



Ivy

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Description: My past has been tainted with beatings and secrets. Being made to feel scared and alone was part of my everyday. But when the violence set its sights on my son, my love for him gave me the strength to leave. It was the hardest thing I'd ever had to do, but it needed to be done.

Now, I am finally taking a stand to be a better person for me and my child. I have found a new home at Castle Ink, a new family – a new life. I've found him. My beast.

I just hope he doesn't break me.

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Prologue

Ivy

My body tenses as I brace for the next punch, but it doesn't come. The screams of my six-year-old son, Carter, stops the hit. I hate that he has to see me like this. I have tried for so long to protect him from witnessing what his father does to me.

"Stop. Daddy, you are hurting Mummy. Stop it!" His high-pitched voice echoes around my bedroom. I push to my feet and step towards Tim as he looks down at Carter, tears streaming down his face, pounds on Tim's thighs, gaining his attention. "Stop," he sobs, and my heart breaks all over again.

"Get off me, you little fuck. You are a pussy, just like your mother. Fucking worthless," Tim shouts, saliva foaming at the edges of his mouth. His anger is normally always aimed at me, but I saw the change come over him when Carter stopped him from his nightly ritual.

Before I can stop it from happening, Tim swings his arm around, and the back of his hand connects with Carter's face.

A horrified scream leaves my sore throat as I see my baby boy fly backwards at the force, and his tiny body hits the side of my bed. Carter screams in pain, and that is the final snap in my tortured mind. The will to leave this man is now in full force. He has never hit our son before; raised his voice at him, yes, but never laid a finger on him. Until now. This will be the first and last time Tim touches my son—and the last time he ever lays a hand on me. I was stupid to stay this long, but his emotional abuse kept

me here.

I grit my teeth before a high-pitched sound leaves me.

“GET OUT,” I scream at him. He looks a little stunned at my tone of voice. I have never answered back to him or stuck up for myself before. The look of shock doesn’t last long before the anger covers his monstrous face again.

“The fuck you say?” he spits out.

“Just leave, Tim. I need to calm him down. I mean—look at him; you bloody marked him. Just go.” I will say anything to him to get him to leave. I want him as far away from us as possible.

“Fuck it. You aren’t worth my time or fucking space. Make sure he’s in bed before I come home.” I nod my head and cradle my crying son in my arms, shielding him from his father. I have done a piss-poor job up until now. My heart sinks at the thought. Even though Tim has never touched Carter, I have been a shitty mother for letting him hear what has been happening to me. But no more. We are out of here.

Tim walks to the door but stops and smirks back at me.

“Sleep in his room tonight. I might just bring some bird back with me. I need a good shag to forget about the shit lay you were this morning.” My stomach churns at his words. He always threatens to bring a girl back to our house and have sex with her while I’m in the other room. The door closes and both Carter and I relax.

I know what you are thinking: Why hadn’t I left him already? Well, you see, I have no one; no friends, because Tim made me cut off all contact with the ones I used to have; and no family. Not since my mother passed away, just over a year ago, leaving me with a shocking secret she had kept from me my whole life. Tim has a pretty good

job with a decent paycheck—not that I see any of it. He has always threatened to take Carter from me if I ever left him. I love my son with all my heart, and I could never risk Tim taking Carter from me

. We are leaving and never looking back. We deserve more. I deserve more. The fear of being with Tim outweighs the risk of being without him. Now is the time for me to start stepping up and taking matters into my own hands.

Chapter 1

Ivy

****Four weeks later****

I look at the sign and sigh. This is the day. The day that marks a new journey for Carter and me. I hope. This is the secret my mother carried around with her for twenty-five years.

I push open the door and see a large group of people standing around. A few kids, also. I grip Carter's hand in mine and step inside. We stand there for a few seconds, taking in the group. The guy with a tattooed sleeve is looking at us with slightly narrowed eyes, but he doesn't seem threatening. A girl with long, dark hair and tattoos steps forward.

“Can I help you?” She smiles at me.

“I'm looking for Dex and Jay Castle. I was told they own this tattoo shop.” Another man steps forward. He, too, is covered in tattoos and has dark hair like the other guy, who is still staring between Carter and me. They look like brothers, so I think I have found the right place.

“I’m De—”

“No. Fuck no. What the hell did you do, Dex?” The tattooed girl screams, at the guy with two tattooed sleeves, and I feel the blood drain from my face. Her anger and upset scares me. I just left a violent relationship; I have no intention of having Carter around more violence. Her anger towards the situation makes my heart rate pick up and I start to feel woozy. I sway on my feet, and just when I think my legs will no longer hold me, a man steps around the people gathered and wraps his huge arms around me, taking my weight and helping me to sit on the leather settee. He rubs my back and calls out to Carter.

“Come here, kid. Mummy isn’t feeling well. Come and sit next to her.” His voice is deep with a hint of sexy. A good old-fashioned phone sex voice, as my mum used to say.

Even in my shaking state, his voice clears the fog. Carter comes over to us, but he doesn’t climb into my lap, like usual. He climbs onto the beast’s lap. I can’t take my eyes off the scene in front of me. Carter is so wary of men because of Tim, but he has no qualms about this man- a perfect stranger. I know they say that kids know a good person, but I’m shocked to see it actually happening.

A pretty woman hands me a bottle of water and I open it and take little sips. I turn to my son and speak to him.

“Mummy is fine, Carter. See, this nice man helped me, and now I’m feeling better.” I look at the two brothers before taking a deep breath and letting them know why I am here.

“I didn’t mean to cause any trouble, but I was told I could find you here.” I take more air into my lungs and explain further, “My name ?? my name is Ivy Bilson. I am your sister. We all share the same father.” My shoulders drop when I see their faces. I look

at Carter and brush the hair off his forehead before looking back at Dex and Jay.

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“Bullshit,” Dex grinds out.

I shake my head. “It’s true. Allan had an affair with my mum. She never knew he was married until she fell pregnant with me.”

“So, why now? Why come to find us now?” the other guy says, his tone gentler than Dex’s. So, he must be Jay.

“My mother passed away a year ago. Cancer,” I whisper, as fresh tears appear. The arm around my back, belonging to the beast, tightens. He pulls me a little closer and I feel grateful for the comfort. The three girls that are in the room all surge forward and hug me, offering their condolences.

“Shit. I’m sorry, Ivy,” Jay says. He pushes through the girls and sits on the little table in front of me. He tilts his head to look at Dex and nods in my direction. Dex takes the hint and joins his brother.

“My mother, Maggie, never told me about you boys until her last few days. I looked you up and waiting until I could I ?” I stop my words. I don’t want these people to know about Tim yet.

“Until what, babe?” the guy next to me asks—I still don’t know his name. I shake my head, but he pushes. “You can tell us. You’re family now. Plus, have you seen these crazy ladies? They will hook you in and never let you go.”

“Luke,” Dex warns. They lock eyes and silent words are passed between them, but Luke just smirks at Dex.

“It’s all good, brother,” Luke says to Dex. My attention is drawn to Carter when he shifts on Luke’s lap.

“What’s up, Carter?” I ask gently.

“Are these my uncles?” He looks between the men. He’s pretty smart for a six-year-old.

“We are, little guy. What’s your name?” Jay asks.

“Carter, and I am six.” He holds up six fingers. Jay stretches out his hand to shake Carter’s.

“Hey, Carter. I’m Jay.”

Dex sits next to Jay and speaks. “Hey, little man. I’m Dex, but you can call me Uncle Dex and him Uncle Jay, if you want. Do you see those beautiful women over there?” He points to two of the girls and Carter nods. “They are your Auntie Addy and Auntie Cassie. The other two people are Liam and Penny, friends of ours, but they can be your friends too.” Dex’s tone of voice surprises me. He seemed pissed when I told him about our dad. I don’t think he’s going to let me in straight away, but I understand that. It will take time to make him see that we are family. I will do anything to prove to him that we are.

“Okay,” Carter agrees. He turns to look at Luke and asks him if he is his uncle too. His answer surprises me.

“No, bud, I’m not your uncle, but you will be seeing a lot of me.” Luke lifts his eyes to mine as he says the last few words. It’s a silent warning—that I will be seeing more of him. My heart beats rapidly in my chest and my cheeks heat up. I look closely at him and take in his features. He has chocolate-coloured hair that is short at the sides and

longer on top. It suits him. The few days old stubble hides his jawline, but I can only imagine how perfect it is. His eyes are what catch my attention. One eye is blue, and one is green, the latter emphasised by the silver of the eyebrow piercing above it. The white t-shirt he's wearing is stretched so tightly across his huge arms it looks like the material will rip open if he moves. His lips are thin but totally suit his face, and they look kissable. I blush at the thought, turning my head away from him. His chuckle snaps me out of my teenage-crushing-fog.

"I know—I want to kiss me too, but it's impossible. You, however, can kiss me whenever you want, babe." He winks at me and my blush burns hotter.

I knew I couldn't let Luke into my heart or body. I had to keep myself at a distance. My head knew this new plan, but my heart and body didn't get the memo.

I am in trouble with a capital 'T'.

Sat here on the couch, I stare at the two men opposite me.

My brothers, Dex and Jay Castle.

After I turned up at Castle Ink, Dex's girlfriend, Addy, suggested that I go home with her until the boys closed the shop up and had time to process what has happened—mainly me and Carter showing up unannounced. Jay seems okay with me being here, but Dex is hesitant, which I can understand. Now, as just the three of us sit in Addy's living room, his eyes bore into me, like he is waiting for me to attack or something.

"So, start at the beginning," Dex says, his voice carrying a layer of distrust.

I tell them everything about my teenage years and how it was just me and my mum; then meeting Tim, how we started out as a couple, and then getting pregnant with Carter; the way Tim changed over the years, the way he treated me; how things got worse when his job changed; then him being there when my mother died, helping me cope, only to knock me down again.

“He was great for the first few years, then he got distant and verbally abusive after we were together awhile. But he got brave after Carter was born. That’s when the punches and kicks started. He never touched me when I was pregnant with Carter, thank God.” I take a deep breath. “He never once hit Carter—until the day I left. I know you must think I’m weak, but you don’t know Tim. He has a great job with good money. He threatened to take Carter from me every time I threatened to leave him. The way I saw it, was as long as he wasn’t hitting Carter, I could take the blows. I did it for my baby. I needed him to stay with me. I don’t know what Tim would have done if he had taken Carter away from me. I kept as much of it away from him as possible.”

“You aren’t weak, Ivy.” Jay takes deep breath and continues moments later. “I will fucking kill him if I ever see him,” Jay growls out. I cast my eyes over to Dex. He’s just looking at me. I shift me attention away from his gaze, before turning back to him, and his eyes change in front of me—they soften. He shifts in his seat, leaning forward, resting his elbows on his knees and locking his gaze with mine.

“You are not at fault, and I get why you did it. You are not weak, and anyone who says that you are, to me, will meet my fucking boot. What I’m finding hard to get a handle on, is why the hell our father cheated on our mum with yours?”

“I don’t know, Dex. My mum never knew he was married until after she told him she was pregnant with me. He flipped and told her he wasn’t ready to be a father and she never saw him again. But she kept tabs on you two. She was told by a friend that he died in a house fire. I’m sorry.” I bow my head and crack my knuckles.

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“I’m sorry about your mum, too, Ivy,” Jay says. He stands and comes to sit next to me.

“How can you be sure that you’re our sister? Your mum could have lied.”

I stand, anger racing through me. How fucking dare he call my mother a liar.

“How fucking dare you! My mother would never lie to me.” My blood boils at his words about my mother. He doesn’t know her. “Do you know what? Fuck it. I’m sure Carter and me can do this without you.” I pick up my bag and walk over to the door. I hear a hissing noise from behind me, but ignore it.

“Ivy, wait.” I turn to face Dex but keep one hand on the door handle. “I’m sorry. That was a shitty thing to say.”

“It was. For Christ sake, Dex, I look like you both. Even my son is a spitting image of you.”

“I know. But this is all overwhelming. I need time to get used to the idea that I have a little sister.” He offers me a small smile.

“I hear you. Believe me, I do.” I chuckle at his words, happy that in some way he is accepting me as his sister. I wipe away the tears I hadn’t noticed were falling.

“So, who is older: me or you, baby girl?” Jay chimes in as he steps up to Dex’s side.

“I believe you are three months old than me.” I shrug.

“YES! Baby sister it is then. Oh, girl, you do know that you’re not allowed to date until you’re fifty, right?”

“Huh?” I ask. Is he crazy?

“Hey, I have so many years of being a big brother to catch up on. No lad is touching you. Am I right, Dex?” He looks at Dex, who nods.

“Yeah, no fucker.” He winks at me and my heart lightens.

“You do know that I have had sex before, right? I have a son,” I say.

