted the dress over her head in one fluid motion. "Fuck." I stepped back, taking in the sight of her in nothing

but a skimpy pair of lace panties.

“What?” she said, her arms dangling by her side, but the smirk on her face told me that she knew what she was doing.

That was another thing that had happened lately. She’d stopped being so shy about her body and would let me see everything. Something that she never would have done a couple of months ago.

She had become so confident, not only in herself but her body as well.

Her eyes flicked down to my growing erection and her tongue swiped across her lips. I couldn’t contain myself any longer and raced forward, lifting her up onto the table and slamming my lips down onto hers.

My hands wandered all over her body, her curves and her tight ass. She moaned when I brought my hand up her side and rubbed my thumb over her nipple. I lowered my head and took it into my mouth, licking and sucking until she was squirming.

“You like that?” I lifted my eyes to hers, not moving my mouth from her nipple.

“Yes...” She tilted her head back, her hips thrusting forward.

Pulling my t-shirt over my head, I threw it across the kitchen and undid my belt, giving my erection some much needed relief.

“Let me,” she said when I tried to pull my zip down.

Pushing off the table, she lowered down to the floor and started to pull my zip down.

“Sweetheart, you don’t have to do this.” I knew what Max had made her do and I

didn't want her to think that she had to ever do that to me.

"I want to." She looked up at me through her lashes, her hands pulling my jeans down. My erection sprang free and she leaned forward, licking the bead of pre-cum off the end.

Moaning, I threw my head back while trying to stop my hands from weaving into her hair. I knew this was about control for her, doing it on her terms. So I resisted the urge to grab hold of her head.

Her tongue licked me from base to tip before her mouth closed over the head and sucked. Lowering further down, she moaned, the vibrations sending tingles through me.

"Shit." I looked down, watching her. Damn, it was one of the best sights I'd ever seen.

Her head bobbed forwards and backwards as she went faster, her tongue flattening on the underside. She was mesmerizing to watch, a sight that I wouldn't be able to get out of my head for a long time.

Not able to take it anymore, I lifted her up onto the table, ripping her panties off and slamming home.

I groaned as her pussy clenched down, it was the sweetest sensation when I was inside her. She dug her nails into my back and held on tight as I fucked her. This wasn't a slow, gentle, night of lovemaking.

No. This was a pure, hard, dirty fuck.

Lowering my hand between us, I rubbed her clit, not willing to get off until she had

and knowing from the tingle in my spine that I wouldn't last much longer.

"I'm close," she moaned.

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Taking her nipple into my mouth again, I sucked hard.

Her pussy clamped down, squeezing me as she screamed my name, her back straightened and I thrust once more before my own orgasm ripped through me.

Groaning, I threw my head back as I shot my load inside of her.

I'd never be able to get enough.

I had the biggest smile on my face Monday morning. We'd had a fantastic weekend; it was just what we had all needed. Kitty seemed to be in a better place after we'd had that talk and she seemed to be back to her normal self.

Me, Ty, Eli and Monty had spent yesterday visiting Ty's ma and dad, then we went out for a meal. Finishing the day off with a movie marathon and a popcorn fight.

"Mama? Can I go to Uncle Luke's tonight?" Eli asked as I strapped him in his seat.

We were running a little late because we'd all woke up late, even Ty, which was saying something, he never woke up late. He was still rushing around inside, feeding Monty and getting ready himself.

"I'll ask Uncle Luke when I come back," I answered, stepping back and shutting the door.

Walking around to the driver's side, I spotted Monty sat at the top of the stairs. He always did this, although most days he tried to get in the truck, but he was slowly

learning that he couldn't come everywhere with us.

I'd taken him to the preschool one day and he barked so loud and fierce at a passing parent and her daughter that I was asked not to bring him again.

It was fine by me. That little girl had sobbed so hard, I felt bad about it and since that day, I hadn't bought him with me.

"I'm meeting Miss Maggie in town when I've dropped Eli off," I said to Ty as he came through the front door and down the steps.

"Okay, sweetheart." Wrapping his arms around me, he stared into my eyes and moved forward, his lips touching mine in a sweet, gentle kiss. "I'll see you later."

"See you later," I whispered and pulled back.

Jumping into the car, I drove out of the compound and made my way to the preschool. Eli Chatting away constantly about what he planned to do with Luke when he came home. Those two when they were together, were a pair of kids, although I loved seeing Luke like that. He was always so serious and broody, but when it came to Eli, he was a different person, gentle, kind, and would laugh until the cows came home.

Pulling up outside the preschool, I parked up and jumped out. We were right on time; I was relieved that we'd made it. I knew that Miss Maggie would be waiting for me in town and I didn't want to make her wait any longer than she had to.

It was the only way that I could see her because I wouldn't go back to that apartment block and her coming to the compound all the time just wasn't feasible. It was too far for her to travel on her own, and the guys couldn't always go and get her. So we'd come up with this arrangement.

Helping Eli down, he placed his hand in mine and I walked him inside.

“You picking me up, mama?” He took his bag from me and turned to face me.

“Yeah, sweetie.” Crouching down, I pulled him in for a big hug and kissed him on the cheek. “Love you, have a good day.”

“Love you too, mama.” He pulled back and ran to the door that Miss Cooper was holding open.

I stood and watched for several seconds, able to see him hang his coat and bag on his peg. I waved when he turned around and saw me, his little hand stretching up into the air as he waved back.

Smiling at the young girl who manned the desk, I spun around and walked back to the truck, pulling my phone out when it vibrated. I frowned at the screen, not recognizing the number.

“Hello?” I answered.

Nothing.

“Hello?” I said a second time, huffing out a breath. Just as I was about to put the phone down, I heard it.

“Guess who?” His voice sent shivers down my spine. I hadn’t forgot what his voice was like but hearing it now bought so many memories flooding back that I had to lean my forehead against the car window to catch my breath. “Not gonna talk, baby?”

“W...w...what are y...you calling me f...for?”

“Just thought I’d give you a heads up.” I could almost hear the smirk that he was sure to be weari



ng.

“A heads u...up?”

“Yeah, thought you’d like to know that we’ll be seeing each other, very soon.”

Pulling my head off the car window, I scrambled to open the door. My hands shaking so hard that I couldn’t get the key to go in and I managed to drop them on the ground.

Bending down to pick them up, a boot came into my line of sight. My heart thumped harder, the blood pumping in my ears so loud that I couldn’t hear a thing.

Jumping up, I tried to move away but crashed into a hard body, stepping back and turning around, I was met with those evil green eyes.

“Told you I’d be coming for you,” he sneered, right before everything turned black.

Me and Monty watched Kay drive off the compound and I was feeling good about everything. Things were going smoothly with everyone, especially since Kay had talked with Kitty.

Once the gates closed behind her, I jogged down the steps and whistled for Monty to follow me. He whined like he did every time they went out. Until Kay was back, he’d be sat by the door, watching and waiting for her to walk back through it anyway.

I heard him follow me to the warehouse and sure enough, just like always, he sat straight by the door when we were inside. I went into my office to try and catch up on

some paperwork, although I didn't know how much I should do because Kay would most probably re-do it all.

It had been crazy these last few weeks and this weekend was just what we all needed. Spending time with Kay and Eli, as a family, was something that I never thought would happen.

Eli may not have been my son by blood, but by all other counts he was. With him not having a great start, I wanted to give him the best possible life that I could. I knew that Kay had done everything that she could, and that she'd tried to shield him from as much as possible, but now it was time for me to step in and be the father figure that he needed. To be honest, I was looking forward to it. I didn't want to replace his father, although that wouldn't be a bad thing.

Even though Kay had tried to shield him from everything, he'd been well aware of what had been going on. When he'd wanted to learn how to box, I'd had a good talk with him and asked him why he wanted to learn. I knew that it was a big decision, especially with Kay's past. I'd never expected him to say what he had.

"I want to protect mama," he had said. I'd tried to swallow past the lump in my throat, to explain that he didn't need to learn how to box to protect his mama. In the end, we'd decided that it would be good for him to learn, I still hadn't told Kay what he had said and I didn't think I ever would.

Was it wrong for me to keep it from her? Probably.

But if I told her, all she would do was worry about it and she didn't need to. It was over now and there was nothing she could do to change the past. All she could do was make the future a better one and with my help, I'd make damn sure that it was one hundred times better.

“Mornin’ boss,” Evan sang as he walked into the office.

“Mornin’.” I nodded.

Shuffling through all the paperwork, I put them all into a pile for Kay. There really wasn’t any point in trying to sort through it because I knew that it would just mess up the whole system that she had, and it would just cause more work for her.

Our time in the office had become less and less, I really should probably try and find someone to work in just the office. Kay was more suited to working on surveillance jobs anyway. I wondered sometimes what we did before her. She had this way of looking at situations; she was able to step back from them and look at it from all angles and that was what was needed in this job.

“What’s today’s plan?” Evan asked, jumping onto the couch and placing his arms behind his head.

“Might pop in to see Charlie.” I looked up at him as a huge grin spread across his face. “What’s that for?” I pointed.

“What’s what?” He looked around, his face full of confusion but I saw the blush rise up onto his cheeks.

“That grin.” I raised an eyebrow.

Shrugging his shoulders, he lifted up off the couch. “Think I might tag along.” He tried to make it sound casual but he was far from it.

“To see Charlie?” I tilted my head to the side, assessing him. Why would he be so happy to see Charlie? “Oh, shit,” I said, coming to a realization.

“What?” His eyes widened in panic.

“You like Charlie?” I chuckled. Damn, I didn’t have anything against same sex couples but Charlie did not swing that way.

“I mean, he’s okay, yeah.” He shrugged again.

“You know he doesn’t, you know, swing that way?”

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“Huh?” Evan looked at me, his face going pale as the blood drained from it. Holding his hands up in the air, he stepped back. “Jesus Fucking Christ! You think I like him, like him?”

Throwing my head back, I laughed so hard that I couldn’t stop, even when I had a pain in my side. “Fuck, that was funny.” Wiping the tears from my face, I looked back to Evan. “So? Tell me why?”

“Why, what?” he huffed, his hand going to his hip.

“Why you want to come with me to see Charlie?” I didn’t look away from him, he knew I could sit here all day and wait for him to answer me.

“Ugh!” He threw his hands up in the air and stomped to the door. “There’s a girl who works there that I like! Happy now?”

“Ooooooh! Evan’s got a crush?” I chuckled.

“Ugh!” he shouted, throwing his hands up in the air and stomped out of the office.

I couldn’t help but laugh again. It wasn’t often that he had a crush on anyone and when he did, I loved to play him up about it.

Shaking my head, I pushed out the chair, ready to go and see Charlie.

I’d spent most of the day at the precinct with Charlie, trying to go through some new leads that he’d had. We’d hit a major brick wall and neither of us were getting

anywhere. I'd told him that when I got back to the warehouse, me and the team were going to go back to the drawing board and look at some different angles.

On the way back to the warehouse, it dawned on me that I was coming home to my family, something that I thought I'd be doing with Serena but that opportunity was snatched out of my hands before I'd even fully thought it through.

Shaking those thoughts from my head, I pushed the button for the compound gates, drove through and parked in my usual spot. Noticing Kay's truck missing, I didn't think anything of it and went into the warehouse.

"How did it go?" Kitty asked as soon as I walked in.

"He's got some new leads that he's checking out, but we need to think outside the box." I sat down and looked around me.

I'd built a good life here. When I bought this piece of land, I never thought I would have achieved what I have.

After getting out the special forces, I didn't know what I would do. Buying this piece of land was a spur of the moment thing, having just walked out on Serena. As soon as I saw the for sale sign, something in my gut told me I had to buy it. It symbolized having that freedom from Serena so I bought it. Right there, on the spot.

The only thing that I was sure about was building my house, I knew exactly what I wanted; a house that I could grow old in and raise a family, so that's just what I did. I spent months building the house from scratch and when Luke left the forces, he helped me finish it off.

Having nowhere to go, I offered him a plot of land towards the back of the property so we spent the next six months building his house.

The only thing left that I didn't know what to do with was the small cottage by Luke's house. I was originally going to knock it down but when Kitty fell in love with it, it made sense to let her stay there.

That's how our team started, with Evan coming along a couple of months later. The rest is history and we'd been solving cases for the last couple of years. Which was probably why this one was so frustrating. We had a fast turnaround time but this one had stumped us.

The

worst part was that it was one of the most important cases that we'd ever been asked to help with.

"Where's Kay?" Evan asked, slumping down in his seat at the table.

"Should be here any second," I replied, looking down at my watch, then over to Monty. I'd know as soon as she was close because he'd go crazy for her. Normally, she'd only just be coming onto the compound and he'd be barking to be let out, then he'd run at her and nearly knock her over every single time.

This was the most I had been apart from her since she had moved into the compound. I didn't want to bother her today though because she was spending time with Miss Maggie, something that she wasn't able to do often.

Just as I was about to tell them what leads Charlie had, my cell rang.

Pulling it out, I frowned down at the screen. "Hello?"

"Hi, is that erm...Mr Mackenzie?" My heart sped up, my gut telling me that something wasn't right.

“Yeah.” I pushed my chair back and stood up, my body knowing automatically that I needed to leave.