“Ewww, gross. Do not talk about you being poked by a man.” Jay shudders and we all laugh. I think the Castle siblings may be okay. In time anyway.

Chapter 2

Ivy

I drop Carter off at school and make my way to work. I am so happy he’s settled into life here. Penny helped me get him into the Junior school that Connie and Knox go to. I’m glad he has to wear a school uniform, so I don’t have to panic with picking clothes out for him every day, as he has way too many clothes for his age. Money isn’t a big problem for me since my mother left me everything. When I say everything, I mean her house, which I’m going to rent out. Plus, I have a little money to tide us over for a few months, so we’re good.

I did an amazing job keeping it from Tim, but now, thinking about it, it wasn’t so hard as he was so self-absorbed. I know I could have used the money to run, but again, with the emotional stuff he put on me, it was hard to walk away. The fear was always there that he would take Carter from me. Now we’ve gone three months

without seeing or hearing from Tim and I almost feel like the old me again. The Ivy before Tim ripped me apart from the inside.

I'm drawing again and now working at Castle Ink. The artistic side runs through the Castle blood and, in turn, I am a Castle. We all love to draw, anything and everything, and I feel this connects us as siblings. According to my brothers, oh my brothers. I will never get used to saying that. I asked them a few days after I turned up if they wanted a DNA test done, but they both said no. We all have the familial dark brown hair, and we have similar eyes. Even Carter looks like the boys.

Anyway, back to me working at Castle Ink. I draw but I don't tattoo. I have no desire to; I have zero confidence to permanently mark someone's body.

So I make designs up for customers and just sketch for the fun of it. Having the freedom to draw again has taken me back to my teenage years, when I used to love the scratch of my pencil over the paper. My mum saw my passion and pushed me to study Art at college, so I did. But that is where the happiness dies for me. My mum fell ill for the first time before I started college, and then I met Tim. He was there for me through all the bad times. He would spoil me, buy me gifts, take me places.

We were together from the time I was sixteen, and I fell pregnant just after I turned nineteen. It was amazing for the first few years, but over the years, Tim changed towards me. He would call me names and try to provoke fights with me if I smiled at a man or had anything to do with other men. Carter was a few months old when the hitting started, and his words became even more nasty and heartbreaking.

He would tell me I was worthless, that no one would ever love me, and that he was only with me because of Carter—not that he bothered with his son. He would use him when he wanted something from his parents, but even they hated us? I guess image means more to some people. I hated them too.

“Peaches.” I smile when I hear the nickname he has given me. My heart skips a beat. He knows what he does to me; he uses every opportunity to get me to blush, and so far, he has succeeded, but I’m wising up to his advances now. I don’t blush as much around him, and I am fucking proud of myself for that. The last three months have been hell. He flirts like crazy with me, but then goes out and sleeps with other women. It hurts to watch, but I have to keep him at arm’s length, for my own sanity.

“What, Beast?” I reply, keeping my attention on the paper in front of me. I’m sketching a tribal and flower design for a man’s sleeve.

“Just wondering if you’ve finished the design for Taylor. He’s coming in tomorrow for a final look over.” I breathe out and grip the pencil tightly in my hand. He knows I’ve finished it. I lift my gaze to his.

Big. Freaking. Mistake.

Holy shit, Luke looks good enough to eat. He’s wearing his usual white t-shirt that I swear he wakes up extra early to paint on. Yes, it is that tight. His hands are resting on top of the reception desk, making his biceps bulge. Arm porn anyone? Damn him! He knows I have a huge weakness for big arms. Fucking Cassie Dawson; she had to open her mouth one night when we went to a pub. It was the first night I had left Carter with a sitter and it was nerve-wracking, but he totally enjoyed himself over at Liam and Penny’s.

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My eyes travel his body and I can't stop from licking my lips. My gaze lands on his sexy mouth that's surrounded by his designer stubble. Surely he pays someone to make it look that good. The smirk that is in place just proves he knows the effect he has on me, and God knows, many other women. That thought is like a bucket of cold water on my overactive but deprived libido. I roll my eyes at his smug face.

"You know it's done, Beast." I started using the nickname 'Beast' for Luke after a few days of meeting him. He is freaking huge, and the name suits him. "Now, what can I really do for you?" I regret the question as soon as it leaves my mouth. I go to rephrase, but he beats me to it.

"You know what you can really do for me, Peaches." He winks at me. I take a deep breath and go to reply, but the door opens, and a woman walks in. Bloody hell, can her clothes be any tighter on her body? I'm pretty sure she has the same clothing-painter as Luke.

Her face lights up when she sees Luke standing there. I shake my head and force the little green demon inside my mind to stay quiet. My head is mixed up when it comes to this man. I know he wants me, but he sleeps with other girls. Why do that if he desires me? That alone is not going to make me fancy him more. I do want him, but I have to think of Carter. I know he thinks the world of Luke, but what if he walks away in a few months? From what I've gathered about Luke, he's a 'hit it and quit it' type of bloke.

A high-pitched laugh breaks through my thoughts.

"Oh, Luke, you are too funny." I chuckle to myself. Funny isn't a word I would use

to describe Luke Baker. They both turn to look at me. The woman has a confused look on her face, but Luke... well, I can't read his expression. I wave my hand at them.

"Ignore me," I say, and turn my back to them.

"Excuse me, but are you going to book me in?" the annoying voice asks. Shit, I knew I had forgotten to do something. I bend forward and collect the forms she needs to fill out before getting her piercing. I can feel his eyes on my arse, burning into my skin. I stand up, form in hand, and turn to them. Beast's mouth is lifted up at one corner, showing me he appreciated the view I just gave him.

"Here, I'm sure Beast—um, I mean Luke, can handle you from here," I say, and hand the forms over to her.

She takes them from me and offers a smug smile. "Oh, I think Beast can handle me just fine." I clench my fists at my sides at her using my name for him.

"Only her," he growls out. His tone shocks me.

"Pardon?" she asks him, looking a little bewildered.

He points to me and answers her. "Only Peaches gets to call me Beast." I stand stock still and take in the scene in front of me. Even though I know what he's saying is true—I am the only one he allows to call him 'Beast'—his words still shock me. The woman looks between us, like a bobblehead.

"Oh, okay. I didn't realise you were a couple."

"NO!" I all but scream the word, making her jump. "Oh, no, we aren't a couple. We're just friends. Yep, just friends. No coupling going on here. Nope, not us." I

shake my head.

“We get it, Ivy.” Ooooh, he said my proper name. He is pissed. Oh no. My heart sinks, because I know what comes next. He’s now going to hit me where it hurts the most: my heart.

Our gazes are locked. It’s like he’s drilling his thoughts into my head, and my breathing becomes erratic, my cheeks flush. He breaks the connection and turns to the woman.

Here it comes...

“Come on, doll. I can handle you just fine. Why don’t we go back to my room and have some privacy. I don’t think my friend would like to see the things I’m going to do to you.” He winks at her and she giggles, and all the while my heart sinks into my stomach. I know I have no right feel like this, but I do. I can't stop the thoughts that run through my head, or the feelings that are in my heart.

Only three months of knowing this man and it seems that he has taken a hold of my heart almost completely.

I shake my head and turn my gaze back to them. Seeing him with all these women is only hurting me, but it’s only me who can stop it. I need to think about everything, take everything into account, and go from there.

Bollocks. The woman’s giggles fill the room and my stomach revolts. I take a few deep breaths and turn to go back to my waiting design.

I jump when I turn around to see my brother Jay standing in front of the reception desk.

“Holy shit, Jay, you scared the fudge out of me.” His face crinkles in disgust at my words.

“Fudge? Really, sis?” I shrug and pick up my pencil. It’s a pencil Carter got for me when he went out on a day trip with Dex and Addy one day in the summer. “You do know that when you say that it sounds like I literally just made you shit yourself, right?”

“No, it doesn’t,” I retort.

“Ummm, yeah it does, but anyway...” He looks towards Luke’s room, and then back to me. “Do I need to go all big brother on his arse? And I don’t mean that shit show where the stupid people lock themselves in a house full of strangers and then bitch because they don’t like them or the tasks they’re asked to do. For fucks sake, they knew what they were signing up for.” He takes a deep breath. God, I love my big brother. I love them both. They have been there for me and Carter since we showed up on their doorstep.

“I think they know and are told to play on their issues.” I drop my gaze to his ‘Captain Awesome’ mug that he drinks out of, and chuckle. Dex has a ‘Captain Twat’ mug. That was a fun conversation to have with Carter one morning. Beast needs a mug. I need to get Addy on that. I look back up at my brother and give him a big smile. A fake smile.

“No need to go all big brother on him. He’s an asshole, Jay, and we all know it. My head is battling over what to do. It’s clear that he wants me, but at the same time he’s still sleeping with anything that will open their legs for him—or drop to their knees. I can’t afford to get hurt again. I deserve a man who will worship me and Carter both.” Jay’s eyes search mine, looking to see if I mean what I’m telling him.

He nods his head, comes around the counter, and wraps me up in his arms. I love

being held by Jay because I feel loved and wanted. One day, Dex will hug me like this too. I know my mother loved me, but this is a different kind of love. I never got to have a father's love because he died before I met him. After a minute or two, Jay steps back but keeps his hand on my shoulder. We smile at each other before he speaks.

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“Just be careful with him, okay.” I nod my head. “He’s a great guy—when he wants to be. Loyal as fuck. Sometimes, though, things are not what they seem, honey.” He kisses my forehead and walks away. Sometimes though, things are not what they seem... What does that mean?

“Jay, what does that mean?” I shout after him. He winks at me but carries on walking to his room. “JAY!”

“Love you, baby girl,” Jay replies.

“Bastard,” I mutter to myself. I shake out my hands and pick the pencil back up, before once again losing myself in the design. I want this to look epic on the guy’s arm. The studio is quiet today, so I use the extra time to work on the designs that need finishing up before I need to go and get Carter from school.

A paper aeroplane lands on the design I’m working on, making me jump. My head snaps up and I see Beast leaning against one of the back walls looking like a fucking model. His legs are crossed at the ankles, and his arms are crossed over his very big and hard-looking chest. God, I want to run my hands all over that man. He smiles and dips his head down, indicating for me to look at the aeroplane.

I slowly pick it up and carefully open it. My eyes widen at the words.

Your arse is as perfect as a peach.

My eyes snap to his and he smirks at me. This is the first aeroplane note he’s sent, but it isn’t the first time he’s mentioned peaches around me. He calls me ‘Peaches’ all the

time. I didn't know why, until now. He thinks my arse looks like a peach. I am not one to toot my own horn, but I know I have a great arse—it's my best asset apparently. No pun intended.

I chuckle to myself and shake my head. His laughter catches my attention and I lift my head. Our eyes lock and I watch as he bites his bottom lip. He looks like... sex. Oh, hell no, he cannot be doing stuff like that. He winks at me and turns to go back into his room where the giggler is waiting for him. I slump down in my seat and bang my head a few times on the desktop. I am in trouble.

Chapter 3

Luke

I turn and walk back into my room after sending a paper aeroplane over to my peaches. God, the woman has me in fucking knots. Her perfect curves, her tits, and that arse... Holy fuck that arse. The things I want to do to it: Lick it. Taste it. Bite it.

Perfect as a fucking juicy peach.

Fuck, my cock is getting hard just thinking about what I want to do to her. The images alone send my blood racing to my dick. She bends over all the fucking time, but she does it in an innocent way. Whether it's getting forms from the cupboard or re-stocking for us, the arse is every-fucking-where. Even in my dreams. I know she's had a shitty past few years, but I don't want to go slow with her. I've flirted with her, but she holds me at a distance. She's worried about getting into something new. I get that, but surely, she has to know I won't hurt her.

The way she reacts to me, the way her breathing changes and her cheeks flush red, my chest puffs out with pride that I can make a woman wet but just looking at her. That is every man's fucking ego boost—to see how a woman is so fucking affected

by their actions. But the way she jumped at the client's assumption that we were a couple didn't sit right with me at all. That fucked me right the hell off. So I did the typical man thing when his ego is bruised a little: I reacted very fucking badly, and I hurt her. I hated the way I'd reacted, but I couldn't stop myself.

I shake my head at the way I acted this morning with that giggly woman. Thank fuck she's gone. Now, I'm waiting for my next client. I was so fucking glad to see the touchy-feely lady leave. Thank fuck for small tattoos.

I sit at my table and pick up the design for the older lady I'm going to tattoo in the next half hour. She's pretty bad arse.

A knock on my door as it opens has me turning in my seat, and I smile at who greets me.

"Hey, babe," I say to Ivy when she pushes the door open more.

"Mrs. Doyle is here for her tattoo." Peaches moves out of the way, so Mrs. Doyle can enter the room. "Do either of you need anything?" her sweet voice asks.