“Erm... Eli still hasn’t been collected from preschool yet and we can’t seem to get in contact Miss Anderson.” I gripped my keys hard, causing them to dig into the palm of my hand and walked to the door. “Your down as the next contact, would you be able to pick him up?”



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“On my way,” I grunted down the line, and shoved my cell back into my pocket.

“What’s happened?” Kitty asked, following me outside with Evan right on her tail.

“Fuck!” I shouted, closing my eyes and taking a deep breath. “Monty!” He came running to me and I could tell that he knew something had happened. He was on high alert as well.

“Kay hasn’t picked Eli up.”

“She may be with Miss Maggie,” Evan said. I desperately wanted to believe that she was but my gut told me that she wasn’t, she’d never miss picking Eli up on time.

Kitty pulled her phone out and held it to her ear, frowning down at it. “It says her cell’s no longer in service.”

“Get on the computers, I want her tracked. Let me know if anything comes up,” I said to Evan. “And Kitty, you come with me.”

“Right behind you,” Kitty replied and jogged to the truck.

Opening my door, I let Monty jump in first and flew out of the compound.

Pressing the buttons on the steering wheel, I dialed Luke’s number, listening as it rang out.

“Yeah?” he answered.

“Preschool, meet us there.”

“What? What’s happened?”

“Kay hasn’t picked Eli up and her phone is out of service.”

I didn’t need to say anymore; he knew what that meant. I didn’t have the time to explain it anyway, I needed to get there as soon as I could and being distracted by talking to him, wouldn’t allow me to get there as fast as I could.

We both knew what I wasn’t willing to say because there was no way I would say Kay’s name and that one word in the same sentence.

Kidnapped.

I groaned at the thumping in my head when I started to wake up. I tried to move but my head hurt even more when I did so I stayed still.

Keeping quiet, trying to assess myself and my surroundings without drawing attention, I concentrated on what I could feel. Almost all of my clothes had been stripped, being left with just my panties and bra. My skin scratched against the cold, rough surface, making me wince.

My ears perked up, telling me that I wasn’t alone. I listened for several seconds, making sure that I wasn’t in immediate danger, and then cracked one eye open. I let my eyes adjust to the dim light in the small space and tried to make out where I was.

The walls and floor were all concrete and from what I could make out in the low light, there was a tiny window and a door.

“Hello?” I whispered. Not knowing if I was talking to an empty room or if someone

was here with me.

“Hi,” a small voice answered me back.

Sitting up slowly, using the wall to help keep me up, I opened both eyes and brought my knees to my chest.

I knew that Max would come after me at some stage, no matter how many times everyone tried to tell me that I was safe and he wouldn't get to me. I always knew deep down, that it was only a matter of time before he caught up with me.

Although, I never imagined that it would be like this, he always liked to do it in private where no one else could see but I guess that he didn't care now that everyone knew what he had done to me.

That made it so much worse, he was unpredictable to a whole other extreme. At least before, I had some idea of what would set him off but now I didn't have a clue.

After a few minutes of my eyes adjusting to the dim light, I noticed two girls huddled together on the far side of the room. No clothes, just underwear, the same as me.

Where the hell was I?

“You should move from there,” the girl who had answered me said.

“Huh?” I frowned, looking around.

“You’re right by the door, you want to be as far away from the door as possible,” she said with an awareness that scared me. This was someone who knew what happened here. It also meant that I could find out what was going on and try to find a way out.

I wouldn’t let Max do this to me. I wasn’t the same woman that he’d tried to control and put down for all of those years. I was strong now and I’d show him just how strong I was when he showed his face.

Leaning on my hands and knees, too weak to stand, I shuffled forward with the concrete floor scratching against my knees.

“Where are we?” I asked when I was closer to them.

“Hell,” she answered.

Leaning against the wall next to them, I couldn’t see the one girl’s face as it was buried in her knees but the other girl’s face, the one who was talking, I recognized.

“Lindsey?” I gasped. She looked just like her, apart from the black eye and dried blood on her lip.

“Y...Yeah,” she stammered. I’d caught her off guard and for the first time, she showed some weakness. It was clear that she was putting on a front and trying to be strong, I suspected for the other girl, who still had her head buried in her knees.

A small smile spread across my face. We knew where she was now and even though we were stuck in here at the moment, I'd be able to get us out. That, I was sure of.

What I couldn't understand was why Max had brought me here. If Lindsey had been taken by Daley, did that mean that Max was working with him?

"We've been looking for you," I told Lindsey.

"You have?"

"Yeah, your parents-" She snorted, cutting me off and leaned forward.

"My parents put me here," she gritted out.

"Josh was right then." I nodded, knowing that she'd want to hear his name. I'd love nothing more than to hear Ty's name. For someone to talk about him. I knew she'd been here a couple of weeks at least and I hated to think what had been happening to her in that time.

"You spoke to Josh?" she asked, her eyes wide.

"Let's start this properly," I said leaning forward and extending my hand. "I'm Kay and I'm part of a team that has been trying to find you."

"Team?" she asked, shaking my hand. "You're a cop?"

"No." I shook my head and pulled my hand back. "Security company."

"And you met Josh?"

"I sure did." I smiled, glad that my mind was off whatever was going on here. "He

told us all about your parents and how you've been living with him. He's been looking for you."

"I knew he would." She nodded, a small smile spreading on her face. "He hasn't got into any trouble though, has he?"

"No." I chuckled. "He's been quite clever actually, watching and waiting. You've got a good one there."

"Yeah." She sighed wistfully. "I really do."

I smiled at the look on her face, her eyes glazing over as she was remembering things.

Then we heard the sound of boots on the floor coming closer and the rattle of keys as they were put in the lock. My stomach took a nose dive and the whole atmosphere around us changed.

"Quick," Lindsey whispered, waving me closer. "Huddle up."

I scrambled closer and sat next to the girl who still hadn't looked up. Her hand came out and clutched onto mine and then she brought her head up.

Her blue eyes so light that they were almost see through. They made me think of Luke and that made me even more determined to get out of this place. I needed a plan.

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We all listened at the click of the lock being turned, echoing off the walls.

Taking a deep breath, I tried to prepare myself for whatever was about to happen. But truthfully, I didn't have a clue what would transpire from here. I just hoped that I could find a way out, and quick.

I spotted Kay's car as soon as I pulled into the lot. Parking a couple of spaces down, I jumped out of my truck and jogged towards her car, looking all around it for any signs of anything to give me an idea of what happened.

"Boss? Anything?" Luke said from behind me.

I didn't answer him, instead I lowered down on the ground and looked under the car. Stretching my hand out, I felt for anything I couldn't see, I felt a bunch of keys and dragged them out. My heart pumped faster as I felt the teddy bear keyring that she kept on there, instinctively knowing that they were Kay's before I even saw them.

"Boss?" Kitty asked. I could feel them all around me now, waiting for me to answer. I clutched the keys tighter and squeezed my eyes closed, not wanting to admit to myself what I already knew.

I counted to three before I lifted up off the ground and opened my eyes, looking down at my hand. "They're Kay's," I said on an exhale. This wasn't good, this was really, really bad.

"Shit," Kitty said under her breath.

I stared at them in shock, this had really happened. She'd been taken away from me and there was only one person that would have don

e this. I felt sick, knowing that he must have been watching her and I had no idea that she was in so much danger. I hadn't protected her.

"Kitty?" I looked up at her and threw her the keys. "Take Kay's car home."

She nodded and jumped straight into the car as I looked away, not being able to see her drive it without Kay being behind the wheel. I'd watched Kay drive off the compound in it this morning and now I hadn't got a clue where she was.

My mind was swirling with thoughts, where did I go from here? How would I tell Eli?

Putting my hands on my head, I looked off into the distance, needing to get my head together before I went inside the preschool.

"Okay, this is what we're gonna do," I turned to Luke. "Call Charlie and then go somewhere so Eli can't see you. I'll get him and tell him...fuck! I don't know."

"Boss-

Holding up my hand, not wanting to hear anything from him, I continued. "Come back and get the footage. I'll meet you back at the warehouse when Eli is in bed."

"Got it." Luke nodded but stood there, his mouth opening and closing before thinking better of it and walking away. I didn't need to know what he thought, all I wanted was for him to do as I'd told him to.

Scrubbing my hands down my face, I walked to the preschool door and took in a deep



breath. I needed to make sure Eli didn't know about any of this, how I was going to do that, I had no idea. I had to try and act normal while on the inside I was falling apart.

Eli was sat in the reception area with Miss Cooper when I opened the door. Putting a smile on my face, I rolled my shoulders back and walked over to him.

"Hey, bud," I said, crouching down. "Sorry that I'm late."

"I thought mama was picking me up," he said, shuffling down off of his seat.

Looking up at Miss Cooper, I could tell that she knew something had happened. I nodded subtly and looked back at Eli, trying to think of something on the spot.

"She was gonna, bud, but she got caught up with Miss Maggie."

"Oh." He scanned my face, his green eyes looking for something. I tried my hardest to keep the worry that I was feeling off my face but I hadn't got a clue if I managed it or not.

"Can we get a burger?"

"Sure." I smiled and held my hand out to him as I picked up his bag off the chair, his small hand gripping mine while he waved bye to Miss Cooper.

She opened her mouth to say something but I cut her off. "Give it five minutes," I said, trying to convey with my eyes what I couldn't say aloud.

I wouldn't talk about this in front of Eli, as far as he would be aware, Kay was fine. I was determined to make sure he didn't know because he didn't need to deal with any of this. He needed to keep being a kid and things like this wouldn't allow him to do

that.

“Okay,” she whispered back.

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Nodding, we walked out and back to my truck as I asked Eli what he'd done today.

We made a pit stop for burgers and ate them inside, I didn't want to take him back to the compound until I had to. It would just be a reminder that she wasn't there. I was having a hard enough time just keeping it from Eli as it was.

I needed help so on the way home, I decided that I'd call ma and get her to come over. I couldn't deal with all of this on my own. She'd know what to do, not that I didn't want to spend time with Eli, I just needed to concentrate on finding Kay.

Once we were back at the compound, I let Monty out into the back yard and he ran around playing with Eli, keeping him occupied. Pulling my cell out, I dialed Ma's number.

"Hello?" she answered.

"Ma?" I couldn't stop my voice from cracking.

"Tyson? What's happened?"

"Kay," I whispered, watching Eli laugh as Monty tagged him with his paw. "She's been taken."

"We're on our way, son." I nodded, even though she couldn't see, and I swallowed past the lump in my throat and pressed the end call button. I had to keep it together, for Eli.

Taking a deep breath, I pulled my shoulders back and walked out into the yard. If I didn't attempt to keep things as normal as I could, Eli would know for sure that something was up. Although, just with Kay not being here, it made it different. She was always home, baking, cooking or playing with Eli and Monty.

I got so caught up in the memories, that I didn't notice Eli running to me. "When is mama coming home?" he gasped, out of breath.

"Soon bud. Nana E will be here in a minute though." He'd taken to calling her that, at ma's insistence of course. They'd fallen in love with him, just like we all had.

"And Pop?" He grinned, jumping up and down.

"Yeah." I smiled. "And pop."

My heart thumped harder as the door squeaked open and I watched as a pair of boots stepped into the room. My eyes ran up his legs, his torso, and up to his face. Max stood there with an evil smirk on his face and I couldn't stop the gasp that came out of my mouth as I looked into his eyes. I'd never seen them look so dead and so lifeless.

I desperately wanted to look away but I wouldn't, I wasn't going to give him that satisfaction. That's what he wanted and there was no way that I'd be giving him what he wanted anymore.

"Come here," he said, his voice low and raw.

Not moving an inch, I kept my eyes firmly planted on him. I wouldn't willingly go to him, he'd have to drag me kicking and screaming. I wasn't the meek person that I used to be.

“Now!” he roared. His face turning red, that vein that always pulsed when he was angry started to throb. I smiled, seemed like he still had a short fuse, that hadn’t changed. His temper would always get the better of him.

He stomped forward, grabbing onto my hair and pulling me up. I bit my lip to stop myself from crying out, I wouldn’t allow him to hear the pain that he was causing, that’s what he wanted, it’s what he had always wanted.

I scrambled to land on the bottom of my feet but the concrete scraped against the top of them as he dragged me up. Bringing me into the middle of the floor, he turned me so that we were facing the girls and I shivered as his chest touched my back.

“I’m gonna teach you a lesson. Every. Single. Fuckin’. Day,” he growled down my ear.

I stared at the girls, seeing the fear in their eyes as they watched us. They knew him, I could tell that much.

His fist to my ribs took me by surprise and I gasped, and then moaned in pain as I tried to get my breath back.

“Ahhh! That’s it! I’ve fuckin’ missed that sound.” I felt his nose touch my neck and I heard the inhale as he sniffed me. I was off balance, and when he let me go with a push, I went tumbling to the floor. Curling up into a ball, I looked him square in the eyes.

“I hate you,” I whispered.

He stepped closer, each footstep echoing throughout the small room. “What did you say?” His voice was low and calm.

Gulping, I lifted my head and squinted my eyes at him. I wanted him to see how much I meant this.

“I. Hate. You.”

His nostrils flared and his hand clenched into fists, this time I was prepared. His fist came down onto my ribs again and he pushed me over onto my back. Pressing his boot into my stomach so that I couldn't curl up into a ball again.