"No, thank you, dear." Ivy nods her head at the lady and turns her gaze to me, waiting for my answer. I smile at her and shake my head.

"No, baby, I'm good." Peaches blushes and turns to leave the room. "Are you going to pick up Carter soon?" I ask her before she can close the door.

"Yeah. I'm leaving in about an hour. Why?"

"I was going to see if you guys wanted to go out for dinner after school. Mrs. Doyle is my last client for the day." I can see the battle raging in her pretty little head, so I shrug my shoulders and smile at her. "Come on, what's the worst that can happen?"

She narrows her eyes at me and goes to answer, but Mrs. Doyle beats her to it.

“Oh, go on, honey. No woman can turn down an offer like that from a man like Luke.” She winks at Ivy, who chuckles, but I see the defiance lurking in her eyes and know it may not end well for me.

“That, Mrs. Doyle, is very true. But unfortunately, I am not the only woman to get an offer from Luke. You see, Luke has plenty to offer... to plenty of other women.” The air in the room shifts and my back tenses. I can’t fucking believe she is saying this shit. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have to finish work before I go and pick up my son from school. And as for your answer, Luke: no, thank you.” With that, she walks out of the room, leaving radio silence in her wake. I keep my eyes on the door, hoping it will open and Ivy will come back in and tell me she changed her mind about dinner. But it never does. Mrs. Doyle clears her throat, breaking my trance-like state.

“Sorry, Mrs. Doyle. Let’s get this tattoo done, shall we.” I busy myself getting all the inks set up and the gun machine ready with the correct needles.

“I can only assume that you’re a ‘player’, as my granddaughter would call it.” Fuck. I nod my head and keep my gaze firmly locked on the design in my hand.

“I want her, though. She’s all I think about, but...”

“Talk to me, Luke. I have had three sons and two daughters, and I have lost count of my grandchildren, so I think I know a few things about love.” She chuckles, but her words are like barbs sticking into my skin. I don’t love Ivy.

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“There isn’t anything to talk about, Mrs. Doyle. I like Ivy, but she doesn’t want anything to do with me. She’s been hurt in the past and is scared to let me get close to her. She has a young son who is important in her life, and he has seen more than any six-year-old child should see.”

“He should be the center of her world. A mother’s job is to guide and protect her children. Woo her, Luke. Make her see the man you truly are, not the man you let everyone see.” With that, she removes her pale pink blouse and turns her back to me. I’m tattooing her shoulder blade with a design Ivy produced for her. I get to work on the tattoo and let Mrs. Doyle’s words sink in. Can I really woo Peaches? How the fuckdoyou woo a girl? Damn it, I’m going to have to go home and seek advice from the four most important women in my life: my mum and three sisters.

I pull up outside my parents’ house and turn the engine off to my black BMW 4 series. This car a fucking dream to drive. My parents live in a typical semi-detached house in a cul-de-sac, where children, now home from school, are running around, playing sports and wreaking havoc on their bikes and scooters before the weather gets too cold. I don’t spot my sisters outside playing, so they must be in the house. I walk up to the house and open the door, calling out to my family as I do.

“The L-man is here. Where’s ma posse at?” I yell, like I’m a gangster or some shit. Screams come from everywhere in the house before three crazy kids come running towards me. My six-year-old niece, Polly, and three-year-old niece, Tia, who belong to my sister Ellie and her husband, Rob, come running around the corner first. Right along with them is my six-year-old nephew, Josh, who belongs to my other sister,

Michelle and her husband, Jason. Ellie and Michelle are twins, who happened to get pregnant at the same time with their first two babies. They all come crashing into my legs and try to tackle me to the ground, but they don't succeed. They never do. I pick up little Tia and throw her over my shoulder. Polly and Josh sit on my feet and wrap their arms around my legs. I lift them up and start walking towards the kitchen where I know the rest of my family are waiting. The kids scream and tell me to stop, but I keep going and act like a troll dragging the kids away.

I enter the kitchen and see my mother and two sisters sitting around the table. A high-pitched screech fills the room, dragging my attention from my sisters. My one-year-old nephew, Rory, screams from his highchair. I smile because that little boy is all me. My mother always comments about how much he looks like me and not his parents.

"Okay, you bunch of misfits, off you go." I gently lower Tia to the floor as Polly and Josh climb off my legs and get to their feet.

"Uncle Luke?"

"Yeah, Polly Pocket?" I answer.

"Do you have a girlfriend?" She giggles behind her hand. I laugh and lean against the kitchen counter.

"I don't, Pol. But maybe soon." I wink at her before grabbing a water from the fridge. My sisters and mum are fussing over the party for my nan's ninetieth birthday. The old girl is still going strong. She is as sharp as a tack, that one. Nothing ever gets past her. She's the type of lady that will tell you how she feels about something. She never holds back. My nana Lilly was born with no filter.

"What's her name? Do we know her? Tell me, tell me. I want the details." Ellie

rapidly fires off questions. Everyone is looking at with me curiosity in their eyes. I chuckle and shake my head at the women in my life, but I answer her questions, knowing they won't let it go otherwise.

“Okay, you bunch of nosey parkers. Her name is Ivy, and she's twenty-eight. You don't know her; she's new to the area. She moved here a few months ago with her son.”

“Her son?” my mum pipes in. She loves kids, hence the number of grandkids she has already. They keep on at me to get started. It was never my thing, until a dark-haired beauty walked into Castle Ink. Ivy has made me change the way I see things. It's strange how despite only knowing her for a short amount of time, she has had such an effect on me.

“Yeah, Mum. She has a six-year-old son. His name is Carter and he's pretty wicked. You guys would like him,” I say, pointing to Polly and Josh. I've spent some time with Carter when he's come to the studio, but I would like to spend more with him. A way to show Ivy that she can trust me one-hundred-percent with her heart.

“Oh, I think he would get on great with my little munchkins. You will have to bring them round,” Mum says. My stomach knots a little thinking how much work it would take to get Ivy just to sit and talk to me. I shake my head and explain a few things. My family don't ever hide anything. No secrets are allowed in this house.

“She won't come here, Mum. She's had a very messed up past.” I take a few breaths and continue, “She lost her mother not too long ago to cancer. She took care of her through it all. But that's not the worst.” I nod towards the kids.

“Polly, Josh, Tia, why don't you guys go and play in the garden. Uncle Luke needs some adult time,” Michelle tells them as she sets Tia down from her lap. The three kids run out into the vast garden, the garden my dad is very proud of.

“Thank you.” I breathe out. My voice drops to an almost whisper when I continue to tell my family about Ivy. “She was also in a very abusive relationship. He would hit her, but never in front of her boy. He told her she was worthless, that she wasn’t enough for any man but he was putting up with her. He even threatened to take her son from her, which is why she stayed.” I remember the night Dex and Jay told me a few things about Ivy and her past. That night I was in my home gym until two a.m. using the punchbag to vent my anger. I will kill the son-of-a-bitch if I ever see him.

“So, what made her leave?” my sister asks and I sigh.

“Her ex hit the boy. That was the final straw for her. She upped and left him, took Carter and came to Castle Ink.” My family all look at me with confusion on their faces. I chuckle.

“Umm, son. Why Castle Ink?” my dad asks as he enters the room.

“Well, as it turns out, Dad, Ivy is Dex and Jay’s half-sister. Their dad had an affair with her mum. Ivy’s mother didn’t know he was married when she was with him. There’s only three months between Jay and Ivy.”

“Oh, my God, that is crazy. I bet that was one big-arse shock to the system,” Ellie says.

“You got that right. When Ivy came through the door of the studio and asked for the boys, we all thought Addy was going to kill Dex. Ivy’s son is a spitting image of Dex and Jay. Addy thought he may have been Dex’s son.”

“I would have paid good money to see Addy kick Dex’s arse.” Michelle laughs.

“Hell, me too.” I laugh with her.

“Bless her heart. That poor girl has been through hell, Luke. You must bring her here. Bring her to Nana Lilly’s party.” I shake my head again, but they are relentless, if nothing else.

“Fine, Mum. I’ll ask her.”

“That’s my boy.” She pats my cheek and gets up to finish dinner for us and the kids. I stay until Ellie and Michelle take the kids home, and then I head to my house. I bought it when I moved back a few years ago. I’d moved away because the town was suffocating me after everything that happened with Tina.

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That bitch almost ruined me. She cheated on me and made me out to be the bad guy. I'm a big guy, which is why Peaches calls me 'Beast', but Tina used that to her advantage. She told people that I had cheated on her. I hated her for what she did. I carried a lot of rage inside me for months after. Boxing helped with the anger, which helped me build up the muscle.

Ellie slapped her across the face at a restaurant one night, and my family do not condone any type of violence, unless it's warranted. I left town because I couldn't deal with the stares and the whispering around me.

When the boys asked me to come back and join Castle Ink, I jumped at the chance. I thought enough time had passed that it was a good time to come back home. I bought my modest four-bedroom house, and it's perfect for me. I added a drawing room and a gym. No need to pay membership when I can just walk up my stairs.

I lay in bed thinking about how to get Ivy to come to the party with me. I know my family will never let up until they meet her. I have never, not ever, taken a girl home to meet the family. Hell, I haven't even talked about my interest in a girl before. Poor Ivy, she won't know what hit her when she meets the Baker family.

Chapter 4

Ivy

It's Friday afternoon and I'm sitting in the storage cupboard at Castle Ink sorting through all the supplies. I do the inventory now, which Dex loves because he hated doing it. Addy used to do it, but now, with little Phoebe, she's had to cut back her

hours here, so I told them I would take on the job. It doesn't bother me, and I'm happy to help family out.

Family. For so long it was just me and Mum, until Carter came along.

Now I have two brothers, two future sister-in-law's, and a beautiful niece, who I love to pieces. I even see Liam and Penny and their three kids as family. My heart has grown a hundred times bigger in such a small amount of time. I love them all. My heart is lighter knowing I have them in my life.

My blissful thoughts are cut off when I hear the most obnoxious laugh ever to be heard by a human ear. I turn my upper body to see where it's coming from and my heart freezes.

Luke stands just outside his room with a redheaded girl wrapped around him. My heart is once again torn in two directions. My head and my heart know I shouldn't feel the way I do, but I can't stop my body from responding.

I need to woman-up or let him go.

As if feeling me watching them, Luke lifts his eyes to mine and his body tenses up. He pulls away and whispers something in her ear. She giggles and walks away. I clench my fists and turn back to my job. Seeing him with these women should make me run a mile, but something holds me to him. I start counting the coloured ink on the shelf, when a shadow falls over me. I don't need to turn around to know who it is. My body can sense him.

"What do you need, Beast?"

"Now isn't that a loaded question. You keep asking me this, but you never like my answer, Peaches."

“Well, I’m pretty sure there are plenty of other women who will be more than happy to help you out.” I take a deep breath, willing my overly-beating heart to calm the hell down. This man has me in knots. I’m sure he brings out the bitch in me. I can never stop my bitter responses to him.

“But I don’t want every woman,” he replies. I scoff and turn on my knees so I’m facing him. He smirks, and I notice the mistake I’ve made. I’m on my knees before this beast of a man, my eyes pretty much level with his dick. And what a dick it could possibly be. Even from this position I can see there is quite a bulge going on in his jeans. Holy shit. I love the way his tight jeans cling to his muscular thighs and outline his growing erection—which should not be happening in the workplace, but WOW!

“Peaches?” He says my name and I can’t stop the moan that slips from my throat. The way he says my nickname... hell, when he calls me by my birthday name, it’s like melted chocolate on a hot, sunny day. A growl sounds above me, and my head snaps up to meet his smouldering gaze locked on mine. His eyes darken, and my heart skips a beat as my knickers get uncomfortably wet. I shift on my knees, moving back an inch or two. I lick my lips and say his name, looking up at him.

“Beast...”

“Peaches, I—”

“Luke, where you at?” Jay’s voice cuts off his words.

“Fuck,” he growls out before storming off back to his room. I let out the breath I was holding—holding for what, I don’t know. For him to ask me out? God, get over yourself, Ivy. Luke Baker couldn’t ever want you as a girlfriend.

I shake the thought from my head and get up to go to my brother. I see him standing by the front desk with Cassie and Dex. I’m happy Luke went to his room rather than

staying to see how much he's affecting me.

"What's up, big brother?" I ask in a cheerful lilt, trying to hide my inner struggles. Jay raises an eyebrow and studies me for a few moments, like he knows something is wrong, but I force a smile to show him I'm okay?even if it is a lie.

"You. Me. Kitten. We're going out tonight. Dex and Ads are babysitting. Carter can stay at their house, so you can truly let loose, woman." He winks at me before his gaze snags on something, or more accurately, someone, behind me.