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“You may hate me,” he said, crouching down, his boot digging into me which made it hard to breathe. “But you’ll always be mine. I made sure to mark you so that no one will ever want you again,” he taunted, running his finger down the scar on my thigh.

Shivering, I pulled away, not caring that the floor scraped the skin off my back. I wanted to get away from him.

Smirking, I lifted my brows “You sure about that?” I couldn’t help but taunt him back.

He tilted his head to the side, his brows pulling down into a frown. He lifted up, his boot pushing into my stomach before he moved it off me completely. Sitting up while he was distracted, I took the time to catch my

breath and shuffled back against the wall.

My eyes moved over to the girls, their faces pale from what they were seeing.

“You fuck him?” he ground out, moving closer so that his body was towering over me.

What was I doing? Why was I winding him up? I needed to stop, I could see how much it was affecting him. His face had started to go red and that vein was pulsing like crazy.

“Yeah.” I smirked and pulled my shoulders back. “And damn... it was good.” I could hear each breath that he was taking, his chest rising and falling faster with each one. I

was getting to him. Good, I wasn't going to lay down and take his shit anymore.

My stomach rolled at each second that ticked by, waiting and watching for his next move. I needed him to snap, if he did, then I could get away. Or at least try to get away. There was three of us and one of him, we had the advantage. If he was distracted enough maybe they could get away and get some help.

It never came though, instead, he threw his head back and laughed. "She said you'd do this." He shook his finger at me and stepped back. "She said you'd lie to get a reaction out of me."

I frowned at him. She?

He stepped back, nodding his head to himself. "I'm gonna pace myself this time." Chuckling, he continued to back out of the room and pulled the door closed, shouting through it, "I'll break you even if it's the last thing that I do."

Staring at the door long after he'd gone, I tried to wrap my head around what had happened. Why had he stopped? He never stopped.

"What are you doing? You don't want to mess with him," Lindsey said, helping me back over to them.

"Trust me," I said, sitting down and holding my ribs. "I know him better than anyone."

"You do?" The other girl gasped.

"Yeah, I'd like to think so, I was with him for five years and we have a son together."

"You have a son with him?" Lindsey asked, her hand flying to her chest.



“Yeah.” I leaned the back of my head on the wall, and took a deep breath. It had been so long since I’d been hurt like this, that I’d almost forgotten what it felt like. “I’ll fill you in. All we’ve got is time in here, right?”

Turning my head to them, I tried to see what injuries they had. Apart from the black eye and split lip, Lindsey looked okay. But the other girl was untouched.

I wondered how long she’d been here and how long she’d stay that way.

Ma turned up in record time and said that she’d watch Eli while I went back over to the warehouse. I went and said goodnight to Eli, knowing that I wouldn’t be back before he went to bed.

When I walked out of the house, the compound was full of cars; which meant everyone was here. I stood next to the door when I was inside and watched as they all ran around, looking at different things and working through paper work. Charlie and his men were in there too, setting up an investigation point.

I still couldn’t believe this had happened and seeing the warehouse like this, made it all the more real. I suppose in my head, I believed what I had said to Eli. That she’d be back later.

“Ty!” Charlie called out to me. I looked over at him, not really seeing him. All conversations stopped as they turned to me. They were all waiting for me to say something, this was where I was meant to tell them what to do, what avenue to go down. It was what I normally did.

I shook my head, trying to get my thoughts together.

“Have you checked her tracker again?” I asked Evan.

“Yeah, it’s a no go. Still says she’s at the preschool.” I’d had that tracker put on her for a reason, that was my one fail safe and it hadn’t worked.

Nodding, I tried to take in what he said. “Footage?” I asked Kitty.

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“Can’t see her being taken but there’s two men who walk past. One of them is Max.” She grimaced, her nose scrunching up with mentioning his name.

I walked over to where she was stood next to Evan, she hit the rewind button and played the footage again.

Two men walked past the camera, neither of their faces were in the frame, but just before they went out of the frame completely, one of them turned and looked straight at the camera and winked.

Max. I knew it was that fuck-face. When I got my hands on him, I wouldn’t be held responsible for what I did to him.

I knew it was him before I’d even watched the footage.

“Go back,” I barked, watching it a second and third time as I tried to place the other man. I’d seen him before but I couldn’t think where from.

“Isn’t that one of Daley’s men?” Luke asked from behind me.

“I think it is,” Kitty answered. Going back and watching it again.

“What the fuck does this mean?” I looked down at the floor, trying to figure it all out. Did this mean that Max was working with Daley?

Was Kay with the girls that had been taken? We all had our suspicions about what was happening to those girls and the thought of Kay going through all that, sent me

into a tailspin.

My mind was spinning and I couldn't get under control. All I wanted was to get hold of Max and show him what it was like to be met with his match.

I had to stop thinking like this, I needed to put all my efforts into finding Kay and not imagine what I would do to that bastard.

"So we have no location but we know who took her," I said to no one in particular. "Evan, hack into all the cameras around that area, I want to know where they went."

I walked away from them and over to Charlie, with Luke at my back.

"How's Eli?" he asked as we walked across the warehouse.

"Good. Ma's over there now. She's gonna put him to bed."

"Good." He nodded. "We need to keep this from him."

Spinning around, I clenched my fists. "I fucking know," I ground out.

"Whoa, boss, I was just saying."

"Yeah, well don't." My nostrils flared. "You don't need to tell me how to deal with this, he's my son."

Luke raised a brow at me, opening his mouth to say something but I walked away before he could.

Shit. What had I just said? Eli, my son?

It may have been wrong to some people but he really was my son, and after this, I'd make sure that everybody knew it. He'd never have to deal with his pathetic excuse for a father again.

Stomping over to Charlie, I went to see what he had found. "Anything?" I barked.

"No." He shook his head, looking down at a map.

"Fuck!" I shouted, just as the metal door opened.

I stared and waited to see who was coming in to disturb us. "Dad?" I frowned. What was he doing over here?

"Someone here to see you, son." He pushed the door open, his face telling me that whoever it was, it wasn't someone that I wanted to see.

"What's up!" he shouted, swaggering through the door, his huge bag slung over his shoulder.

"Corey?"

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“Hey!” he shouted, dumping his bag on the floor and coming over to me. He hugged me, slapping me on the back several times before letting go. “Where’s my lil’ sis?” He smiled, looking around.

“Erm...” I swallowed.

He frowned, looking around at all of us. Noticing how many people were here, he frowned. “Ty? What the hell is going on?”

“Kay was...” I took a deep breath, the words not willing to come out of my mouth. “She’s been taken.”

“Taken?” His hands clenched into fists as he stepped back. “You better fill me in Ty. Right fucking now.”

We’d been up all night, looking at everything and anything that we could find but we hadn’t gotten any further. The board was full of possible places that she could be and slowly each one was being crossed off, after it had been checked out and nothing found. We were now down to two places and I knew in my gut that she wasn’t at either one of them.

“Time to go and meet my nephew,” Corey said on an exhale. He was used to this, staying up at all hours, but you could see that not knowing where his sister was, was killing him.

I knew exactly how he felt. I couldn’t bare not knowing where she was, and as soon as that thought would hit me, all I could imagine was what was happening to her.

Images of what that fucker was doing to her sped through my mind. I wish I could erase them because I was imagining the worst.

“Yeah.” I scrubbed my face, trying to prepare myself to see Eli. I hadn’t seen him since I said goodnight the night before. I dreaded to think what he would think this morning when he woke up and Kay still wasn’t there.

Although, secretly, I hoped that Corey being here would occupy his mind enough to not ask where Kay was.

Corey slung his bag over his shoulder and followed me over to the house. He stayed one pace behind me, and when I got to the bottom of the steps, I turned and saw how he was hesitating.

Frowning, I asked. “What’s up?”

His eyes were fixated on the door and his face had gone an unusual ashen color. If I didn’t know better, I would have said he was about to throw up.

“Shit, man.” He looked all around him and then back to me. “I haven’t seen him since he was a baby. What if he doesn’t recognize me?”

I chuckled at how much he was panicking. Corey was one of the most confident guys I’d ever known yet he was worried that Eli wouldn’t recognize him?

Kay would know just what to say to him so that he didn’t freak out.

And with that thought, my stomach rolled again, I was spending one hour back at the house and then I was getting back to it.

I shook my head and focused back on Corey, even though it pained me to look at

him. Him and Kay were so different but so alike in so many ways.

“Come on,” I slapped him on the back, the force knocking him off balance. “He’ll know you. He’s spoken to you enough on video calls. I mean, who can forget that ugly face?”

“What the-”

Before he could finish what he was saying, the front door swooshed open and we were met with Eli, hands on his hips, and a stare to rival his mothers.

“Uncle Corey? Why are you standing outside?” Shaking his head, he stepped backed and sh

outed, “Nana E, my Uncle Corey is here. We’ll have to play hide and seek later.”

Looking back to us, he rolled his eyes and whispered. “She keeps making me play games.” I chuckled, knowing just what that was like.

“Yeah?” I asked, ruffling his hair as I stepped inside.

“I don’t wanna play girlie games, I wanna play superheroes.” He snorted.

I chuckled, then turned my attention to Corey who was stood there staring at Eli like he had two heads.

“Corey?”

“I...err...” he stammered.

Eli huffed and turned to me. “What’s the matter with him?” he asked, hooking his



thumb over his shoulder.

“I think he’s scared,” I smiled.

“Come on, Uncle Corey.” He held his hand out to him. “You don’t need to be scared. She won’t make you play the games. Let’s go play in my room,” he said, his eyes looking behind me and widening as the kitchen door swung open. “Quick! Before she makes me play those games again!”

He dragged him through the door and up the stairs, talking the whole way. I stood and watched them, wishing that Kay could see this. This was something that I knew she had been looking forward to and she was missing out on it because of that scumbag.

“Son?” Dad said from beside me. “Made any progress?”

“No.” I walked away from him, the smell coming from the kitchen reminding me of Kay. Every time I came home, she always had something cooking or something in the oven being baked. It was a smell that I’d gotten so used to that it was too much to smell things like that while knowing that I wouldn’t be able to walk into the kitchen and put my arms around Kay.

Everywhere I looked in this house, it reminded me of her. The table that she sat at, or the corner of the sofa, her favorite place to sit. Even her favorite painting that she would stare at for hours. It was just too much.

I walked straight through the kitchen and out the sliding doors, ignoring my ma and dad, their pleas for me to come back, falling on deaf ears. I couldn’t go back there. Without her there, that house was just a shell. Kay made it a home.

My feet took me through the woods and up to the clearing. Kay came up here all the time, she said it helped clear her mind.

There was so much that I wanted to say to Kay, so much that I should have already said to her. It was times like this that I realized I hadn't even told her that I loved her. I did. I loved her more than anything in the world.

Why hadn't I shouted that from the roof tops?

I should have told her as soon as I knew that's how I felt but I was afraid that she didn't feel the same way or that it would be too much too soon.

I vowed that as soon as I had her back in my arms, I'd tell her exactly how I felt.

I wouldn't keep another thing from her, I'd tell her the good, the bad and the ugly.

Sitting down at the picnic table, I looked out into the trees. This was her favorite place, and although it still reminded me of her, I felt at peace here. She was right, it did help clear your mind and this was where I felt the closest to her without it being too much for me.

My thoughts turned to what I should have done to keep her safer. It was my fault that she was taken. I had all these security measures in place and the one person who meant the most to me, I hadn't been able to protect.

I'd put everything in place to keep her safe but that still hadn't been enough. I should have done better; I should have found Max sooner.

I should have done a lot of things differently but thinking like this wasn't getting me anywhere. Lifting up off the bench, I took one last look at the clearing.

The next time that I would be here, Kay would be stood by my side.

The days passed in slow motion. With only one window to tell when it was day or night, we counted the days and if my calculations were right, I'd been here four days.

My thoughts constantly drifted to Eli and Ty, I was trying to stay strong for them but it was so much harder than I originally thought and each day that passed became harder and harder.

Max had come in everyday, each time 'teaching me a lesson'. Both of my sides were covered in bruises now. He hadn't touched my face and each time I thought he was about to lose control, he'd pull back and leave.

He was getting good at controlling himself, something I thought he'd never be able to do.

I was in constant pain, just enough to make it hurt but not enough for me to pass out. I wished he would make me pass out but it was as if he knew that's what I wanted and deprived me of it.

Yesterday was the worst, after he'd taught me my lesson, another man came into the room and dragged Lindsey out. She'd kicked and screamed, fighting her way from their holds but it didn't matter what she did, she couldn't get away. Max had made sure that I couldn't get up to help her, he must have seen it in my eyes the moment he stepped in the room, knowing that I'd fight for her.

The other man knocked her out and she went limp in his arms and then he carried her out. They still hadn't brought her back and I was starting to get worried.

It was just me and Ava now. She'd leaned on me most of the night, her sobs the only sound in the room. I'd put my arm around her and tried my best to comfort her but it

was hard when it hurt every time I moved.

When the sun shone through the window, brightening the room, she seemed to perk up a little and even had a small smile on her face. She must have needed a good cry. I was a firm believer that a good cry every once in a while, was a good thing.

I was so bored, sat in this room with nothing to do and just waiting for Max to come back was driving me insane so I decided to try and get to know Ava a little more.

“How old are you, sweetie?” I asked, unable to stop the question before it came out of my mouth.