"Do I get a say in the matter?"

"Nope," Cassie says all too cheerfully. She is one chipper girl.

"Do I really have to go? I am more than happy for Carter to sleep out, but I can stay in and relax in the bath. I could do with a nice hot soak. Plus, I have a few books I could catch up on."

"Pleeeeeease," Cassie says, drawing out the word like Carter does when he wants extra sweets or more time in the bath.

"But I'm not really—"

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“Oh, for fucks sake, just go out for a drink. What harm could it do?” Beast growls behind me. I spin around and glare at him.

“Stay out of this, Beast. This doesn’t concern you.” As I turn my back on him to once again talk to Jay, Luke grabs my upper arm. His grip is not so tight as to hurt me or leave a mark, but enough to jolt painful memories. Suddenly, I am back in my old house where Tim would hit me, almost daily. Coldness washes over my body as I bring my other arm up to protect myself. A cry leaves my throat as I wait for the blow. I squeeze my eyes closed, willing the punch to not come.

My heart is beating crazily in my chest and my lungs hurt from holding my breath, but I can’t seem to take in enough oxygen. I hear a scuffle and slowly open my eyes. I see Dex and Jay holding Luke back. His face shows utter shock and concern, as he fights against their restraining arms.

“Let me go. I need to get to her. Peaches.” I look on, confused, not sure what has just happened.

“Let him go,” I whisper. No one moves, so I try again. “Let him go.” This time my voice is heard, and everyone looks at me as if I have grown another head. Cassie, clearly shocked and upset, is the first to move. She slowly approaches and places her slender arm around my shoulders. Dex and Jay are still holding Luke back from me. Why?

“Let him go. Now,” I repeat, my voice stronger this time.

“Ivy, I don’t think—”

“Now, Dex.” I lock gazes with Luke and see the anger in his eyes, but the anger is not aimed at me. “He would never hurt me,” I say to Dex, but keep my eyes on Beast. They slowly release Luke, and he makes a beeline for me. I don’t cower from him. I truly believe that Luke Baker, my ‘Beast’, would never physically hurt me.

“Ivy, honey, don’t you remember how you just reacted when Luke grabbed your arm?” Cassie asks from my side.

“I didn’t fucking grab her,” Luke growls out, taking the last step to me.

“Luke,” Jay hisses out in warning, as Luke stops in front of me. My eyes stay locked on his, getting lost in the beautiful colours, seeing his pain for making me feel like this. I shake my head and he gives me a nod, confirming my reaction. Shit. The bastard Tim has ruined everything. I need to try and force myself not to react when men touch me. It’s different when my brothers hug me.

“I would never hurt you, Peaches. Please, tell me you believe that. Please. Before your brothers take me out back and try to rip me in two.” He gives a little chuckle.

I smile back at him. “I do believe that you would never hurt me, Beast. My brothers don’t need to take you out back and rip you in two. I’ll protect you from them.” I wink at him and he laughs, surprising me when he follows it up by pulling me into a hug. I force down the urge to tense up. I need to show him and my family that I know he would never hurt me.

I slowly wrap my arms around his narrow waist, the heat from his skin seeping into my body. He smells so fucking good. I bury myself closer into his chest, not caring who’s watching us. I feel Luke bend down a little, rubbing his face in the crook of my neck and inhaling. He’s scenting me. I thought this would creep me out, from what I’ve read in books, but in this instance, it’s kind of sweet. Now that is not a word you would normally associate with Luke. I chuckle to myself against his white t-shirt.

“What are you chuckling to yourself about, there, babe?” Beast asks.

“Nothing,” I say, pulling back from his body. I step up to my brothers, who are looking less concerned about the fact I just freaked the fuck out. “Listen, I think a night out with a few drinks will do me good.”

“You sure?” Jay asks. I smile, go up on my tiptoes and kiss his cheek. A growl sounds behind me and I turn my head to see Luke scowling at Jay.

“Did you just growl?” I ask him. He just shrugs and walks off to his room. I watch him go, stunned by his sudden mood change. I sigh. I will deal with him another time. Tonight, I’m going to have a few drinks with my brother and his girl, and try to get out of this funk. I know Carter will be safe, so I can have some me time.

Sitting in the pub with Jay and Cassie, I find myself smiling more than I have in years. They are perfect together. Cassie can make anyone laugh and that, in my book, is a great thing. She can also pull off any outfit. She’s sitting across from me in knee-high boots and tight black jeans with a white t-shirt tucked into the waistline and the word ‘Thirsty’ in red print across her amazing boobs. I didn’t have a bloody clue what to wear, so thank God she came over and helped me out.

I ended up wearing a thin V-neck jumper and my faux leather, mid-thigh skirt with patterned tights and a pair of small-heeled ankle boots. When we were getting ready, Cassie told me my boobs looked amazing, but I brushed off her comment. She kept telling me my outfit made my ‘mummy curves’ pop. I just laughed at her and finished doing my make-up. I added a little curl to my hair, showing off the layers.

I look around the room and survey the people sitting around enjoying their night out on this chilly and wet September evening. There are some lads playing darts across

the bar by the pool tables. I used to love playing pool when I was in college. Tim used to love me tempting the boys, but then he'd get angry if a man tried to talk to me, so I stopped playing. I didn't want to play his games. But no one here will stop me. Jay is sucking Cassie's face off, so I tap the table to separate them. They pull apart and look at me.

"What's up, sis?" Jay asks. A big smile breaks across his face whenever he calls me 'sis' or 'little sister'.

"I'm going to play some pool. Do you guys wanna join me?" I ask while climbing out of the booth.

"YES!" Cassie yells, making me and Jay laugh. Before I can smooth down my skirt, Cassie is running across the room to secure us a table.

"Excited much." I nod in her direction.

"Yep, she doesn't get out much," Jay jokes with a wink.

"Oh, God, I don't want to know."

"Oh, come on. You know that sex is the a thing these days, right? Everyone is doing it." God, he's speaking to me like he's a teenage boy who just got the hottest girl in the whole school. To be honest, I think he did, and so did Dex. They did good when it came to finding the right girl for them.

"Dickhead. I have no clue what sex is these days," I joke back as we pass a table of young guys. They hear me and start shouting out crude comments, but I ignore them and keep walking. Their laughter fades as we get closer to Cassie. By the time we reach the table, Cass has it loaded up and ready to play. It's us girls against Jay. I laugh at her enthusiasm. She is a wicked girl.

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“Do you know how to handle that stick, babe”? Jay asks her. She cocks a perfect brow at him and gives a reply that makes me burst out laughing.

“Baby, I can handle any stick I hold, but I need time to find yours before I can play with it.” She winks at me before Jay lunges at her. I laugh as I watch Jay take Cassie's mouth in a full and passionate kiss, making me look away from the private moment. Their love is evident in their kiss.

I set the cue ball on the small white spot and line up the shot. I bring the cue back, but freeze. The hair on the back of my neck stands up, alerting me to the presence of a certain someone who has entered the room. Staying in my position over the table, I scan the room until I find him.

He walks through the pub like he owns the place. Talking to a few people who stop him, they are all smiles. A girl tries to rub her breasts against him, but he casually steps back, surprising me. Luke would normally eat that shit up, but he isn't acting like the Luke Baker I have come to know over the past few months. I shake off the thought, line the cue back up, and take a shot.

The balls go scattering around the table, hitting the walls of felt. They clatter as they bounce off each other, making one hell of a noise. I know the sound can be heard over the music. I cringe at the sound and look up to see if anyone is paying attention. I see Luke staring at me. His heated gaze locks on mine and I straighten my spine. A smirk graces his face and my heart skips a beat. What the hell is this man doing to me?

Luke

When I heard Jay saying they were going to Sail and Anchor with Ivy tonight, I knew I wanted to drop by. I changed up my usual clothes for tonight. I decided on brown boots, with blue jeans and a dark green t-shirt under my dark khaki winter jacket. I scan the room for Ivy, Jay, and Cassie as I say hi to a few people I know. Trisha steps up to me and greets me with her tits rather than her mouth. I fucked up once when I stuck my dick in her. She automatically thought that because we had sex, we were a couple. Yeah, she was super pissed when I told her that wasn't the case.

“Hey, big boy. Fancy coming home with me tonight?” Her tits rub against my arms as I catch sight of my girl bent over the pool table.

Holy fucking shit. She is beautiful.

I step back a little and politely as I can, tell Trisha to fuck off. “Not tonight, or any other night for that matter. Stop texting and calling me, Trish. It was a one-time deal.” I walk away from her before she can reply, watching as Peaches takes a shot and the balls bounce around the table. She looks up and our eyes lock. She stands up and my dick disagrees with the movement. Yeah, I hear you fella.

My gaze never leaves hers as I make my way over to her. I bump into one or two people and casually mutter an apology, but I don't stop my steps towards my peaches. Movement draws my eyes from hers as a man closes in behind her, wrapping his arms around her waist. I freeze on the spot. My heart picks up speed. Did she pull someone already? She won't pursue anything with me, but she will shag a random bloke! I clench my fists and go to turn away, but I see the slight panic in her eyes. She tries to pull his hands off her stomach, but he doesn't budge.

That's fucking it.

I charge forward, her eyes telling me she doesn't want him to touch her. I clip Jay's shoulder as I pass him to get to my girl. He stumbles back some and goes to say something, but he must see where I'm heading. I stop in front of Ivy and the guy attached to her and speak.

"You mind letting my girl go, fuckhead?" I grind out. My blood is boiling over from him touching something that doesn't belong to him. Her eyes stay on my face, but I keep my gaze on the asshole holding her.

"Hey, man, clearly she wasn't here with anyone, so I made a move. I was here first, so you can fuck off now."

"Mate, I swear to fucking God that you had better get your hands off my girl, right the fuck now, or you will be eating through a fucking straw for the foreseeable future." I growl this time, making my point clear to him. Ivy manages to struggle free and comes to me, but the lad grabs her arms, pulling her back and making her cry out in pain. I see red.

A growl rips through me and I lunge for him. Luckily, Ivy steps back in time. I grip him by the shirt and lay a punch on him, hitting him square in the face. A crunching sound hits my ears, telling me I just broke the fucker's nose, but I don't give a fuck. I let him go and he falls to the floor. I lean over him, and the fear on his face is clear.

"I ever see you touching my girl again—fuck, any woman that doesn't want you touching her—I will fucking end you. Got me?" He nods his head, blood dripping down on the floor next to him. I turn to see people watching, but no one gets involved.

Cassie has her arms around Ivy and Jay is standing in front of them, protecting them. The look on Ivy's face breaks my heart. She is petrified right now. She's visibly shaking and tears are running down her beautiful face. I just hope she isn't scared of

me. That would kill me. I take a step towards her, but Jay blocks my path.

“Don’t,” is all he says. My heart stops as, his face displays both anger and disappointment. I frown at him, trying to figure out what he’s thinking. Jay lifts his hand to stop me moving forward, but must see the hurt on my face from his action.

“Luke, I—” I raise my hand to stop him saying anything else. One of my best friends thinks I would hurt his sister. I look at him, my heart beating like mad in my chest at knowing he doesn’t want me anywhere near Ivy. I drop my eyes to the floor and take a few calming breaths. My eyes start to burn with the threat of tears at the thought of Jay, and possibly Dex, not trusting me with their sister. I can’t be here anymore. I can’t be around them and have them thinking this bad shit about me. I look at Ivy and see she is still staring at me, trying to read my thoughts, but my head is hurting too much to try and analyse everything that just happened.

“I get it. I’m gone.” I turn and walk away, leaving a little piece of my heart behind. No one stops me from walking out of the pub. I decide to walk home and sift through all the thoughts that are running around my head. I truly believed that they trusted me. They have fooled me into thinking I belonged at Castle Ink. I shake my head, my heart hurting at the possibility that I won’t be working there anymore. I can’t work with them if they think that badly of me.

My walk home helps me clear my head some. I need to figure shit out before I make any big decisions.

It’s been five days since I walked out of the pub. My phone has been blowing up with calls from Dex and Jay, so I turned the damn thing off. Addy came around, banging the fuck out of my door, but my arse was too drunk to fucking budge.

I move off the couch and walk into my kitchen to make myself more coffee. I need a fucking truckload to shift this hangover. I click the machine and go about getting my mug and the milk, when the doorbell rings. I groan at the thought of who may be visiting me. I am in no shape for visitors. I trudge over to the door and fling it open to find not only Addy, but Cassie as well.

“Great. The Olsen twins. And to what do I owe the pleasure of this visit?” I say sarcastically, leaving them by the door and walking back into my kitchen. I ignore them as they flit around, getting themselves a hot drink. I pour myself a coffee and turn and lean my arse against the kitchen counter. I half cross my arms across my chest and hold my mug close to my pecs.