“Seventeen,” she whispered. She never talked above a whisper and I didn’t know if she physically couldn’t or if that was just how she chose to speak.

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Now that she was talking, I decided to try and find some things out about her. All I had found out so far was her name. Spending all of this time with someone, and being in the situation that we were in, meant that you connected on a different level.

“How did you get here?” I shifted a little, my butt becoming numb from sitting in the same position for too long. “Sorry.” I chuckled to relieve the tension. “You don’t have to answer that.”

She looked down at her feet, her hands holding onto her ankles. I didn’t expect her to answer so when she opened her mouth I was a little taken a back.

“Same as Lindsey,” she said, turning her face to me. “My dad sold me to cover his debts.”

Shaking my head, I couldn’t believe that parents would do that to their children. How could they send them off into the hands of these monsters knowing what they would be put through.

“I think I’m better off now that I’m not at home.” She lay her head on her knees, her face still turned towards me.

“Things that bad at home?”

Shrugging, she said. “Everyone has problems at home right? Cleaning up after your junkie dad and fetching his next hit isn’t as bad as some kids have it.”

Closing my eyes, I took a deep breath. “Sweetie, it doesn’t matter if people have it

worse or better.” Reaching over, I placed my hand on her head. “You shouldn’t have to live like that. Your seventeen, you should be in school, having fun and dating boys.”

“Yeah,” she breathed out on a sigh. “I guess so.”

Shuffling closer, I wrapped my arm around her and gave her a side hug. If we ever got out of here, I’d make sure that she’d never go back there.

She was so innocent and young, she had the rest of her life ahead of her. She’d been dealt a really crappy hand in life and girls like her deserved better than what they had been given.

We sat like that until we heard the tell-tale sound of boots coming. I hugged Ava closer as the key turned in the door and Max came inside with the same man from the day

before.

“Where’s Lindsey?” I spat at him.

He looked to the big brute that had come in with him and nodded his head. Stealing myself for him to grab me, I planted my feet and butt further into the floor.

He didn’t come for me though, he grabbed Ava and she held onto me, not wanting to let go. I clutched her, fighting against the brute, determined that he wouldn’t be taking her as well.

“No!” I shouted, scrambling up as I lost my grip and he lifted Ava off the floor.

“Kay! Help!” Tears streamed down her cheeks and she struggled against him, not

getting any further. Though I did notice that they didn't hurt her in the way that they had with Lindsey.

Barreling forward, I grabbed onto her arm, trying to pull her out of his grip. Deep down I knew that it was useless but I had to try. The brute pushed me back and I caught myself at the last moment.

"What the-" He moved Ava to his side, not letting go of her, his arm wrapped around her waist and lifted her feet off the floor.

"Let her go!" I screamed, going at him again.

An arm wrapped around me from behind, thrashing about I tried to get out of Max's hold. I wouldn't let them take her. She was too good, too pure, too innocent.

"GO!" he roared at the brute. He grunted in response and left the room. All I could hear were Ava pleas to let her go then her sobs started and I could imagine how they were wracking her small body.

"Get off of me!" I shouted and brought my elbow back hitting Max in the solar plexus. His arms fell from around me and I ran for the door, nearly making it out before he grabbed my arm and pulled me back.

His fist slammed against the left side of my face, my head reeling to the side and smacking into the concrete wall. I saw stars and slumped down, my whole body losing its fight.

"Never fuckin' learn," I heard him growl right before the door closed and I passed out.

My eyes flew open and I tried to push up off the floor and I stumbled as spots



exploded in front of my eyes. Taking deep breaths, I tried to get my dizziness under control.

I gripped onto the wall, the feeling of my skin scraping against it was a brief relief from the thumping in my head. Pushing up into a standing position, I let the wall support me as I gained my bearings.

After a few more deep breaths, I took a slow step forward and made sure I had my balance. Being able to stand without the support of the wall, I stepped closer to the door.

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Banging on it, I screamed for them to bring her back. I screamed until my voice couldn't any longer and I was basically croaking out as loud as I could.

I didn't give up though, I shuffled down the wall and kept banging on the door. I couldn't cope knowing that they hadn't only taken Lindsey, but now Ava as well.

I drifted in and out of sleep, not being able to keep my eyes open as the throbbing in my head was getting worse and worse. I desperately needed water, the one small paper cup they provided us with each day just wasn't enough.

I stumbled against the wall at the sound of footsteps. Stepping back, I faced the door, ready to confront whoever was about to open it. The window in the door was too high for me to see out of so when they opened the door and threw Ava inside, I wasn't prepared. I barely caught her as we both fell down on the floor.

The brute winked at me, then slammed the door shut. "Dick." I croaked, my throat burning with using my voice.

I looked down at Ava, checking her for injuries. Her bra was ripped, the straps barely holding it on.

"Ava, sweetie? What did they do to you?"

Her answering sobs racked her whole body so I stayed silent and wrapped my arms around her, rocking her back and forth until she buried her head into my shoulder.

After her sobs started to slow down, I pulled back and smiled softly. "Let's sit," I

said. Tilting my head over at the wall.

“Th...they...” she stammered.

“Oh, sweetie,” I whispered. I had to stay strong, I couldn’t let her see how much my heart was breaking for her. I hated to think what they had done to her.

“Did they...” I asked, letting the question hang in the air between us.

“No.” She sniffled and shook her head. “They took me to a man who wants to buy me.”

“They’re selling you?” I pulled back, my head swimming. We needed to get out of here. Now.

Did that mean that Lindsey had been sold? Would I ever see her again? Was she even still in this building?

I was starting to piece things together in my head. These girls were being taken off the streets, not just because they were there or for convenience, but because their parents had sold them to clear their own debts, their own mistakes. Once they were here, it looked like they were then being sold off to the highest bidder.

How many girls had been sold already? Were there more girls in here? I hadn’t been outside of this square room and I really needed to. I needed to scope the place out. Look for possible escape routes.

Just as I was trying to think of a way to get out of this room, the door flung open again, only this time, we hadn’t heard any footsteps coming. I didn’t know whether that was because I was inside my own head or because he didn’t want me to know that he was coming this time.

Ava lifted up off me and I stood up, using the wall as support. “You dick,” I spat at Max. His eyes widened in surprise, yeah, I’d shocked him with never having spoken to him like that before.

“Watch your mouth,” he growled, stepping closer to me. I matched him, step for step, meeting him in the middle of the room.

I wouldn’t back down from him, I was stronger than I’d ever been. I knew how to protect myself and I wasn’t afraid to use it to get us out of here. To get back to Eli and Ty.

“I won’t watch my mouth you piece of shit!” I smiled when I saw his hands clench into fists. That’s what I wanted, I wanted him to be distracted. To lose his cool.

“You’re pushing it,” he gritted out through clenched teeth.

“Awww, am I?” I pointed my finger, jabbing him in the chest. “What you gonna do about it?”

His hand flew up, grabbing my finger and twisting it. I squealed as I felt the snap of bone.

“Kay?” Ava said from behind me.

Yanking me forward, I fell into his chest, the force making me bite my tongue.

“I’m trying my fuckin’ hardest here and you’re pushing my fuckin’ limits.”

Pulling back just slightly, I smiled, blood flowing out of my mouth.

“Yeah?” I mumbled, though it didn’t quite sound like that with my tongue swelling.

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I did something then that I'd never thought I'd ever do, I spat in his face. I hated it but I knew that I'd get a reaction from him. I watched as the blood dripped down his face and onto his t-shirt.

He came at me, throwing me down onto the floor. I tried to break my fall with my hand but I couldn't get it out in time and my back slammed off the floor with a hard crack.

The bottom of his boot came down on my ribs and I squealed. He always went for the same place. He stomped his boot down a second time and I screamed from the pain, knowing straight away that he'd cracked several ribs.

"No! Stop!" I heard Ava shout, the shock of her shouting caused me to look over to her. I shouldn't have, I knew never to take my attention away from Max, not when he was like this.

"Why!" he yelled, so loud that my ears popped. "Why do you make me like this!"

"I don't make you like anything," I said turning back to him. "It's all you. You're an evil bastard and I'm so glad that Eli is away from you!"

His eyes turned black while his face went bright red. Reaching down, he gripped me by my throat and lifted me up off the floor.

My head spun and I knew that I would pass out any second but just as I was starting to lose consciousness, I felt his fist slam down onto my face.

“Stop,” a gruff voice said from the doorway.

Max stopped, just like that, no argument. His hand stayed around my throat, the only thing holding me up right now.

“Boss wants to see her.”

And with that, Max grabbed me by the arm and dragged me out of the room. My last view of Ava was of her sat in the corner holding herself tight. I just hoped that I would be coming back because she needed me.

Four days. Ninety-six hours. Five thousand, seven hundred and sixty minutes.

That’s how long Kay had been missing for and we were at a complete dead end. None of the leads that we actually had, had brought anything up. To top that off, we hadn’t had any fresh new leads.

She’d been taken in broad daylight and not one person had seen a thing. How could they not have seen anything? It just wasn’t possible, she was out in the open, not behind a wall or in the darkness of the night.

It was clear that someone had seen something, but were keeping their mouths shut. It was all too suspicious. There was something more going on here.

We’d tried to keep things as normal as possible at home and we’d even told Eli that Kay was staying with Miss Maggie. It was Miss Maggie’s idea to tell him that Kay was looking after her because she wasn’t well. I didn’t want to lie to Eli but I had no choice. The alternative was devastating and I wouldn’t subject him to that, I’d shield him from it for as long as I possibly could.

We’d tried to keep everything else as normal as possible, he continued to go to

preschool, having Corey here helped because he was occupied in getting to know his uncle and telling everyone who Corey was.

Having taken a quick power nap, all I'd allowed myself to have since Kay had been taken, I walked back into the warehouse and into the center of things.

"Anything?" I asked Charlie. He'd stayed here with me but we had a constant flow of other people coming and going.

"Nothing." He shook his head and stretched his arms up in the air.

"Damn it!" Slamming my hands on the table, I bent over. I couldn't take this much longer. I owned this fucking company and I couldn't even find the one person who meant the wo

rld to me.

"I know a guy," Corey said from the opposite side of the table.

I moved my eyes to him, seeing the guilty look on his face. "What?"

He looked down at the table where he was drawing circles with his finger. "I err...I know this guy." I stood up straight, frowning at him. "He might be able to help us find Kay."

I stared at him, sure that I had fire shooting out of my eyes. Why was he only telling us this now?

"And why the fuck didn't you mention this before?" I growled.

"Fuck." He looked at me, his eyes blazing. "It's complicated, he's not even meant to

be alive.”

“What?” I stepped forward, none of the shit that he was saying made any sense.



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“Look.” He held his hands up. “It’s a long story and I probably shouldn’t be saying anything.”

“Yeah?” I chuckled, the sound sinister to my own ears. “You’re gonna fuckin’ explain yourself, right now.”

He huffed and leaned back in his chair, gripping his hair and groaning. “He’s undercover. Only a few people know about him.”

“And?”

“If I reach out to him,” he said, his face going pale. “I’ll owe him big time.”

“Wait. Let me get this fuckin’ straight. You haven’t asked this person for help, because you’ll owe him?” I raised my brows in disbelief. I couldn’t believe he’d done this. Out of all the people that want to find Kay, I thought he’d be the first person to sacrifice anything and everything.

“Fuck, Ty.” He stood up, matching me in height and size. “You have no fuckin’ idea what they make us do over there. I wanted out but if I do this I won’t be out, I’ll be in deep.”

“The fuck you talking about?”

“I’ve said too much,” he murmured. “Just...Forget I said anything,” he said, shaking his head and pulling his cell out.

“Wait. What are you talking about?”

Ignoring me, he walked off and left me staring at his back.

I stood and waited for him to come back, determined to know just what he had been talking about and what he was getting himself in for.

I opened my mouth as he came through the door, but before I could get a word out, he said, “don’t.” The warning in his voice clear.

“Corey...”

“I already said too much and I didn’t want to make this guy aware that I had family. He’ll use them against me.”

“What fuck are you in with, Corey?”

“Man, if I told you, you wouldn’t believe me. But if this is the only way that we can get Kay back, then I’m willing to sacrifice my future. It’s killing me not knowing where she is.” He raised his brows at me. “And I know it’s killing you too. I can see it every time I look at your face.”

He was right but the look in his eyes frightened me. Whatever he had just got himself into wasn’t good and I knew Kay wouldn’t like this, she wouldn’t want him to do this.

Me? I was worried about him, but the fact of the matter was, Kay needed to be out of wherever she was. And quick.

Max dragged me down the hallway, his fingers biting into my skin. Another bruise to add to the collection that he’d already given me. I took in all of my surroundings,

making sure I remembered certain marks on the walls.

Several doors lined the hallway, all exactly the same as the one to our room. My mind was spinning, were there girls in those rooms too? I couldn't hear anything but that didn't mean they weren't in there.

My whole body screamed in pain the longer we walked, my feet hurt from the floor, my ribs made it hard to breathe and my head was spinning. But I wouldn't let myself show how much pain I was in. I wouldn't look weak in front of Max. Not anymore.

"Keep up," he growled, walking faster.

I kept my mouth shut this time. I'd gotten what I wanted, out of that room. All I needed to do was figure out the layout of the building and find possible escape routes. I wasn't going to wait for someone to come and rescue us, I needed to rescue myself and take the girls with me.

I had no doubt that Ty was looking for me but that didn't mean I could rely on him to come and save me.

We went through a set of doors after the brute swiped a card in the reader. So I needed a card to get through these doors, I filed that away, already figuring out how to get one as I watched which pocket he put it in. The whoosh of the doors sent a blast of cold air over me. Shivering, I wrapped an arm around my middle, gritting my teeth when my ribs screamed in pain again.

My feet hurt as we walked on the jagged concrete floor, each step scraping against the already open wounds. I longed for a pair of shoes, especially my boots. I loved those boots, they were the one thing that Ty had got for me before we were even together, plus, they were the most comfortable boots I'd ever worn.

We came to another door, this one different from the others. It's color a deep red and had no peeling paint, in fact, it looked like it had been painted recently.

"Stay there," Max growled and pushed me up against the wall. I kept my face level with his, I wouldn't look down, I wouldn't show him one millimeter of weakness.

He nodded at the brute and pushed through the door. I moved my eyes to the brute, giving him the same look that I'd given Max. Men like this got off on making a woman submit. Having once been one of those women, I swore that I'd never submit to anyone ever again.

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I didn't know how much time passed before Max came back out but when he did, his face was a mask of confusion and anger as he headed straight for me. I gritted my teeth and planted my feet on the floor, ready for whatever he was about to do to me.

"In you go." He smirked. He seemed so pleased with himself, he obviously knew something that I didn't.

Taking a small step forward, I hesitated. Was this all one big elaborate set up? What the hell was I walking into? Or the better question was, who was I walking in on?

The brute pulled the door open, giving me a small push on my back which caused me to stumble into the room. The door slammed shut behind me, I looked back at the door, then slowly spun around and took in where I was.

The door that we had come through didn't look like a door at all from inside here. It was concealed really well, and if I hadn't just come through it, I'd never have known that it was there.

The whole room was bathed in light and swathes of purple and gold material. A giant desk sat off to the side, opposite a leather couch. The whole room was grand, and it occurred to me then, I was about to meet the boss. The one behind all of this.

The giant double wooden doors opened and I inhaled a deep breath, preparing myself for whoever I was about to meet.

"Hello there, Miss Anderson," she sang.

I frowned, closing my eyes and opening them again, not believing what I was seeing.

“Serena?” I gasped.

I knew it. I knew all along but then again; I couldn’t believe I was right.

She cackled as she moved closer, circling me and looking me up and down. “I don’t know what he sees in you,” she sneered, backing away and covering her nose. “Jesus, you stink.”

“That’s what happens when your left for days in your underwear with no fuckin’ toilet,” I fumed at her.

She harrumphed and walked over to her couch, sitting down and crossing her legs in one fluid, controlled movement. It didn’t go unnoticed; the extra perfume that she was wearing or how perfect her makeup was.

“So it was you all along?” I stepped forward not caring when she scrunched up her nose in disdain at me. She’s the one who made me look and smell like this so she could put up with it.

“What was me all along?” she leaned back, her eyes assessing me, she wanted to hear me say it.

“Taking those girls?”

“Hmmm, I don’t know what you mean.” She smirked.

She knew exactly what I meant. Why she was playing all coy now, I didn’t know.

“There’s only you and me here

, Serena,” I said, stretching my arms wide, not caring that my whole body ached with the movement. “What’s the matter? Can’t admit to what you’ve done? How sick in the head you are?”

“Oh.” She pushed forward, standing on her sky high pumps, not even wobbling a little. “I can admit it. I took all those girls for money. Simple as that. But you...” Walking forward she came to a stop right in front of me and leaned down into my face. “You were purely for personal reasons. I can’t have my husband running off with a piece of trash like you.”

“He’s not your husband,” I gritted out.

“Oh, honey, he is, and I’ll be making sure he comes back to me. I just need to get you and your offspring out of the way first.”

“Excuse me?”

“I got rid of one before, shouldn’t be too hard to do it again.” She smirked, taking a step back.

“What-”

She snorted, her lips spreading even wider. “Ah.” She sauntered over to her desk and balanced on the edge. “He never told you.”

I counted to ten in my head, trying to keep my cool, if she was saying what I thought she was then...I couldn’t even comprehend it.

“Hmmm, interesting,” she said, looking over at the windows, not paying any attention to me. That was her first mistake. “See, when I found out I was pregnant with that...thing...I had to get rid of it. I couldn’t share Ty. I won’t share him, he’s mine.”

She turned back to me but it was too late.



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“You fuckin’ bitch!” I screamed as I lunged at her. There was no stopping me, my hand flew out and slapped her, the sound echoing throughout the room.

Gasping, she turned to me, her arm moving out in a pathetic attempt to hit me back. I was faster than her though. I’d trained with all the guys, and even though I didn’t have my full strength, I knew that I could take her down. I opened my palm, my hand coming up and hitting her nose. Blood sprayed everywhere as she screamed for help. I didn’t stop though, I took her down to the floor and was just about to hit her again when I was lifted off her and dragged to the other side of the room.

I was raging, the anger uncontrollable. She was bat shit crazy if she thought that was a valid reason for aborting a baby.

Max came forward, bending down and checking on her before turning his angry eyes to me. “Take her back,” he growled at the brute who had a hold of me.

He dragged me out of the room, another man appearing out of nowhere and walking with us. Once I was away from her, I started to calm down. This would be my only chance to get out of this place, there was no way that I’d be allowed out of this room again after what I’d just done.

Once he’d swiped his card and we went through the doors, I started to struggle in his arms. He lost concentration and tried to restrain me so I dipped my hand into his pocket, pulling out his card.

He threw me into the room when we came to the door and slammed it shut behind me. I landed on my hands and knees, and lifting my head, I was relieved to find

Lindsey and Ava sat together.

We all sat there and waited over two hours for Corey's contact to turn up. He'd apparently refused to meet anywhere but a secure place. We were all on edge at the prospect of actually finding Kay today.

Corey was pacing back and forth and had been for the last hour, mumbling to himself.

"Will you just sit down?" Evan asked. "You're making me dizzy!" He moaned, holding his hand to his head and looking away.

"Don't look at me then," he growled.

"Chill the hell out Corey and sit down." I said in a tone that meant he wouldn't argue. He was making us all even more on edge. What we needed was to all calm down and get it together. We couldn't do this if none of us were ready for what we could be walking into.

As soon as he sat down, he pulled his cell out and jumped back up. "He's here."

We all stayed where we were and waited while Corey met him outside. We'd discussed it and we'd come to the conclusion that it was best for Corey to meet him at the gate and escort him in.

I didn't know this guy from Adam, and if Corey said that he was incognito then he could be bringing some real danger with him. Danger that we didn't need, or want.

I blew out a breath and held my head in my hands, I was so tired, tired of all this but mainly I was frustrated at not having Kay beside me.

The sound of the door opening had me lifting my head. I could hear Corey saying something to him, but couldn't quite make out what it was.

As soon as I saw who it was though, I shot out of my chair.

"What the fuck are you doing here!" I ran at him; it was all his fault. He was the one behind all of this, what the hell was Corey thinking letting him onto the compound?

"Whoa! Ty, calm the fuck down," Corey said, jumping into my path and holding his hands out.

"That's the fucker who's been taking the girls!" I shouted. The rage bubbling inside me, I could practically feel my whole body shaking from it. Made even worse by the calm that he exuded back at me.

"I think we need to sit down and discuss a few things." He pulled the sleeves of his suit down and looked around. "You have an office?"

His eyes met mine and I was flummoxed at how calm he was. This wasn't the person that I had met a few months ago, this was a completely different version. Before I could answer him, Corey waved his hand in the air and showed him to the office while I stood staring at their backs, wondering what the hell was going on.

"What the hell?" Evan murmured beside me.

I nodded at him, thinking exactly the same thing. Stomping after them, I slammed my office door shut and sat behind my desk. "Explain," I gritted out.

"Well..." He leaned forward. "Shall we start at the beginning?" I raised a brow at him in answer, waiting for him to explain.

“I was brought here to investigate the disappearance of some girls. Which you probably know all about, seeing as you’ve been following me.” He raised a brow but I didn’t answer him. “My name isn’t Daley, and I’m not the one who has been taking the girls.” He paused and leaned back. “That would be your wife.”

“Serena?” I leaned forward. My head was spinning with this information. I tapped my fingers on the desk, trying to stay calm. Kay had tried to tell me, time and time again that she didn’t trust her, that there was something about her. Why hadn’t I listened? Why had I just assumed she was jealous?

Kay wasn’t the jealous type. I should’ve known that.

Scrubbing my hands over my face, I thought back to the last couple of months. I’d let Serena into the compound, she’d seen that we thought it was Daley. She’d known what we had going on here. She never did have anything for us, she was looking for information. How had I been so stupid?

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“Yep, and I’m guessing that the latest girl is someone you know?”

“Kay,” I gritted out. “It’s Kay.”

His eyes widened and I could see that he hadn’t known that. “Ah, shit. I didn’t know. She’s a nice chick.”

“She’s also my little sister, you dipshit.” Corey growled from where he was stood off to the side.

He leaned back in his chair, caught off guard. “I didn’t know you had a sister,” he said to Corey, his eyes assessing him.

“Yeah, no one did.” His eyes moved to mine. I could tell that he still wasn’t happy about me and his sister being together but he’d just have to put up with it because that wasn’t changing any time soon. If ever.

“I think your gonna need to fill me in on everything, and then we can go from there,” Daley said. He still hadn’t provided me with his real name but I guessed that he probably wouldn’t due to the work that he did.

We sat there for over an hour telling him everything. Every little detail of the investigation. If he was going to help us find Kay, then I wouldn’t be leaving anything out.

Apparently he was aware of Max, he’d become Serena’s lap dog and would do anything that she said.

Daley told us that it all made sense now, he was doing it so that he could get revenge on Kay. I'd shown him the pictures of Kay's injuries from Max. Looking at them, I hoped that she hadn't been hurt this time and that we'd get to her before it was too late.

But in my gut, I knew that she was hurt. Call it a connection, call it what you will, but I just knew.

"I've got an inside contact. It's time we took this place down." Daley gritted out and stood up. "Between us all, we'll be able to get those girls out and take that evil bitch down."

"I want Max," I growled.

"Yeah," Daley said, looking between the two of us. "You can have him. I'd kill the fucker if he did that to my sister." Buttoning his jacket up, he then said. "If I had one of course," and winked.

Corey followed him out and I was left alone.

Slumping back down in my chair, my stomach rolled. This was the first time we had been this close to getting Kay back.

I owed her one big apology for not listening to her in the first place, but if she was with Serena then that meant she probably knew.

She knew what had happened, what had broken me.

I rushed forward as fast as I could and showed them the card that I had pick-pocketed. I couldn't contain my excitement at the prospect of getting out of this place.

“What’s that?” Ava asked, leaning forward and touching it.

“Our way out.” I smirked and looked over at Lindsey. She didn’t look that bad, apart from a new bruise on her cheek.

Her eyes were filled with fire and I knew she wanted out of this place; right now. “Lindsey? You okay?” I frowned, my face hurting when I did.

“Yeah.” She nodded. “Fuckers ain’t gonna get to me. Let’s get out of this shit hole.”

I nodded and crawled closer. We all huddled up and made a plan, we knew that it wouldn’t be easy but once we were out into the hallway then things would be easier. We just had to get out there first. If I hadn’t been so injured, I would have been able to disengage whoever opened the door. But I knew that I couldn’t

do it, at least, not on my own.

“Teach us,” Ava said, standing up.

“You sure?” I raised my brow. I hadn’t expected her to say that.

“Yeah.” She nodded as Lindsey stood beside her.

“Me too,” Lindsey gritted out.

In the little time that we had, I taught them what I could. I couldn’t show them all the moves; my body just wouldn’t allow it. Once they had the moves down, we sat and waited for our daily dose of water.

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We'd decided that this was going to be the best time to make a move. We always waited for this time of the day for a completely different reason, but this time, it would be our last. As soon as I got out of this place, I wanted a fresh bottle of water. I salivated at the thought, I swear I could almost taste it.

We all looked at each other with smiles on our faces when we heard the footsteps come closer. Standing, we waited for the key to come into the lock, and when it started to turn and the click sounded in the room, we all nodded at each other.

It was now or never.

The door swung open slowly and in walked a guy that we hadn't seen before. It was always Max or the brute but this guy looked nothing like them.

He opened his mouth, but before he could say a word, they pounced on him.

Lindsey jumped on his back while Ava threw her arm out at him, hitting him in the throat with her fist.

Standing back, I watched him as he didn't fight back and noticed the gun on his waist band. Taking the opportunity while he was distracted, I lunged forward and grabbed it. This is what would get us out of here.

"Girls!" They both looked over at me and stared with wide eyes. "Into the corner," I barked at the guy, pointing the gun at him.

"You don't understand-"



“I said into the corner!” I barked. “Girls.” I tilted my head at the door, telling them silently to go out of the room.

I watched him as he held his hands in the air and backed into the corner. I didn’t move my eyes from him as I stepped out of the door. I slammed it closed and turned the lock, making sure that he couldn’t come after us.

Taking a deep breath, I turned to face the girls. This was it. We were actually going to get out of here.

“What now?” Lindsey asked looking up and down the hallway.