“We are far sexier than the Olsen twins, fucker,” Addy throws at me.

“Debatable.”

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“Wanker,” she fires back, and I chuckle.

“How are you, Luke?” Cassie asks. I see the concern on her face. I shrug before taking a seat at the table with them.

“Pissed out of my head. You?” Addy shakes her head at me.

“The boys are fucking livid with you right now. I’m surprised they haven’t kicked your door down. What gives?”

“I’m done working there. I thought that was pretty obvious from the other night and the fact that I haven’t turned up to work this week.” I take another drink of my coffee, loving the burn of the liquid running down my throat. I need to feel something other than the gut-wrenching pain of having disappointed my best friends.

“You can’t quit, dickhead. And they most certainly didn’t fire you. They would have to go through me first.”

“Addy, you are one tough chick, and I respect the fuck out of you, but there isn’t much you can say that will make me come back to Castle Ink. The way Jay looked at me told me all I need to know.”

“That’s where you’re wrong, Luke Baker,” Cassie says from her chair.

“Not wrong, Cass. You saw what happened. Neither of them will ever forgive me for what went down, and I understand that. It’s best if I stay away.”

“So, if I told you that both Ivy and Carter are missing you, that wouldn’t change your mind?” Hearing their names makes my stomach knot up and my chest ache. I lean forward, resting my forearms on the table, my mug firmly in my grip.

I close my eyes and let the building pain wash over me—the pain of not seeing either of them again. They mean a lot to me, even if it has only been a few months, but the thought of her thinking that I would hurt her kills me like no other. I sound like a fucking woman, but hell, fuck it, I have never been afraid to say how I’m feeling. I’m a man, and I’m confident in my sexuality. I will cry in front of anyone if the situation warrants it.

“I miss them too,” I say, as I expel the breath I was holding. “I can’t get the look of fear on her face out of my head. She hates me.” Cassie lays her tiny hand on my arm, and I look up at her, seeing the sympathy on her face.

“She doesn’t hate you, Luke. She misses you. She said that she’s text you a few times, but you never replied.”

I shake my head. “I don’t want her to feel sorry for me. I fucked up—I hurt her.” I take a sip of my now lukewarm coffee, wetting my suddenly dry throat.

“No, you didn’t. Holy shit. You are a stubborn bastard, aren’t you?” I shrug at Addy. “Luke, go and get in the shower. You need to be at the studio in an hour. I’m not taking no for a fucking answer. Now, move that sexy arse of yours.” She winks at me and I can’t help but smile at her.

“Sexy arse, huh? I wonder what your man would say about you looking at my arse and declaring it sexier than his.” I wink at her, and she laughs.

“Oh, man, I said you had a sexy arse. I never once said it was sexier than my man’s. No one is sexier than Dexter Castle. I can tell you that now.”

“Hey! My Captain Awesome is pretty freaking sexy, if I do say so myself.”

“What am I, chopped liver?” I fake my hurt and lay a hand over my heart, laughing when I see their smiles. Addy and Cassie truly are beautiful women. Dex and Jay are lucky bastards for catching them.

“Sexy chopped liver, at its best,” Cassie says.

“Whatever. I’m going to shower. It seems Caste Ink is falling apart without me.” I stand up and walk towards the stairs.

“Hey, you are not that special, Luke Baker.”

“Oh, but I am, Addison Cole. Sexy chopped liver or not, I am the prime beef that brings in the clients and the gravy that keeps the studio going. Plus, I’m the beast, and the beast always gets his five-a-day.” I wink at them and continue towards my bathroom to shower and change.

After my shower, I stare at myself in the bathroom’s steamed-up mirror and see that my beard has grown over the last few days. I normally keep it short, so I pick up my electric shaver and trim it down to a fashionable stubble.

Once I’m happy, I step into my bedroom and throw on a pair of dark blue jeans and a white V-neck t-shirt. I know Ivy loves seeing me in these; she’s always staring at my arms when I wear them. The material is so tight I’m pretty sure that one day it will tear open.

Happy with my clothes, I pop back into the bathroom and put a little gel into my hair, adding volume and pushing it to the side slightly. I give myself a once over in the mirror and am happy with what I see. I wouldn’t say I’m a vain person; I just like to make sure I look good—and I need to look good for what I’m about to do.

No more messing around. If what Addy and Cassie said is true, then maybe I have more hope with Peaches that I thought. So now I have to make my move and prove to her that I will never hurt her. I will always care for her. Both her and Carter. That little guy makes me want to push to have them in my life more than they are now. I just really need Ivy to see what I can do for her. With her.

It's time that the beast got his five-a-day, and he's hungry for peaches.

He needs a taste. He needs the juice dripping into his mouth, down his chin, covering his cock as he pounds into her. My shaft hardens in my jeans at the thought of finally taking Ivy. I reach for my dick, but instead of pulling the nine inches out, I push him down, willing the throbbing to stop. I chuckle and make my way to the girls, who are waiting for me in the living room. Addy is tapping her foot like an impatient child waiting to go to the park.

"Let's do this. I need to see her and set the boys straight about what's going to happen," I say, picking up my wallet and phone.

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“And what, exactly, is going to happen, Captain Cocky?” Addy says with a smirk on her face.

“Finally, huh?” I smile at her.

“Yep. So, what’s the plan?”

“I’m going to tell Dex and Jay that I want Ivy. Simple.” I shrug and open the front door for them to walk through.

“Simple?” Cassie says.

“Yep. I’m done messing around. Peaches will be mine. But I know I have to go slow, so I will. For now.” I say the words and wait for the panic to start, but it doesn’t come. I am so fucking ready to start this.

Chapter 6

Ivy

I walk into Castle Ink and set my bag under the front counter. A paper aeroplane lands at my feet, and I smile at it. I pick it up and lean my hip against the counter, looking around for Luke, but he isn’t in sight. He always draws intricate designs on the wings of the planes. Today, it’s stars and flowers entwining.

I slowly unfold the model and see what he has written today. I’ve been getting three or four of these a day since Luke came back to work a week ago. It’s crazy how much

I missed him after that night. I wasn't scared of him at the pub; I was scared he would get hurt. I had been frozen with fear when that a stranger put his hands on me, but unfortunately, Jay took it the wrong way. He thought I was scared of Luke. I could never fear him; I know in my heart he would never hurt me. I smile at the words that are written in neat handwriting. He sometimes sends me weird fruit quotes, calling me 'Peaches', which is weird and cute.

'Sometimes I'm an arse, but as sweet as a peach.'

I chuckle and place the aeroplane in the basket I bought to keep these special notes under the counter. Seeing a new side to Luke has been refreshing, but it still worries me that his lifestyle will come between us. I hate all the women he's sleeping with. Even though he's been super sweet to me and Carter, sending me the little notes, the women haven't stopped, and each time I see it, I take an emotional step backwards, not forward like my heart wants. The bell above the door rings and a pretty, older woman steps in and smiles at me.

"Hi, can I help you?"

"Yes. I have a booking with Luke. Is he ready for me?" My stomach churns at the look on her face. She clearly knows about Luke's exploits here at the studio. I plaster a fake smile on my face and reply to her.

"I'll let him know you're here. Take a seat." I point to the couch against the wall, before walking around the counter and towards Luke's room. I gently push open the door and see him sitting in his chair, playing on his phone with a smile on his face. My heart sinks straight into my stomach as I question who could be making him smile. Is it a girl he's already had sex with? Is he sexting someone? Maybe it's a tit-pic or something.

"Luke, your one-thirty is here, and she's ready for you," I say sarcastically. Luke lifts

his head, and his beautiful smile disappears. He stands and places his phone on the worktop, before moving closer to me. I step back, and he frowns at me.

“Why?”

“Why what?” I reply.

“You moved away from me. Why? I thought we were over this fear of me,” he says, confusion lacing his voice.

“I’m not afraid of you, Luke. God, how many times do I need to say this.”

“So why won’t you let me touch you?” I chuckle humourlessly. I can’t believe his question. Doesn’t he see that what he’s doing is wrong? Being sweet and flirting with me but sleeping with a shitload of other women. How can he expect me to let him touch me when he gives his touch so easily to every other woman who shows interest in him?

“Do you want me to be honest, Luke?” I see his small wince at me using his birth name.

“Always, Peaches,” he insists.

“Fine. I hate that you’re sweet and flirty with me, and then turn around and sleep with a bus load of other women. I’m sorry, Luke, but I don’t share very well. Call it being an only child; I don’t care, but when something is mine, it belongs to me and only me.” I take a deep breath after my mini rant. It feels good to get it off my chest.

Luke stares at me, no emotion showing on his face. I shake my head and leave the room. I don’t get far before Luke comes charging out behind me. He takes a gentle hold of my wrist, stopping my steps. I love the way the heat seeps from his touch into

my skin. He is always so warm, like a patio heater.

I turn my head around to face him and he grins the typical Beast smile at me. It always takes my breath away when his eyes brighten and his smile fills his face. Those damn lips of his look even more kissable when they turn up. It makes it harder to be pissed at him.

“Baby, things aren’t always what they seem. I—”

“Dammit, that’s what Jay says. What the hell does it mean, Beast?”

“You see me with all these women and you think the worst of me, but have you actually seen me kiss them?” I shake my head. “Cop a feel?” I go to speak, but he stops me. “Okay, I did with that one girl, but that was your fault.”

“My fault?” I ask in disbelief.

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“YES! You came into work looking like a fucking model. You were wearing those painted on jeans and that cropped green jumper, and your arse looked amazing. I couldn’t touch you, so my hand grabbed someone else’s arse. See, your fault.” He smirks at me like he is in the right.

Bastard.

I remember the day he’s talking about. I caught him checking me out a few times, but whenever I looked at him, he smirked and walked away. He did nothing about it.

“Oh, come on, Luke. I didn’t place your hand on her arse and tell you to squeeze, did I?”

“Maybe not, but it was your arse I was picturing when I squeezed it.”

“Oh, good God. What the hell am I going to do with you, Luke Baker?”

“Well, you could go out with me.” I’m stunned by his answer. He wants to go out with me?

“Go out? Like, on a date or just as friends going for a drink down the pub?” I have to ask; I hate not knowing how things are. It was like that with Tim. I never knew what mood he was going to be in. I feel my face getting hot and his smile grows. Bastard. I fan my face and look around the room, anywhere except his smarmy face. I hate that he makes me blush. I thought I was getting better at hiding it. Bollocks.

“A date, Peaches. Come on, you know you want to. This has been a long time

coming.” He leans in and lays a gentle kiss on my lips, and pulls back before I can even react. I nod my head, my breath suddenly lost.

Damn him.

My beast.

“Hey, fucker, you’d better not be upsetting my sister.” I pull away from Beast and see Jay coming towards us. His frown looks out of place. Jay is one handsome bloke and should never be frowning.

Luke chuckles beside me. He wraps an arm around my waist and pulls me closer to him. My body heats up from the contact and my girly part tingles. I can feel the warmth of Luke’s touch through my clothes. I can’t wait to feel his heat skin-to-skin.

“I’m not upsetting her, knobhead. Hey, where’s Dex?” Beast asks.

“Out back. Why?” Jay answers. You can see the wheels turning in his head. He keeps shifting his eyes to where Luke’s hand is resting on my hip.

“DEX,” Luke screams, making me jump. His head snaps down to me and he frowns. I offer him a smile and he leans in, kissing my head. “I’m sorry, babe.” I nod.

“What the fuck is going on here?” Dex bellows as he makes his way to us. I inch closer to Luke, not really meaning to, his arm wraps around my waist, holding me to him. My body responds to his.

“Calm your tits, will you. I just wanted to set a few things straight about how things are going to be around here.”

“And how’s that, Luke?” Dex grinds Luke’s name.

“I’m going to take Ivy out on a date. What happened before was messed up and Ivy has forgiven me for that. She knows I would never hurt her—or Carter. You can be the broody bastard all you want, Dex, but this is happening, as long as it’s okay with Ivy. It’s ultimately her choice.” He gazes down at me and I can’t stop the smile that forms. His happiness matches mine.

“Is that fucking so?” Dex, again, sounds pissed off, but this is my decision.

“Yeah, it is. You have something to say, Dex?” Luke stands tall, showing that he isn’t afraid of my brother. I know my brothers are protective of me, but they should know that they don’t need to protect me from Luke. Dex and Luke are locked in an intense stare down, and neither of them are giving in. My gaze bounces back and forth between the two men, one my big brother and the other with the power to break my heart into a million pieces.

“Okay, that’s enough, you fucknuts. Dex, Ivy is a big girl. She will be fine. Luke, I swear on everything I own that if you ever hurt our baby sister, I will kill you and no one will ever find your body. You got me, brother?” Jay chimes in, breaking the alpha-male stare down. His words shock the hell out of me.

Jay is not the violent type, but his threat has me feeling so flipping proud of him, not scared of him. He truly loves me. Knowing I have two big brothers who love me makes my heart swell ten times its size. Me being here with all these amazing people makes me miss my mother. She would have loved to meet the boys. She told me so much about them in her last days. I was shocked with all the details she knew about Dex and Jay when they were growing up. Clearly, she kept tabs on them.

Luke nods and smiles. “You got it, man.” They fist pump, before their attention falls on Dex. We wait for him to say something—anything. The silence is making my stomach knot up. My anxiety is not faring well at the moment. Slowly time passes, until Dex speaks up.

“Only one warning, Luke. One. I trust you with her, and I trust that she will kick your arse to the curb if you fuck up. Also, you fuck with my nephew and I will bury you, just like Jay said. You got me, mate?”

“But it is her choice. Ivy?”

“I’m in, Beast,” I tell him. Luke looks to the boys.

“Yeah, I got you, brother,” Luke answers before I can speak, and pulls me even closer.

“I want to see where this can go, boys. I love you for protecting me, but I wear big girl knickers. So...”

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“Baby girl, please don’t give us the mental image of your knickers.” Dex shudders and walks away.

We all laugh, and Jay looks between us before saying, “We love you like a brother, Luke, but Ivy and Carter come first. You have to understand that.”

“Yeah, man, and I wouldn’t want it any other way. But believe me when I say, I will never do anything to hurt either of them.” There’s no hesitation in his answer; he genuinely believes his words, and that alone makes me fall for him more. Jay nods, his understanding before leaving out the back, leaving me and Luke alone. My breathing picks up as I feel his brotherly protection leave with him. I don’t fear Beast, but my anxiety is building as I wonder if I can handle a man like Luke Baker.

“So, a date?” I choke out.

My nerves are blasting to the surface, and Luke can see them. He turns to stand in front of me and gently cups my jaw, his eyes, taking in my face, softening with every passing second.

“Yeah, honey, a date. You okay with that?” he asks. I nod and the smile that takes over his face makes my heart flutter like a thousand butterflies taking off. “Good. So how about we go to the school later and pick up your boy. Then maybe go out for some dinner and pop to the park close to my house?” He wants to take both of us out to dinner? I frown at him.

“I thought you wanted a date? I don’t want to take Carter out on our date, Beast.” He chuckles at me and leans in, laying a kiss on my dry lips.

Damn, I need to invest in some lip balm.

“Baby, we can go on a date another night. Today, I wanna spoil you and Carter.”

Oh. Well damn him and his sweetness.

“Oh, okay. Yeah, I think Carter will like that.” He cocks an eyebrow and I smile shyly at him. “Fine, I’ll like that too. Thank you, Luke.” He kisses me again and walks back to his room. Maybe spending time alone with Luke will do us good—well, as alone as we can be with a six-year-old boy running around.

Chapter 7

Luke

Watching Ivy and Carter together makes my heart beat in ways I never knew it could. I have always known I wanted a family, but I never knew I was ready to settle down until Ivy Bilson walked into Castle Ink. Yeah, I shagged around most of my life, but I knew, as soon as I met that one special girl I would stop all the nonsense and grow up.

I grew up with an amazing family. My sisters and I were always shown that we were loved, and we were always taught to speak freely and honestly. My parents are still madly in love after all these years. Sickeningly in love. Though I can’t say fuck all, because I want that. I want that with my Peaches.

I want it all.

Ivy and Carter.

But what I want doesn’t mean shit if she doesn’t feel the same way. So, slow and

steady with us, is how I'm going to have to play this out. As the tortoise and the hare story goes, 'slow and steady wins the race'.

I may have to take my time in building a relationship with Ivy, but this Beast will win his Peach.

One day at a time.

I smile when I see Carter throw his hands up in the air and yell, "FINISHED!" Both Ivy and I laugh at him. I lean across the table and offer my hand for a fist pump. He obliges and smiles at me. "See, I am a big boy, Luke. I can eat everything on my plate. Can I go play now, please?"

I brought Ivy and Carter to a small restaurant in town that has a play area outside. It's dry but a little chilly.

"You can, but please put your coat on," Peaches tells him. Good, this will give us some alone time to talk, yet still be able to keep an eye on the boy at the same time. We all put our coats back on and make our way outside. Ivy and I sit on one of the picnic tables, so we can watch Carter run around and burn off some energy. I have no clue where he gets it all from. He's like a bundle of energy. The wind picks up and I put my arm around Ivy, pulling her closer. Carter runs up the metal stairs and slides down the slide, screaming as he does.

"Did you see?" Carter yells as he runs for the stairs again.

"Yeah, bud. Keep going," I shout after him.

"He's hyped up today. I blame you, Mr. Baker." She nudges my ribs with her elbow, but I don't feel much because of my leather jacket.

“My fault?” I ask, faking a hurt look. I pout and stick my bottom lip out. My mum falls for it every time.

“Yeah. He was super excited when he saw you picking him up from school, and then you mentioned food and the park.” Ivy looks over at Carter and takes a deep breath, her smile falling from her face a little. “I know he’s always had Tim in his life, but he wasn’t exactly father of the year.”

“How has he been, since you left the dickhead?”

“Since Carter has been around you and my brothers, he’s come out of his shell. He isn’t afraid to try something and fail now. I know I seem weak, but walking away before was scary. It took everything in me to leave when I did, but I am so fucking happy I did it. I know in my heart now that I should have left years ago.”

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She looks at Carter, and I just manage to see the tear slip down her cheek. It breaks my heart to know what she's been through—her and Carter both. I can feel her pain, and it makes my chest ache for her. I lift my hand and use my cold fingers to make her face me, so she can see my empathy for her and Carter. A few more tears have escaped, and strands of her hair have stuck to her cheek. I wipe her tears away with my thumb and slide my fingers over her cheek, slowly unsticking her hair before tucking it behind her ear. All the while our gazes are locked on each other. Fucking hell, she is truly beautiful. I lean down to kiss her, but Carter yells my name, bringing us out of the fog we were in. I keep hold of Ivy's face, but we both turn our heads to see what he's calling us for. He's standing on the top a big climbing dome. We chuckle as he sits there, balancing on the metal bars with his hands in the air.

“Were you going to kiss my mum, Luke?” he yells from the top.

“Oh, God,” Ivy whispers, and rests her head on my shoulder. The woman sitting on the table next to us, chuckles.

“Yeah, I was, kid. You got a problem with that?” I joke back. His smile is fucking infectious and I realise it's something I want for the rest of my life.

“Nope. I like seeing Mum smile.” The words are like a punch to my gut. I suck in a breath at the same time Peaches does.

Holy fucking shit.

He has done me in.

Those words mean the world to me, the innocence and sincerity of them like a balm to my heart. I pull Ivy closer again, loving the feel of her against me. I rest my head on top of hers as we watch her boy enjoy his freedom, acting like a normal six-year-old. God, I was wild when I was his age, climbing and jumping off everything. I was a bit of a daredevil.

“I like making you smile, Peaches,” I whisper against her hair.

“I like smiling for you, Beast.”

“Good, because I don’t plan on stopping. You are mine, Ivy. I don’t plan on letting you go.”

“You scare me, Luke. I don’t know how to be in a normal relationship. If you want to do this, Luke, then you need to be patient with me.”

“Baby, I’ve never been in this type of relationship before, either. Well, there was one.” I take a deep breath and look over to make sure Carter isn’t getting into trouble.

“Her name was Tina, and she was a bitch. We started out great, but then things fizzled out because she was materialistic and I was training to be a tattoo artist, and that wasn’t bringing in the money. She cheated on me with an old friend of mine, who was more than happy to tell anyone who listened. She then told everyone in town that it was me who cheated. Since this town is filled with busy bodies, they took the woman’s side. So, I left and started shagging anything that moved.” Ivy hastily pulls her body away from mine, but I snatch her hand, making sure she doesn’t run. My heart is racing just thinking about all the shit that Tina caused for me.

“I’m no monk, Peaches. You know there have been plenty of women before you, but once I saw you, everything came to a screeching halt. I haven’t been with anyone since you walked into Castle Ink.”

Her eyebrows shoot up into her hairline and I chuckle. She doesn't believe me, but that's cool. I know what she's seen.

"Not everything is what it seems." I wink at her and walk over to Carter, who is sitting on a swing. I hear Ivy calling my name, and then mutter, "Oh, come on", but I ignore her. I grip the chains and pull Carter back.

"High or low?" I ask him.

"High!" he screams. I laugh and look at Ivy, who is still staring at me with a shocked look on her beautiful face. I pull back the chains a little more and let go, watching as Carter glides forward before coming back to me. I push on the swing, making him go higher. His screams of excitement fill the air around us. I laugh at him. This kid is amazing. I look over at Peaches and see her staring at us, taking in the scene before her: her son enjoying himself, and with me, of all people.

It makes me happy that she's willing to have me be involved in Carter's life. It shows that she trusts me—with him, anyway. I push Carter a few more times and then lean against the frame and watch as he swings back and forth, not going too high. His laughter is again infectious. I feel around in my pocket for the piece of paper I had put in there earlier. I smile to myself and pull it out, making sure it's still in good shape. Good enough shape to fly.

I lick my lips and lift my gaze to Ivy, who is now talking to the lady sat at the table next to her. I smile and check the words I wrote on there, and the little heart I drew. With the hope that it reaches her and not the lady she's sat next to, I bring my arm up and let the plane fly, watching as the wind carries it with a meandering trajectory, just like how our relationship has been so far.

Nothing is straightforward in life.

I drag my gaze from the aeroplane and look at Carter, who is still whooping and yelling, then I turn to look at the ladies again, my heart dropping into the ground under my feet. The lady next to Ivy is picking up the paper plane and is about to read it. I step forward, but Ivy's words stop me.

“Sorry, I think that was meant for me. My boyfriend likes to send me dirty messages.”

Boyfriend.

Holy fucking shit.

Did she just call me her boyfriend?

Oh, fuck me, she did.

The smile spreads across my face and my heart climbs back into my chest. It beats with pride. I reach out to grip the chains, stopping Carter mid-swing. He looks over his shoulder at me.

“Why did you stop me, Luke? I was swinging super high then.”

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“I know, kid. You would have reached the moon if I didn’t stop you. But what do you say we go back to my house? We can get warm and watch a film. Any film you like.”

“Any?” He eyes me skeptically. I nod my head and he jumps down off the swing before screaming at Ivy while running towards her. Her head snaps in my direction and I wink at her. I walk over to them as the other woman calls her child over, and they leave, saying goodbye to us. The lady winks at Ivy, making her blush, and I chuckle.

“Come on, Peaches, let’s go to my place.”

“Your place?” she asks. I nod, but Carter cuts me off and explains.

“Luke said we can go to his place and I can watch whatever film I want.”

“Any film?” she asks, and I nod. Her smile breaks out big time, and I can’t stop myself from smiling back at her. “God help you, Luke Baker. God help you. Come on, trouble,” she says to Carter, and takes his hand.

We walk around the building towards my car. As soon as we hit the car park, Carter slides his tiny hand into mine, and my heart stops. Bloody hell, this feels right. Fucking perfect actually.

Ivy’s words come back to haunt me as I silently pray to God for help. Carter decided he wanted to watch the Power Rangers movie and is now watching the TV series. The

cringeworthy dialogue combined with mediocre action scenes have numbed my brain and made me want to get rid of my TV altogether.

I sigh again as Carter puts on the next episode, making Ivy chuckle. Wench. After the first five, I asked Carter about the show and he gave me a full lecture on all the Power Ranger series and their character and storylines. Needing a break from staring at the screen, I go and get a drink. It's just after six, and I know Ivy will want to take Carter home soon, so I opt for pop instead of beer. I have never driven after drinking alcohol, not even one. My dad was hit by a drunk driver years ago, and it scared the shit out of me and my family.

I lean against the kitchen counter and look into the living room, watching Carter absorb the fighting on the TV. Ivy looks at me over his head and smiles, before making her way to me. I take a drink, wetting my dry mouth. The sight of her in her tight blue jeans, with a black and white checked shirt over a white vest top, making my dick pay attention. She was wearing white Converse, but took them off when we arrived, so now I can see her grey socks with little white hearts. She's cute, as well as sexy, but she doesn't know it.

"Hi," she says when she stops in front of me. She bites the corner of her lip, and my cock takes notice. Greedy fucker.

"Hi. You okay?" I ask, like a dumb fuck.

"I am. Better than you can know. Thank you for dinner, Luke."

"No problem, Peach. I'm always happy to take you guys out for dinner, or whatever we plan."

She nods. "Thank you for my note." She looks down and plays with the corner of her shirt, a cute blush settling over her face. I lift my hand and cup her jaw gently, lifting

her face to mine.