“This way.” I pointed the way that the brute and Max had taken me. There had to be a way out through Serena’s office. Those big double doors had to lead somewhere.

We shuffled down the hallway, all of us on high alert and aware of our surroundings. There was no hiding, and if someone was to come through the doors right now, we’d be caught; I didn’t want to think about what would happen if we were.

Swiping the card, the doors opened and we rushed through them. Everything looked the same and I couldn’t remember how far I had gone to Serena’s office. After passing the same door five times, I started to get panicked.

Just as I was starting to wonder if we’d ever get out of here, I spotted the door and signaled the girls to stand against the wall. Moving forward, I opened the door and looked inside.

Empty. Just what I had hoped for.

“Let’s go,” I whisper-shouted at the girls.

Lindsey came past me as I held the door open, and I waited for Ava. When she still hadn't come through, I frowned and looked back, screeching at what I saw.

"Go," she whispered, her eyes glazing over from the hold that the brute had on her.

"Ava-"

"Hmmm, I wonder what she'll do," the brute said to Ava, his tongue coming out and licking up the side of her neck. He held her in front of him, making it impossible to shoot him without hurting Ava.

"Go get help," Ava pleaded, her eyes begging me to go.

I couldn't leave her here, not like this. I stepped forward to help her, just as the doors in the hallway flew open and men came running through.

Looking back at Ava, she nodded, telling me that it was okay.

It wasn't okay, it was far from it. But if I didn't get out now, I was afraid that I never would.

I'd come back for her. As soon as the guys came, I'd come straight back for her.

We were dressed and booted up within an hour, I was more than ready to go and get Kay.

Daley had made some phone calls and by the time we were ready, we had another thirty men turn up, dressed in combat gear with guns. Between them, and all of Charlie's men, we had a small army. Both Daley and Charlie were trying to be boss of the whole operation, so in the end, I had to put a stop to it.

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“Neither of you are in charge. This is my warehouse, my woman, my operation.” I raised my brows, just waiting for one of them to say something but they didn’t.

Something that they both did agree on, was going in the vans. I refused.

Me and my team would be going together.

We all piled up into two trucks and led the way to the location while Evan sat in the back trying to hack into all the security systems.

The twenty-minute drive there made me seethe in anger. She’d been this close all along and I hadn’t found her. Gripping the steering wheel, I took deep breaths, trying to keep my cool. Now wasn’t the time to lose it, now was the time to stay calm.

Pulling a little way back from the building, I could feel her closeness. I relished in the feeling, having not felt it in so long.

The vans pulled up on either side of me and they all jumped out in formation. We opened our doors and led the way to the wall of the building, I signaled Charlie and opened the door, letting him go in first and following closely behind.

Scanning the open space, I couldn’t see anything but a door off to the left. Tilting my head towards the door, I moved forward with Corey at my back while the rest filed in behind me and went to check out another part of the warehouse.

We both stood at either side of the door, signaling for him to pull it open, we both filed inside, guns raised.

There was nothing but empty space with another door off to the right. Tilting my head to the door, we repeated our maneuver again.

“Well hey there, husband,” Serena sang, her voice sending goose bumps over my skin, and not in a good way either. I had a feeling that I’d come face to face with her at some point today.

“Where is she?” I gritted out, stepping forward, knowing that I had my guys at my back. It didn’t seem to bother her in the slightest that she was cornered. In fact, she seemed to relish in it.

“Where’s who?” She smirked, leaning back on the desk that she was perched on.

I stepped forward, stopping a couple of paces in front of her, not trusting myself to be any closer to her.

“Kay. Where is she?” I scanned what was around me in my peripheral vision, not daring to take my focus off her fully.

She huffed and walked out of the door that we had just come from, her steps quick. Following her back into the main building, I stood and waited.

“You know I never wanted any of this,” she said, turning back to face me. “I just want you back,” she whined.

“Yeah?” I chuckled, leaning down into her face. “You never wanted our baby either did you? Didn’t take you long to solve that problem either, did it?”

Her face paled as I pulled away. I hated her for what she had done, what she had taken from me. She took away the opportunity for me to be a dad, she took away my choices. Everyone always raved on about women’s choices, which I fully believed in,

but that baby was half of me and I didn't have any say in the matter.

"That baby was never meant to happen," she said, holding her hand up in the air and moving a step forward.

"Bitch, you take a one step closer to him and see what happens." I swung my head to the voice, a voice that hit me straight in the gut.

My eyes scanned her barely clothed body, the bruises and dried blood scattered all over her. I tampered down my rage for now, knowing I'd do some real damage if I didn't.

"What-" Serena gasped.

"I'll shoot your face off if you move," she growled. "You sadistic fuck."

"Kay?" Another voice said from behind her. "Ava's still back there."

Lindsey.

"Who's here?" Kay asked me. For a second I was speechless, she still hadn't taken her eyes off Serena. "Ty! Who's here? Get her in cuffs!"

Luke stepped forward, taking his cuffs out as I went to Kay.

"Sweetheart, you can put the gun down now." I held my hand out for it but she shook her head and walked backwards, the way she had just come.

"I'm going to get Ava!" she shouted when I tried to stop her.

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Rushing forward, I stopped her by walking in her path and holding my hands up. “Sweetheart, Corey and Luke can get her. You need to be checked out. Shit, you’re bleeding.”

“No, I need to get her.” She shook her head, moving to the side to get past me.

“Corey, Luke? Get this Ava girl.”

They came over to us, Corey kissing his sister on the head before going through the concealed door that Kay had pointed out.

“We need to get you out of here,” I said gently, taking the gun out of her hand.

“I...I...” She didn’t take her eyes off the door that Corey and Luke had gone through.

Moving into her line of sight, I bent down and cupped her face with my hands.

“Sweetheart, we need to get you out of here.” Opening my vest, I pulled my t-shirt off and placed it over her head. Shoving my arms back through the vest, I took her hand and led her back outside. Aware of her slight limp and flinches every time she took a step.

Was this all a dream? Had I really just made it out of there?

I wasn’t sure whether I was hallucinating but Ty’s touch felt so real. I shook my head, hoping this wasn’t some kind of cruel trick that my mind was playing on me.

My eyes stayed on Ty's as Corey went to get Ava. So many men ran after him and piled through the door. I had no idea how many girls were being kept in there, I just hoped that it wasn't too many.

Looking over at Lindsey, I could see that Kitty was comforting her and had covered her with a blanket. Feeling Ty's t-shirt touch my skin made me shiver and my whole body sagged in relief.

It was real. We really had made it out.

"I shouldn't have left her," I whispered. Why had I left her? I'd just gone through the door and left her with that brute.

"Sweetheart..." Shaking my head at Ty, I couldn't quite meet his eyes while I was admitting that I'd just left her there. That poor innocent girl had been left with all those men. The lump in my throat became bigger and I desperately tried to hold back the sob that was bubbling up.

Ty walked me over to Lindsey and we held each other tight, neither of us looking away from the door, waiting for Ava to come out.

Corey walked out after what felt like hours, cradling Ava in his arms. He held her tight, her face buried into the crook of his neck as she clutched onto him. Rushing forward, I tried to check on her, but as soon as I touched her, she whimpered.

"What happened?" I asked Corey, his eyes blazing in anger.

Shaking his head, he walked straight out of the warehouse and into the truck. Not acknowledging anyone. What had he done to her?

"Kay, we need to get you checked out. You all need to be checked out," Ty said,

coming up behind me. Nodding my head, I moved toward the truck, Lindsey still holding onto me.

Hearing Serena shouting, I turned my head. “Just leave it,” Ty whispered in my ear.

Closing my eyes at the sensation, I did what he said, knowing that if I was to see her face, I wouldn’t be able to hold back from hurting her again.

“Ty,” I whispered, the lump in my throat becoming bigger. We were out, we were actually out.

His arms opened and I turned, going straight to my safe place. His arms came around me and I snuggled into the nook that was specially shaped just for me. At least, that’s what I liked to tell myself.

I was tired and drained, all I wanted was a bottle of water, my bed and a cuddle from Eli.

I hadn’t even registered the fact that Corey was here, or how they’d found us. I didn’t even want to know why Daley was stood talking to Charlie.

“Let’s get you checked out and then we can get you home.” Nodding into his chest, I let Ty lift me up into the passenger seat. His face coming so close to mine as he did my belt for me, that I couldn’t help but lift my hand up so I could run my fingers through his scruff.

“I missed you,” I whispered, my eyes filling with tears.

His brown eyes told me how much he’d missed me, without having to say a word. Leaning forward, he kissed me softly on the lips and leaned his forehead against mine.



“I missed you too,” he said, his voice deep and gruff. “So much.”

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“Guys, I know you want a reunion and all that,” Corey said from the back. “But Ava needs to be checked out. Like, right now.”

Pulling apart, Ty grinned at me and shut the door.

For the next few hours, we were poked, prodded and examined. We’d all been split up; Ty stayed with me, Luke turned up and stayed outside Lindsey’s room and Ava still hadn’t let Corey go.

They stitched me up and sent me for x-rays, telling me that I had two cracked ribs and a broken finger. Something that I could have told them without the x-rays. They wrapped my ribs and feet in bandages because of the abrasions and taped my two fingers together.

All of the other injuries were just bruises and cuts that would heal with time. Though they wanted me to talk to a shrink but I refused. There was no way that I would be telling a stranger all about my life.

Ty wouldn’t let me walk out of there so I hobbled into a wheel chair, my feet still sore from the cuts on them, only now, I was wearing a pair of hospital issued slippers so that gave me some relief.

We all met back up in the waiting area and waited for Ava and Corey to come out.

“Ava?” I whispered as they came through the doors.

Corey shook his head at me and mouthed, ‘not right now’.

Looking down at my knees, I frowned. It was all my fault. If I hadn't left her there alone, she wouldn't have been like this right now.

We all went out to the truck and piled in, my head spinning with so many different things that I thought it would explode. All I wanted to do was see Eli but Ty told me that he was with Elena and Trevor at their house. Which was probably for the best because I wanted to get all the formal stuff out of the way first. Then I could concentrate on Eli, and getting better.

Ty's hand drifted over to my knee, looking down at his fingers drumming his beat, I smiled. I'd missed that, the constant rhythm. Reaching down, I ran my finger over the top of his hand, running along his knuckles and down his fingers. Turning his hand over, I placed my hand inside his and looked over at him.

Without words, I knew exactly what he was thinking. I could see that he had lots of things whirling around in his head. Lifting our linked hands up to his mouth, he planted a gentle kiss on my hand and brought them back down to rest on my leg.

The sight of the gates had me releasing a breath, my ribs screamed at the motion but I didn't care. This place really was home.

You know that feeling, where everything just seems fine, even when it wasn't? That's how I felt when I came into the compound. That no matter what was going on, as long as I had the people behind these gates, everything would be fine.

It was pure torture listening to Kay give her statement. Every little thing that she said made me angrier and fed to the need to find Max. I wished I could go back to change it all and for her not to get hurt again; to do more to protect her.

I hadn't been there the first time he'd done this to her and I hadn't been there this time.

The only difference between this time and last time was that she was more confident in herself. I could tell that she was being strong for Lindsey and Ava but she was also being strong for herself. Only time would tell how affected she would be by all of this, I just hoped that we'd be able to move past it all and start a fresh.

Charlie assured all of them that Serena and Max were being charged and wouldn't get away with any of this. It was one less thing that we all had to worry about, the only downside being that I wouldn't be able to get my hands on Max.

Time. I'd wait. I'd wait for twenty years if I had to but he wouldn't get away with.

"What will happen now?" Kay asked Charlie.

"A social worker will be here soon to talk to you," he said to Lindsey and Ava.

"They're going to be put into the system?" Kay gasped. Charlie looked away, not confirming or denying. She looked over at Lindsey and Ava, wide eyed.

"It's fine," Lindsey said. "I'd rather be anywhere but there anyway."

She didn't seem to be bothered by it, but Ava, she was freaking out. She looked around the room, searching for something. Her guttural sob bounced off the walls and I could practically see Kay's heart break at the sound.

"Ava?" Kay whispered. She leaned closer to her as she whispered something back and frowned.

Turning her head to me, and then looking at Corey who was stood behind me, she tilted her head at him and he moved forward, crouching down in front of Ava. Whatever had happened inside that place when Corey went to get her, must have been bad. Her face was full of bruises and she hadn't stopped shaking.

I saw the door handle move out of the corner of my eye and jumped up just as it flung open.

“Mama!” Eli shouted, running at her, a huge grin on his face. He stopped right in front of her, scanning her body from head to toe. His little face scrunched up as he moved his hand forward, cupping her cheek.

“What happened?” his little voice asked.

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“Mama got hurt. But I’m fine now, sweetie,” she said softly, turning her face and kissing his hand.

Corey stood, helping Ava up and looked over to me. “I’m taking her back to the house to get some rest.”

Nodding, I moved over to sit next to Kay, bringing Eli up onto my lap. “We need to be extra careful, bud,” I said when he tried to move closer to her.

I spotted Ma stood at the door

and I nodded, letting her know that it was okay.

“Lindsey? Would you like to wait out in the warehouse with me?” Charlie said, standing up and waiting by the door. Lindsey stood up, giving Kay a small smile before she followed Charlie out of the room.

“Right!” Kay announced. “Now that all of that is over, who wants to make popcorn and watch a movie?”