“Love seeing that,” I state. She frowns, clearly not knowing what I mean. I move my thumb over her cheek, feeling her skin heat under my touch. I really fucking hope her whole body flushes pink when she’s aroused and coming on my cock, my fingers, and in my mouth.

Oh, hell yeah. I smirk at her.

“That blush. I’m gonna bet that you will blush all over when I’m taking you, Peaches.” She gasps and her blush deepens, and I laugh. I can’t stop it.

Her face takes on a stern look, brows scrunched together, but I silence her before she can berate me.

I lean in and kiss her. Her lips are soft and warm, perfect for me.

She tastes of the candy floss we ate during the film—thank God I stock junk food for when the kids come over. I slant my head and deepen the kiss, and she sighs into my mouth, her body melting against me. This makes me fucking happy??to know that she’s enjoying this as much as me. Her kisses say it all.

Yeah, the beast has taken hold of his peach, and he can’t fucking wait to take a bite.

Chapter 8

Ivy

It’s been two weeks since Luke took Carter and me out for dinner after school and then took us back to his house for film time, or as Beast calls it, ‘braincell-killing time’. Since then, we have spent many afternoons together at his house and mine.

Seeing him with Carter makes my heart melt, but it also still scares me a little. I know Luke would never hurt us, but I thought that about Tim when we first got together. However, we're taking things slow—one day at a time.

After making sure Carter is sleeping, I head down to my living room and settle down on the sofa opposite Dex and Jay. They showed up at my door a few minutes ago, wanting to know what's going on between me and Luke. They know we're seeing each other, but not much else, and they refuse to believe me when I say we aren't that serious yet. Luke isn't helping the situation. He's always telling them we're a couple.

“So...” I leave the question hanging between us.

“You and Luke, for a start. Details, now,” Dex says. Jay sips his coffee, keeping a watchful eye on me.

“What about us?” I ask. Yeah, I'm playing dumb, but I can tell by the cocking of Dex's eyebrow that he wants me to stop stalling, and talk.

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“I want to know everything. Are you two a couple? Luke says you are, but you seem to think differently.” I shrug. “Don’t shrug at me. Addy does that and it gets her a spanking, but since I can’t do that to you, I want to know the truth.”

“Cass gets kisses withheld when she shrugs at me,” Jay chimes in. God, my brothers are evil boyfriends.

“Why would you do that? That is so mean,” I object.

“Hey, we have to keep you women in line somehow. You’ve met Addy and Cassie; you know how they can be.” Dex winks at me.

“Oh, Luke had better not do any of that stuff with me.” I clamp my hand over my mouth. Shit. I do not want to talk about my sex life with my brothers. They chuckle.

“Ha! I think Luke will come up with some form of sexual punishment for you,” Jay says. I shake my head at him, and Dex pipes up.

“I am not talking or thinking about you fucking Luke. Nope. No way, no how. So, shut it.” He points between Jay and me, which makes me laugh.

“Oh, Dex. Oh, big brother. Again with the non-sex thing. You know how babies are made, right? I mean you and Addy made little Phoebe. So, you kinda know that I’m not a virgin, and have had plenty of sex before.” I wink at him and he grimaces. I take a sip of my tea and settle back into the couch. My gaze flicks between Dex and Jay, my heart pounding in my chest.

“So, are we gonna start this or not?” Dex says, making me jump. I gulp and place my cup on the coffee table between us.

I shrug. “What do you want to know?”

“I want to know everything about you. I know you’ve been here for a few weeks now, but I feel like us three haven’t had time to just be us. The three Castle siblings.”

“But I’m not legally a ‘Castle’, am I? My mother never put Dad’s name on my birth certificate.” God, it feels weird saying ‘Dad’ out loud. Mum and me never talked about him much. She only told me they existed because she didn’t want me to be alone when she passed. She never liked Tim, and she tried talking me into leaving him. She knew there was something wrong about him, but she could never have imagined how much he would change after she died.

“We can get that sorted. We can change your name via deed poll. Simple,” Jay says.

“Do you want that, Ivy?” Dex asks.

“Do I? Do you?” I breathe out, shocked that they want me to change my name. “You want to share your name with me?”

“Of course we do. We’re family.” I nod my head and bury my face in my hands, feeling tears well before dripping onto my fingers. My shoulders shake with sobs. I have never felt love like this before, besides my mum and Carter. Having two big brothers makes my heart grow.

I feel the couch dip next to me on both sides, and then four arms wrap around me, clinging to me.

I feel safe and protected. I cry into their arms, releasing everything that has been

building inside of me for years: the pain from Tim, losing my mother, feeling weak and a failure to my son. Then the happiness of the past few months washes over me: the love from seeing my son surrounded by family, the smile on his face, having my new brothers showing me their love and support, their own friends and families taking me and Carter under their wings.

Then Luke pops into my head. My crying slows to deep breaths, and the boys pull away a little, giving me room. I grab a tissue from the box on the coffee table. I always have them on hand because of Carter.

“You feel okay?” Jay asks gently. I nod, not trusting my voice at this moment. “From the state you just got in, I can only imagine how long you’ve kept all that emotion locked away.”

“You have us now, Ivy. We aren’t going anywhere, baby sis.” Dex pulls me tighter against him.

“Thank you, boys. It means so much that you’ve accepted Carter and me. God, all of you have been amazing.” I smile at them.

“We are more than happy to have you both in our lives. Makes everything seem complete,” Jay adds.

“So...” Dex says, leaving the question wide open.

“So... What?” I ask.

“Where did you learn to draw like that? Fuck, woman, you are awesome. Why don’t you try your hand at tattooing?”

“I’ve been drawing for as long as I can remember. It’s relaxing for me.” I get up and

grab my portfolio from the cupboard. My brothers have seen my sketches at Castle Ink, but my real masterpieces are hidden inside this red leather binder. I walk back to the sofa and hand the book to Jay. “Here.” I take my seat and watch them open the book.

“As for tattooing, I could never permanently mark someone. I have zero confidence in myself to do that. I just love drawing, making something out of nothing.” I bounce my shoulders once and sit on the coffee table in front of them, watching the expressions on their faces change with every page they turn. Every now and then they look up at me in surprise. My heart swells with pride at seeing their proud, smiling faces.

“Holy-motherfucking-shit,” Jay exclaims. I laugh at his funny outburst.

“Fuck me, Ivy, these are amazing. I need to tattoo these on someone,” Dex chimes in.

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“Fuck someone else. I want this one,” Jay says, flipping the pages to find the tattoo he wants inked on himself. I smile when he flips the image around to show me which one he loves. I see Dex nod his head.

“Matching,” Dex states.

“Hell yeah.” I’m shocked my brothers want a tattoo designed by me. The one they’ve chosen was something I drew while I was in hospital one time while pregnant with Carter. I’d caught a sickness bug and was dehydrated, so I needed a drip and rest.

The design is of a castle wrapped around a forearm. The rocks as its base start at the wrist, then the castle spans up the arm, the arched windows and intricate brickwork bringing it to life, and at the elbow, where it ends, are the battlements. The detailing in the drawing is on point, even if I do say so myself. It’s one of my best pieces. The shading is perfect, as the moon sits to the right of the castle high in the sky, casting its light down on those below.

“You—you want my design tattooed on you?” I manage to ask around the lump in my throat. Their smiles beam at me, making my cry more. The thought of my brothers having a tattoo on them, that I drew, making my heart swell with love and pride.

“Hell yeah, baby girl. This is beyond epic. The shading, the fine detailing... It’s perfect for us. Dude, we are so getting this done, ASAP,” Jay says happily. I can’t help but offer a watery smile at my brothers. They are showing me their love and loyalty through their faces.

“BOOM, motherfucker. We can do each other’s, add in that extra sentimental crap you girls are always talking about,” Dex chimes in, and we burst into a fit of laughter at his enthusiasm. I fall back onto the couch, holding my stomach as the muscles tighten from laughing at Dex. Tears are streaming down Jay’s face, which makes me laugh even harder.

“What?” Dex asks. Jay barks out a laughter, making my stomach muscles clench. He chuckles with us but has no clue why we are reacting the way we are.

“I love you, boys,” I say between gasps of air. Their laughter fades, and they stare at each other as if having a silent conversation. When they look back at me, my chest tightens from the emotion in their eyes. But then two beautiful smiles break the tension, and they both lunge for me.

They smother my face in kisses and start to tickle me when I try to get away. This is what I have been missing all these years—having two big brothers.

“STOP,” I pant out between shrieking laughing. They pull back and smile at me.

“Love you, too, cupcake,” Jay says.

“Love you lots like jelly tots, Ives,” Dex says. I snort at his words.

“Jelly tots?”

“Yeah, it’s something Connie always says. It’s cute.”

“Cute sounds so fucking wrong coming out of Dexter Castle’s mouth,” Jays adds. I nod in agreement.

“Whatever, fucker.” He fake pouts. “Hey, are you coming to the Halloween party

we're having at our house?" Dex asks.

"Yeah. Luke said we have to dress up. He wants the three of us to all match, or something. I don't know; he said he will sort it." I shrug. I have never liked Halloween, but I do dress up for Carter. He loves dressing up in his superhero outfits. Iron Man is his favourite. Tim always loved Halloween, but for a different reason. He would find an adult party to go to and I would be made to stay at home with Carter. It was his way of punishing me, but what he didn't know was that I loved it when he left. Me and Carter always had so much fun without him.

"That's cool. Me, Ads, and Phoebe will be matching as well. What about you and Cass?" Dex asks Jay.

"No clue. I'll see what Cass has to say."

"Do you guys want another drink?" I stand and walk towards my kitchen

"Yeah, please," they both call back. I smile and take two bottles of beer out of the fridge and a can of diet Coke for me. When I return to the living room, I see Dex and Jay once again flicking through my portfolio, and my heart skips a beat. Every picture is a glimpse into my mind, into my past and as artists themselves, my brothers know that. I have kept this side of me hidden for so many years, but it feels amazing to finally share it with someone—well, two someone's. I smile and take my seat. I push their drinks across the table to them and they both offer me the famous Castle grin. Lucky for me, we have familiar features. So, our father did leave me with more than the artistic side of him.

Dex looks up and catches me watching them. A smirk slides across his face and he winks at me.

"We're glad you found us, Ivy. Really fucking glad." My throat clogs up with

emotion. I shift my gaze to Jay, and he is grinning and nodding in agreement.

“Me too,” I manage to choke out. My words are the truth; finding Dex and Jay is the best thing I’ve done in a very long time. I sit back and take in the moment, treasuring it for years to come.

Chapter 9

Luke

Laughter fills the kitchen at Dex and Addy’s house. The kids are playing dunking apples, but finding little success with water sloshing everywhere and soaking them. Knox is trying his damndest to sink his teeth into the bright green apple that’s floating in the large bucket of water. Dex, being the mean bastard he is, not only put apples in the water, but also onions and oranges.

“Get your teeth stuck into that apple, Knox,” Adrian, Liam’s friend, shouts. We all laugh at the scowl Knox throws in his direction.

“You got this, little man,” I say. I look at Ivy, who is standing across the room talking to Penny and Cassie. I wink at her and her cheeks redden. Fuck, I love making her blush. Thoughts of how much her skin will blush when she is beneath me, riding me, when she is screaming my name when I make her come later tonight flash through my mind.

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My dick goes on high alert when I think of finally taking Ivy as mine. We have been taking it slow over the past few weeks, but tonight is the night I finally, fucking finally, get to bury myself deep inside her and never fucking leave.

I turn to look out the kitchen window and adjust my dick in my black cargo trousers. When we talked about planning our costumes, Carter wanted us all to match, or at least have a running theme, but I wasn't keen on dressing up like a superhero. Carter is Iron Man, while Peaches is Supergirl.

I decided to dress as a SWAT member. Fucking love the movie with Colin Farrell and Jeremy Renner. Classic. I bought the full get-up: black cargo trousers and black t-shirt under the fake SWAT bulletproof vest. I even borrowed one of Knox's toy guns and have it tucked into my waist holster. I added the SWAT baseball cap to finish off the look. I look hot as fuck, if I do say so myself.

"Hey, Captain Cocky, are you looking forward to some alone time with Supergirl later tonight?" Addy shouts from across the room. Three women turn to look at me, three women who are dressed as... yes, you guessed it, Supergirl!

A bark of laughter fills the room as Dex bends over in hysterics. Soon most of the room join, all except Ivy and some random bloke who has his arms around one of the women dressed as Supergirl. I raise my hand at him and shout, "Sorry", before pointing to Ivy and explaining.

"I'm going home with that Supergirl." I shrug my shoulders. "Sorry for the confusion, ladies, but I'm a one-woman kinda man."