Shaking my head, I smiled. That was the woman that she’d grown into, she’d come such a long way. Even after all that she’d just been through, she was still putting on a brave face. Remembering back to the last time she was in this office, after Max had hurt her, to now. The difference was incredible.

“You can choose the movie, mama,” Eli said as I put him down on the floor. Pushing up off the couch, I held my hand out and helped Kay up. She let a small groan slip

but just smiled it off and squeezed my hand.

“Hmmm, I think I want to watch, spider man,” she said, limping to the door.

“Really?” Eli asked slipping his hand inside Kay’s.

“Yep!”

We walked slowly through the warehouse, Kay stopping to talk to Lindsey who was on her way to the station with Charlie.

“Social worker is gonna meet us at the station,” he said to me.

“Thought she was coming here?” I asked, keeping my eyes on Kay.

“She was but I think Ava needs some more time.” He looked around, not wanting to say what we were all thinking. She still hadn’t given her statement yet so we had no idea what had happened to her.

“Yeah, I think that’s a good idea.” I nodded.

Lindsey walked back over to Charlie after her and Kay had hugged, and gave me a nod before she walked off.

“I’ll be over tomorrow,” Charlie said before he walked off. I watched as he gave Kay a hug, whispering something to her before following Lindsey out of the warehouse.

Kay turned and smiled, looking down at Eli and then back up to me. “Ready?”

Swallowing past the lump in my throat, I said. “Always ready for you.” Winking, I moved forward, wrapping my arm around her shoulder.

Having her back made our little family complete, only time would tell how we would move on from here. I hoped we could move past everything and start again, this time without all of the drama.

Things had settled down after being home for a couple of days, with me they had anyway. Ava still hadn't come out of the room that Corey had taken her to and we were all worried about her.

Charlie had said yesterday that he couldn't give her much longer, not only did he need a statement, but the social worker had to find her a foster home.

"Has she still not come out of her room?" Elena asked on the fourth morning.

Ty had taken Eli to preschool while Elena came around for a visit. I loved having her come over, not only was she easy to talk to, but she understood some of the things that I was going through. She hadn't told me specifics but just the way that she said she understood, and the look in her eyes, let's me know that she was telling the truth.

"No." I shook my head, lifting the coffee cup up to my mouth, taking a sip. "She'll only answer to Corey."

"She needs to come out of there sooner or later."

"I know," I huffed. I didn't know how to try and get her out of there. I was spending all of my time and energy on making sure Eli didn't see how much it had affected me and that in itself wasn't easy.

Elena pushed her chair back, placing her cup down and standing up. "Let me try." She smirked.



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With wide eyes, I followed her out of the kitchen and up the stairs. She was actually going to go in there, I couldn't believe that she was doing this. I'd wanted to do it, but to be honest, I didn't think I was strong enough mentally. Yet.

She knocked on the door and pushed it open, the room was so dark that I had to wait a couple of seconds before my eyes adjusted.

"Ava?" she asked softly, walking into the room. "Time to get up now, honey."

She walked over to the windows, pulling open the curtains and looked at the bed. I followed her eyes and saw Ava lay in the middle of the bed, the blankets wrapped around her tightly as she stared at the wall. Her eyes bloodshot, making me wonder if she'd had any sleep at all over the past couple of days.

"Let's get you showered and changed. You'll feel much better." Elena sat down on the bed, lifting her hand and stroking some hair out of Ava's face.

"I'll never be clean again," she whispered, her voice so raw that I winced. I could see that she was in pain, not just physically, I recognized that look in her eyes. The one that said she'd never be the same again.

Elena looked back at me, silently asking what she was talking about. I shrugged, having no idea. She still hadn't told any of us what had happened, I had a feeling that Corey knew but even he wasn't saying anything.

"Let's at least try though, honey." I watched as Elena kept trying to coax her out of the bed, Ava not moving at all, not even her eyes moved from the spot on the wall

that she was staring at.

I leaned back against the wall, waiting her out. The longer I stood here, the more my resolve grew, she couldn't stay in here forever. If I had to be cruel to be kind, then that's what I'd do.

"What are you doing?" A voice growled from behind me.

I startled. "Corey! Jeez you scared the life out of me." My hand was clutching onto my chest as I looked over at him stood in the doorway, his body filling the whole frame.

"What are you doing?" he asked again.

"Ava needs to have a shower and come out of this room," Elena answered. Standing up she gave Corey the 'mom' look and dared him to tell her any different.

He looked at all of us in turn, his eyes finally landing on Ava.

Moving forward, he sat down on the other side of the bed, his hand touching her arm. "Ava? Elena's right," he said softly.

I'd missed Corey so much and we still hadn't had a proper talk since he'd been back. Not that I minded, I still had to talk with Ty. He may have thought that I wasn't going to bring Serena up again but he was wrong. I wanted to know everything, not just what she had told me.

Corey reached forward and helped lift Ava up off the bed slowly, she didn't move, her body limp. He carried her to the bathroom, her head going to his chest, with Elena following right behind her.

“You can go now,” she said to him when they were in the bathroom.

I waited for Corey to come back out and walked down the stairs with him. “She’ll be okay,” I said when we were both in the kitchen and sat at the table.

“I know,” he huffed. “She won’t last in the system though, sis.”

Nodding, I agreed. She needed to be around people who understood her, not with people who didn’t care.

“Anyway, what do you say that me and you go out and get something to eat? I’ll ask Elena to watch Ava,” I asked, hopeful.

He grinned for what felt like the first time in forever, his hand slid across the table, grasping mine and squeezing slightly. “Yeah,” he replied. “Let’s catch up. Just the two of us.”

I didn’t want to go out anywhere so we went to a drive through, got some burgers and then drove up to the spot that Corey always used to take me. Moaning at the first taste of my burger, I couldn’t help but close my eyes at the taste.

I’d never missed food so much in my entire life and I savored every bite. I moved my eyes to Corey, grinning wide with a mouth full of food at his chuckle.

“Some things never change.” He bit into his own burger, moaning at the taste just like I had.

“See,” I said once I had swallowed my bite, and raised my brows at him. The burgers at that place were the best and it was all I could do to stop myself from eating one after another.

We sat and ate in silence, both of us just gazing out of the window. It was nice, to just be sat with someone and know that you didn't have to say anything.

“So...” he sa

id, breaking the silence after ten minutes. “You and Ty, huh?”

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I cleared my throat, knowing that this was going to come up at some stage. It was inevitable, Corey had always been protective and now he knew the truth about Max, I had a feeling he would be even worse.

“Yeah,” I said, flicking my eyes over to him. “I know he’s your friend-”

“Does he treat you right?” he interrupted.

“Yeah.” I sighed wistfully. “He really does.”

“Then as long as you’re happy...” He shrugged. “I’m okay with it.”

I raised a brow at him because even if he wasn’t happy with it, I had a feeling that Ty wouldn’t care. To be honest, it wouldn’t have made the slightest bit of difference to me either.

After the elephant in the room had been spoken about, we talked about everything. It was good to get my brother back, have him physically in front of me instead of on a computer screen.

I didn’t want to think about how long he would be here before he’d have to go away again. I pushed all of those thoughts to the back of my mind, not worrying about them until the time came.

We spoke about Eli and all the stuff they’d got up to while I was ‘away’. Then talk turned to how I was doing on the jobs and whether I’d learned to shoot a gun yet.

Telling me about when he first met Eli, I giggled and said, “I would have loved to have seen your face.”

“I was shitting myself, honestly, sis. I freaked the fuck out.” He shook his head, his face turning bright red.

I grabbed my side as a pain shot through me from giggling so much. Damn, that hurt.

“Careful, sis,” he warned, pulling up to the compound gates.

“Yeah, yeah, I know,” I huffed. If he wasn’t so funny then I wouldn’t be laughing in the first place, ergo, I wouldn’t be in pain. So it was his fault. That logic worked, right?

But seriously, I could just imagine his face. Eli didn’t seem fazed by it so why had he freaked out? I was sad that I’d missed it but I told myself that it wouldn’t do me any good to wallow about it, I wanted to move on from everything that had happened. The only way I’d be able to do it was if I forgot about the past and focused on the present and the future.

Parking outside of the warehouse, I was about to push my door open, but before I could, Evan’s face came into view.

“Kay.” Looking over at Corey he nodded and then moved his eyes back to me. “I need your help.”

My heart rate sped up at the serious look on his face. Holding my hand out so he could help me down, I stepped out and followed him to his cabin.

Once we were inside, he started to pace the small space, his hands waving all about. Frowning at how agitated he was, I asked, “Evan? What’s the matter?”

He turned to face me, his face pale as he worried his lip. "I..."

Stepping forward, I held my hand in the air. "It's okay, just calm down, take a deep breath." Once I could see that he had calmed a little, I asked again. "Now, what's the matter?"

He ran his hands through his hair, looking at everything in the room but me.

"Take a deep breath." I breathed in and out to show him. As if he didn't know how to breathe. "Sit down." I pointed to one of his chairs and waited for him to sit before I stood in front of him.

"Now," I said calmly. "What's going on?"

"Well, see...there's this...girl." He flicked his eyes to mine and looked away again.

"Erm...Okay?"

"And...I...I...don't know how to ask her if she'd like to...court me?" he said, uncertain.

I held the giggle in that desperately wanted to come out. Ty had briefly told me about Evan's crush on Geena and how he had freaked when Ty had found out.

"Geena?" I asked, trying to keep a straight face. It wasn't funny that he liked someone, it was how nervous and worried about it that was.

"Yeah," he nodded, looking everywhere but at me.

“You have her number right?”

“I have her email.” He nodded, becoming more sure of himself.

“Okay, this is what you’re going to do.” I sat down next to him, patting him on the arm. “Send her an email and ask her if she’d like to go out on a date.”

“But-”

“Nope,” I said, shaking my head and standing back up. “No ifs, ands or buts. Just do it, you won’t know until you ask.”

With that said, I stepped out of his cabin and walked back to the house, wondering how Elena had got on with Ava. Time to go and see.

I leaned back in my chair as someone knocked on the office door and shouted for them to come inside. I waited for whoever it was to come in and blew out a big breath. I couldn’t wait for this weekend, we were all taking it off and were going to spend time together as a family.

After all of the stress over the last week, we deserved it. I refused to take on any more jobs, wanting to spend some much needed time with Kay and Eli. I’d even debated on taking them on a vacation but I didn’t know whether it would be too soon.

I had a feeling who would be coming through the door because Kay and Corey had taken Eli to preschool and then they were off to visit Miss Maggie so I knew they wouldn’t be back until later. Kitty and Luke were finishing off a last minute job and



Evan never knocked, he just walked in with his arms wide so it couldn't be them.

"Hey," Charlie said as he opened up the door and shut it behind him.

"Hey." I nodded.

I watched as he sat down in the chair opposite me, running his hands down his face. He looked stressed and I wasn't surprised with the amount of work load he had since bringing down Serena.

She'd been asking to see me but there was no way that I would. Although, I had been tempted when she said she'd sign the divorce papers but she'd caused enough suffering to the one person I cared about the most in the world. Not to mention, all of those girls that had been found in that building.

A total of twenty-seven girls had been found locked up, dehydrated and beaten. I couldn't stomach looking at the pictures so I could see why Charlie looked so worn out.

I still hadn't talked to Kay about everything. Something that I needed to do, and soon.

"Have you spoke to Ma?" Charlie asked.

"About?" I'd spoken to her about a lot of things these last few days so he needed to be more specific.

"Ava," he huffed.

"What about her?"

"She wants to take her in."

My eyes widened. She hadn't spoke to me about this, but even if she had, I wouldn't have said it was a bad idea because Ava needed someone like Ma. "Yeah? So?"

"Why would she want to do that? I mean, haven't we all been through enough? Why does she want to bring something else into our lives, on top of all of that we've already been through?"

Leaning forward in my seat, I rested my arms on the desk, trying to keep my cool. I couldn't believe I was hearing this come out of his mouth.

"Really, Charlie?" I raised my brows. "If Ma hadn't taken Emmy in, you'd have never met her."

"That's-"

I held my hand up, cutting him off. This wasn't the time to get into everything with Emmy.

"Ava needs to be somewhere safe, she needs to be with someone who understands her. She's seventeen Charlie, it's not like she's a kid and will be our new sister, she just needs guidance."

I shook my head, utterly disgusted with him. How could he sit and watch a girl like her, who had been through so much already, go into the system when she had someone offering her sanctuary?

From what Kay had told me, she'd been through so much already and deserved so much better than the shitty hand she'd been dealt already. She'd get lost in the system and he knew that. At least with Ma, she'd be able to try and get back to who she was before she was sold to Serena. Maybe she could even go to college. Get her life back on track.

“I know but I don’t want Ma to get hurt.”

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“How would she get hurt? She’s a grown ass woman. You have zero say anyway, Charlie.” I chuckled. “You know Ma don’t listen to anyone.”

“Yeah,” he huffed. “I suppose she would be better with ma. I still need her statement though.”

“Well then, you need to talk to Ma about that then.” I said with a smirk.

He blew out a big breath, yeah, we both knew how that would go. Trying to tell Ma what needed to happen was like talking to a brick wall. If she didn’t want to do something, you could bet your bottom dollar that she wouldn’t. At least, not until she was good and ready.

“How’s the case going?”

“Busy,” he said, pushing up out of the chair and pulling his cell out of his pocket. “I better go and pay Ma a visit.”

“She’s at the house with Ava,” I called to his back. He waved in acknowledgment and I waited for the warehouse door to shut behind him before leaning back in my seat.

I almost wished I didn’t have to finish this paperwork so I could go and see him get told off like a three-year-old boy. Looking down at all the paperwork I still had to do, I blew out a deep breath and pushed up out of my chair.

It would still be there when I came back, seeing Charlie get his ass handed to him was

a far better way to spend my morning.

No matter how old you got, your ma could always put you in your place.

At least, ours could.

The last time I had been up here, I'd swore that Kay would be with me. I'd stuck to that, not even being able to look out at the woods. It was crazy how much these last six months had changed. I'd known from the moment she walked into the office that she was mine, but I'd never knew how much I would fall for her.

How much my life would revolve around her, and a certain four-year-old boy, and how much I loved living my life that way.

Just looking at her now, laying down in the grass and looking up at the sky; I couldn't believe how much I truly loved her. I had a feeling she felt the same, but telling her while I still had secrets wasn't what I wanted to do.

We'd had the perfect afternoon, coming up here and having a picnic, just the two of us and not needing to worry a

bout anything and just spending quality time together.

I could go back and forth in my head all day. It was the perfect time to tell her, we were on our own and I could explain it all to her, but at the same time, we were on our own and having such a nice day. I didn't want to ruin it.

"Just spit it out," she said, opening her eye a crack and looking up at me.

Lifting up, I sat down and bent my knee, resting my arm on it. Plucking a few blades of grass out of the ground, I fiddled about with them, keeping my hands occupied.

“I know Serena must have said something to you.” My breath came out raggedly and I closed my eyes briefly at the anger that coursed through me at the mention of her name.

She lifted up from her position, sat up crossed legged, and pulled her long skirt over her legs.

“She said something, but I didn’t want to say anything to you about it.” Bringing her eyes to mine, the sadness that she felt, shined through. “I wanted to wait until you were ready to tell me.”

Nodding my head, I took a deep breath, deciding to start from the beginning. The prospect of revealing everything to her, filled me with dread. Would she look at me differently?

“I’ve told you that we were married and that I split with her because she did something unforgivable.”

“Yeah,” I looked away, not able to look at her when I told her. I couldn’t bare for her to see the pain in my eyes, to see how much it broke me to even think about it let alone talk about it.

“She came home one day, the same as she did every other day of the week. Bags of shopping hanging from her newly manicured finger nails.” I felt Kay shuffle forward, her hand slipping into mine. I gripped it, needing something to hold onto, to ground me.

“She thought I didn’t know, she thought she’d be able to get away with it.” I swallowed past the lump in my throat. “She’d done it without a care in the world, not one drop of emotion.”

“It’s okay, Ty,” she said softly, her hand coming up to cup my face. “Look at me.”

Turning my head slowly, I looked into her beautiful, kind eyes. Eyes that called to me in a way that nothing had ever called to me before.

“She didn’t even say sorry. She took the choice away from me.” I took a deep breath, trying to get my emotions under control. “I should have had a say. It wasn’t just hers.”

“What did she do, Ty?”

Closing my eyes, I swallowed, the lump in my throat getting bigger. “She was pregnant.” Squeezing my eyes closed harder, I managed to get out, “she aborted my baby and didn’t even tell me.”

“Oh, Ty, I’m so sorry.” Her soft voice was closer now. I felt her move and sit between my legs, the warmth of her body against mine comforting me.

Opening my eyes, I looked down at her as she gripped my face in her hands. “She shouldn’t have done that to you Ty, it wasn’t her place to do that without your consent. I’m so sorry,” she said with venom in her voice.

Nodding my head, I agreed with her. I should have had just as much of a say as she did. Yeah it was her body but that was my baby, too.

I’m not opposed to abortions, far from it. If a woman has been forced upon, or there’s a medical reason, then yeah, so be it.

But Serena? She did it because she didn’t want to ruin her figure. She thought that I’d understand that. I didn’t know what world she was living in, where she could possibly think that I’d have been fine with her aborting our baby because of her precious figure.

“It hurts,” I grunted. “It still hurts after all these years.”

“It will,” Kay whispered, her arms wrapping around my shoulders. I nuzzled into her



neck and for the first time ever, I let it all out.

I cried.

That's something that I'd never done. I'd never let myself grieve, sure it was only the size of a peanut, but that peanut was half of me and would have grown into a beautiful baby.

"I got you," Kay whispered in my ear.

For the first time, I truly believed she had got me. That I had someone who I could lean on, that wouldn't judge me or take advantage of me.

It was so hard to watch Ty break down like that. To see him completely come apart because of something Serena had done, for her own selfish reasons.

If she wasn't already locked up I would have gone and given her a piece of my mind. She'd been asking to see Ty and I told him that if he wanted to visit her then I was fine with that.

He'd point blank refused and said, "I never want to see her face again."

After that, I didn't bring it up again. I wasn't going to press the issue, not when I didn't want him to go and see her in the first place.

We'd all had more time on our hands now that the case was over, which meant we got to take on fun cases. At least, they did. Me and Ty had taken a little time off and we spent most days up the clearing, just spending time together.

I was still healing and spending a lot of time with Corey and Ava. She was a little better now and was moving in with Elena and Trevor tomorrow. Which would mean

that the house would have one less person in it. I didn't know how I felt about that.

It sounded strange but I liked having a house full of people. It meant that there was always someone to talk to or to bake with. I hated being on my own, I hated the silence that it brought. It was another thing to add to the list of things that Max had caused. But I was determined to get over it, even if it meant sitting in a room by myself all day.

It had been great seeing Eli get to know his Uncle, they'd become inseparable, but luckily, Luke was a part of that too. He and Corey had become fast friends, mostly thanks to Eli.

Rolling over, I watched Ty as he slept. He looked so peaceful and I didn't want to disturb him so I rolled out of bed, tip-toed across the floor and closed the door behind me with a soft click.

I went down the stairs quietly, not wanting to wake anybody else up. Even though I'd been sleeping better than I had before, I still couldn't sleep for the whole night. Like clockwork, I'd wake up just before the sun rose.

I gasped as I walked into the kitchen, the floor so cold on my bare feet. Heading straight for the coffee pot, I switched it on and waited for it to finish brewing, getting lost in the view out of the window.

It was so beautiful to watch the sun rise, the way it climbed over the trees and made the dew on the branches sparkle, was amazing.

"Morning," a soft voice whispered from the doorway.

Turning to face Ava, I smiled. "Morning, you want some coffee?"

This had become our morning routine, we'd started to meet down here around this time and at some stage, Corey would always join us. He was so used to sleeping in short bursts that he never slept all night.

"Please," she said, walking over to the table and sitting down.

I poured us both a cup and sat down next to her. We never talked much but she was slowly opening up to me. Each day, she would tell me something else, no matter how small it was, it was still a step in the right direction.

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“How you feeling today?” I asked, cringing as soon as I said it. I hated when anyone asked me that.

“Good.” She smiled, her eyes lighting up. “Corey’s helping me move to Elena’s today.”

“Yeah?” I grinned, picking up my coffee and taking a sip. “You excited?”

“Elena was talking about college.” She shrugged, her face unsure.

“You could totally do it.” I reached over and clasped her hand. “You really could. We’ll help in any way that we can. Get out of here. Make a life for yourself.”

She looked over my head at whoever had come through the door and nodded. “I think I might. It’ll be good for me, right?”

“What will?” Corey’s gruff voice asked

“Erm...going to college,” she mumbled into her coffee cup.

“Ahh.” He turned, leaning against the counter. “Yeah, it’ll do you good to get away from this place.”

I looked to Corey,

noticing how guarded he was being. I frowned, trying to read him and figure out why he looked so angry.

“What’s going on?” I asked as I stood up.

He huffed, looking away from me and out into the woods. For several seconds, I stood there and waited for it. I knew it was coming sooner or later but I thought I would’ve had more time with him.

“I’ve been called back. I leave in two days.”

My stomach bottomed out, my feet moved toward him and I went straight into his arms. I didn’t know when I would see him again, that was the worst, not knowing when I would talk to him. Not knowing if he was okay.

I was just getting used to him being back and now he was being taken away from me again.

“It’ll be fine, sis,” he said, planting a kiss on the top of my head.

“I know,” I whispered, looking up into his eyes.

“We’ll spend the whole day together tomorrow; you, me and Eli,” he said.

“Okay,” I sniffled onto his shoulder. I loved having my brother here but I knew that he had a job that he needed to do. I backed away and walked out of the kitchen, not being able to face him. I knew I would break down if I saw his face again.

I needed some time to process so I climbed up the stairs and back into bed with Ty, snuggling up to him and closing my eyes.

Finding out that Corey was leaving in a couple of days kicked my ass into gear. There was something that I needed to ask him before he went back.

I'd been on edge all day, and when I finally asked him to meet me in the warehouse, I couldn't handle my nerves.

I wanted to do this the right way, but even if he said no, I'd still ask her.

I had to.

I paced the length of the warehouse for the hundredth time, my eyes not moving from the main door. He'd be coming through it any second now.

I'd never been this nervous in my entire life.

Not when I started a new school. Not when I went away for basic training.

Never.

My stomach was doing flips and I was sure that I would be sick at any stage. I tried taking deep breaths but nothing was working.

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Wiping my hands on my jeans again, I felt my pocket, making sure it was still there.

I'd carried it around with me everywhere I went for days now and it was burning a hole in my pocket, too scared to put it down in case anyone found it. Nothing was ever a secret on this compound and so far, I'd managed to keep it just that.

The sound of the door opening had me spinning around. He stepped through the door, almost as if in slow motion.

It was time.

Corey hadn't wanted us to see him off, he wanted to leave the house like he was just going out for a while and would be back in just a few hours.

Eli went to preschool just like any other day, but I couldn't stop the tear sliding down my face as they hugged goodbye. As soon as Ty drove off with Eli, it was time for Corey to go.

I squeezed him as tight as I could, not caring about the pain that it caused me. Taking a deep breath, I tried to lock away the smell that was all Corey.

"I'll see you real soon," he whispered in my ear.

"Yeah," I mumbled. "Love you."

"Love you too, sis."

He pulled away, his eyes misted over and he cleared his throat. He patted Monty on the head as he walked past him, not looking back as he slung his bag over his shoulder.

Leaning against the counter, I couldn't help the sob that escaped me. I wished I had been able to spend more time with him, that I would've been the one to introduce him to Eli.

I'd missed out on things again, all thanks to Max.

Wrapping my arms around my middle, I let it all out. Knowing that if I didn't, it would eat away at me.

I leaned against the counter, not bothering to wipe the tears away as they flowed down my face.

"Sweetheart?" Ty said when he came back and I was still in the same position. "He'll be fine."

"I know," I sniffled.

Looking up at the hand he held out to me, I took it. He pulled me into his chest and wrapped his arms around me, kissing the side of my head.

"Let's go up to the clearing," he said, keeping his arm around me and guiding me out the sliding doors.

I let him lead me, knowing that anything was better than standing there sobbing, and wishing that Corey hadn't just left us again.

We walked through the woods in silence, taking our time as we weaved through the



trees. The tears stopped by the time we had got to the clearing and we made our way straight to the picnic bench and sat down.

Ty put one leg on either side of the bench, facing me. I smiled softly at him, glad that he was here with me.

“Kay?” He reached for my hand, his voice serious.

I looked up into his eyes, now just noticing how much he was shaking. “Ty, what’s-”

“Wait.” He held up his hand and closed his eyes.

His chest lifted as he took a deep breath, and when he opened his eyes back up, he said, “I’ve wanted to say this to you for months.”

“Okay...”

“Since the first time you walked into my office, I knew. I knew that you would change my life but I had no idea just how much that would be.”

I had this weird combination of a smile and a frown, confused but happy at what he was saying. I’d known that he felt strongly for me but hearing him say it out loud was different. I had a feeling I knew what he was about to say and I knew that I would say it back because I’d felt the same for a long time.

“I love you, Kay.” His chest rose and fell with another deep breath. “I love you so much.”

I replied, not skipping a beat. “I love you too.”

We both moved forward, our lips clashing in a mess of tongues. Since I’d been back, we hadn’t done anything but a quick peck on the lips. He backed away and I followed him with my lips, my eyes springing open when he chuckled. I hadn’t had enough of him; I didn’t think I ever would.

“Sweetheart,” he said, lifting up off the bench.

I frowned at him, wondering where he was going.

My heart sped up as he bent down, his hand going into his pocket.

“Ty? What are you doing?” I gasped, my hand flying to my mouth.

“Just...” He shook his head and smirked. “I want to spend the rest of my life with you. I want to grow old with you and sit on the porch swing, drinking mugs of cocoa, listening to the trees. I want to have children with you, and grandchildren. Most of all, I just want you, with me, forever.”

My eyes widened when he opened the box, revealing the ring that was held by the dark blue velvet.

“Kaylee Anderson, will you marry me?”

I looked from the ring, to him, and then back again.

“Yes,” I whispered.

He smiled and moved my hand from my mouth, slipping the ring onto my finger.

“I love you,” I whispered, wrapping my arms around him.

“I love you too.”