“A one-womankindaman?” Ivy asks from across the room. She folds her arms across her chest, making her tits push up in her costume. She looks sexy as fuck, and she is totally keeping those red boots on while I pound into her.

I shrug. “Okay, I’m a Peaches kinda man. Is that better, babe?” I say, and I make my way over to her. She nods but her blush gives her discomfort away. She’s embarrassed; she never likes to be the center of attention. The music gets turned up and everyone resumes what they were doing. I look down when we are chest to chest, her body flush with mine.

“Hi,” she whispers.

“Hey. You okay?”

She nods.

“Is Carter enjoying the party?”

“Yeah, he’s running around with the kids in the garden. Penny’s parents are out there watching them.”

“That’s good. They’re good people.” I lean in and kiss just behind her ear, making her shiver. “So, are you sure about tonight?” I say, and then kiss her again, letting my lips linger against her skin. She leans against the wall behind her for support, but I will always catch her if she falls. I set one of my knees between her legs, holding her in place.

“I think so.”

“You think so? Baby, I’m sorry but that isn’t good enough. I need a yes or no. I’m not pushing you into doing this with me. I will wait.” God, I want her to be one-

hundred-percent sure that she wants to take this step with me. I will not force her into a decision. I will be with her until she is ready. I'm all in with her and Carter. Fucking hell, that boy has wormed his way into my heart.

"I'm sure, Beast. Just bear with me, okay? Guide me through this with you. Show me what you like and dislike. Tim was a pig in bed. He never cared about my pleasure, only his. I honestly can't remember the last time a man made me come." Her voice lowers the more she speaks. My body tightens in anger at the so-called man she spent the last few years with. What man wouldn't make his woman climax? A fucked-up piece of shit, that's who.

"Baby, you will be just fine. All you have to do is feel and enjoy. Ride the pleasure beast, baby." I wink at her before burying my face in her chocolate hair. She smells fucking amazing. My cock jerks in my trousers from her scent. I lay soft kisses over her neck and start towards her shoulder, but a pull on my trousers stops the movement. I pull back and am met with a frown from Ivy. I smile at her and look towards the little munchkin standing next to us.

"Are you taking my mum home tonight, Luke?" Carter asks me. Ivy gasps, her eyes widening, and I smirk at her.

"I am. Is that okay, kid?" He nods with so much enthusiasm that I'm afraid he'll give himself whiplash.

"Yes! That means I can have a sleepover. Who am I staying with, Mum?" He peers around me, so he can see his mother. This is why she calls me 'Beast': I am fucking huge, but in a muscly way. My shoulders are wide as fuck, but I also have a good sized waist, making my shoulders seem wider. Ivy takes a deep breath and moves out of my arms. She drops to her knees to speak to Carter, but even that doesn't stop the very erotic scenes that start running through my head: the image of Ivy on her knees, my cock moving in and out of her mouth, her red lipstick marking my skin as she

takes me all the way down her throat.

High-pitched squeals break through my sexed-up fog.

“Yes! That is so cool. Thanks, Mum. Luke, did you hear what Mum said?” I shake my head to clear the residual thoughts and drop to my knees next to Ivy. Carter still has to look up at me.

“Yeah, I heard. That’s wicked, kid.” I look to Ivy for help, and she laughs at me.

“I was just telling Carter that he’s spending the night at Liam and Penny’s. He’s bunking with Knox tonight.” I nod, loving that she’s covering for me. I don’t want Carter thinking I don’t listen to him.

“That sounds like a fun night, kid. You boys will have a great time.”

“Your bag is in the car, let me go and grab it. Maybe Liam can put it in his car before we forget.”

“I’ll come with you,” I say. Dex shouts over the music.

“I bet you will.” Everyone one bursts into hysterics. Fuckers. I flip him off and bend down so I’m eye level with Carter.

“Carter, go and find your uncles and tell them you want more sweets.” I wink at Peaches and she just laughs, knowing my true intention of filling Carter full of sugar. Liam and Penny are in for a night of three very hyper kids.

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We walk outside to Dex and Addy's driveway, which is surrounded by trees and bushes. They like their privacy. I take hold of Peach's hand and she smiles at me, making my heart skip a beat again. This woman does shit to me that has never happened before.

We reach the car and she unlocks it before pulling open the back-passenger door. I stand there like a fool as she bends over. The red skirt of her costume rises up the back of her thighs, giving my pervy eyes the perfect view of her peachy arse. My dick slams into the zipper of my trousers, letting me know he approves.

Dirty bastard.

I smirk and take one large step forward before resting my hands on her firm, smooth arse. She yelps and jumps, but my large hands keep her in place. The perfect position for me to cop a feel. I bend my body over hers, my chest to her back.

"Shhhh, you don't want to alert the neighbours to what we're doing," I joke in her ear.

"They can't see anything, can they?" Her question shocks me a little. I chuckle and answer her.

"No, babe, they can't see anything, so I can do this and no one will witness you panting out my name." I slide my hand from her arse and around to the red costume shorts she's wearing under the skirt. Thanks to Addy, I know Ivy's wearing a thong under them. She gasps when my hand makes contact with her warm pussy. Even through the material I can feel how hot she is for me.

“Can’t wait to get my mouth on you, babe. I bet you fucking taste like peaches.” I moan at the thought of her flavour on my tongue. “Tonight, babe, I’m going to taste every fucking inch of you.” I add pressure to her pussy and her knees give way a little. Yeah, my girl is responsive. She whimpers when I move my fingers slowly in a circular motion.

“You like that, Peaches?” I don’t get words from her, only a nod. I laugh on a sharp inhale of breath, loving the effect I’m having on her. My dick is screaming for me to release him from the confines of my cargos, but he will have to wait for now. I can tell she’s worth the wait. My peaches will be juicy and succulent in my mouth. My body heats up from the inside just thinking about Ivy beneath me. But we are outside Dex’s house, and nothing can happen here.

I abruptly pull back, breaking all contact. Ivy’s hands come to rest on the seat of the car. I hear her take a big lungful of air before she turns around to face me. I smile at the blush that’s covering her face, neck, and chest. Yeah, she will flash fucking red when I make her come later tonight.

I wink at her and wait for her to say something. Ivy closes her eyes and takes a deep breath??as if she’s counting to ten in an attempt to calm herself-before opening them, her bright green orbs fixating on me.

“You, Mr. Baker, are an evil man. How can you leave me like this? My knickers are wet and really uncomfortable.” She shocks the shit out of me when she leans forward and wraps her hand around the bulge in my cargos, giving me firm squeeze.

“I think you should match my discomfort.” Her tiny hand moves up and down, caressing my hard-on, my dick leaving a clear imprint in the material. I jerk back some when she adds a little more pressure.

“Baby!” is all I can say as a shiver runs through my body. She smirks and starts

walking back to the house. She looks over her shoulder at me and winks. I chuckle and bolt towards her, making her scream and run into the house.

Chapter 10

Ivy

My palms are sweaty, and once again dry them on the skirt of my costume. I look at Luke, who is driving us to his house. We left the party because Luke kept touching my bum under my skirt, and in the end, he couldn't take much more. Dex laughed at him and asked how he'd managed to last as long as he did.

We both said goodnight to Carter, who was bouncing like an overactive Tigger, courtesy of all the sugar he'd taken onboard today. I chuckle as remember Liam's face when we couldn't calm Carter down enough to give me a kiss goodbye.

"What are you chuckling about over there?" Luke asks, startling me from my thoughts

"I was just thinking about Liam's face when he saw how hyper Carter was." I smile and twist my body to face him. He looks good in his black SWAT costume.

I take in his profile and my lady parts quiver. God, he is sexy. His stubble is a little longer than normal, and I can't wait to see how it feels between my legs. Tim was always clean-shaven. He used to say it made him look younger, and it did, I see that now. I was blinded by my own need to find love, and then Carter came along and my wish to give him a happy family became an impossible dream.

"Hey, you okay?" In the silence of the car, Luke's deep voice startles me. I flinch and bring my gaze to his. There's no ugliness inside him.

“I was wondering how your beard would feel against my thighs.” I snap my mouth shut and my eyes go wide. Holy cow. Did I just say that to him?

“Fuck, Peaches. Now you got my dick even harder with thoughts in my head of how you smell and taste.” He groans and pushes down on the bulge in his trousers. I giggle and bite down on my thumbnail. I do this when I’m nervous—sometimes.

“Sorry,” I say behind my hand.

“Don’t be sorry, baby. I plan on burying my head between those creamy thighs of yours. I bet you smell like peaches and cream. God, I need to get us to a bed. Now.”

I smile and watch as the town zips past the windows on our way home. In what feels like a blink of an eye, we are pulling up outside my house. Luke thought I would be more relaxed in my own space, and I love him for thinking that.

Love? Where the bloody hell did that come from?

I can’t love Luke. Not yet. Right?

I am so lost in the thought that I’m possibly in love with Luke Baker, that I don’t notice him getting out of the car and coming around to my side to open my door for me.

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I take his offered hand and climb out. As soon as I straighten up, Luke has me wrapped in his big, beefy arms and is kissing me. The touch of our lips is filled with sexual tension, the need to get hot and sweaty is clear in the action.

I grip his waist, holding him to me. I can feel how hard he is. His shaft is pressing into my body, and it's making my belly flutter with anticipation. I soak in the feelings of Luke, the way his skin is hot under my touch, the feel of his facial hair against my lips and chin. I'm pretty sure I'll have whisker burns later tonight, and not just on my face. I shiver, and Luke breaks the kiss.

"You cold, babe?" I shake my head and step around him, before walking towards my front door. I turn to see Luke staring at my arse. I crook my finger at him. He doesn't waste a second as he jogs up to meet me. I laugh at his speedy advance.

I open the door and walk into my house, leaving Luke to follow and lock the door behind him. I trust him to make sure we're safe and alone here.

"No time to waste, Peaches. Let's get right to it. We've waited long enough." I laugh when he throws his arm around my waist and heaves me over his shoulder in a fireman's lift. He marches through the house and directly into my bedroom. I squeal when he drops me onto the bed. I bounce a few times, and when I settle, my laughter dies in my throat.

Luke is standing at the bottom of my bed, eyes locked on me, and I can see the desire and lust dance in his gaze.

"God, you are beautiful," he breathes. He reaches behind his head, grips his SWAT t-

shirt, and slowly pulls it off, before dropping it to the floor. I suck in a breath when I see his chest. And he calls me beautiful. Damn, he is hot, sexy, handsome, and beautiful, all rolled into one beastly Luke Baker package.

His arms are huge, well-toned from hours at the gym. His biceps look bigger than my thighs. His shoulders are wide, and his chest is massive. Every muscle needs its own postcode from the size of them. His abs go on for days, each ridge winking at me, calling to me to touch them, to lick them. Who am I to refuse such a request.

The bold, black cursive letter 'B' on his ribs stands out against the colour of his skin, skin that is begging to be licked. I climb to my knees and crawl towards him, his gaze never leaving mine. We are inches apart, and I can feel his warm breath on my face. I lick my lips and his eyes follow the movement.

His arms hang loosely at his sides, and I see the four small triangles on the inside of his wrist. I reach for him and turn his hand over. I can see the third triangle is coloured in, but the other three are just outlined. I look up at him.

“What does this mean?” I say, caressing the design with my thumb.

“The four of us have them—my sisters and me. Michelle has the first triangle coloured in, indicating she is the eldest, the first. Then Ellie, then me, and then Alice, the baby of the family but by far the loudest.” He smiles, the pride lighting his face. It was something I always saw when he spoke about his family. I knew he had three sisters from one of our talks.

Dating a man like Luke is not a hardship; he is funny, easygoing, and very loyal to his family and friends. Oh, and did I mention he is sexy as hell? I have loved getting to know him over the past few months. When things heated up between us, he took me on dates, some that included Carter and some just the two of us. We went bowling, to the cinema, and even on a picnic at the community gardens in town.

I raise my hands and run them over his heated skin, causing goosebumps to form, making me smile. I start at his neck, then graze my fingers over his shoulders, and each of his biceps. I know he has a feathered wing on his left arm. It starts at the top of his shoulder and covers the back of his bicep, stopping at his elbow. I lean in and kiss it gently, making Luke shiver under my touch.

“What does this mean?”

“It’s for a friend from my past. He died in Afghanistan.” I close my eyes, imagining the pain he must have gone through in losing his friend.

“I’m sorry, Beast.”

“Thank you, but he knew what he was signing up for. He lived for the Army. No more dark talk okay?”

I nod my head and watch as the look in his eyes, change. “I am here for for you,”

I bring my gaze back to his, and the lust shining through is enough to blind the whole of the UK. I smile at him before moving back a little. The costume I’m wearing has no buttons or zips, so it’s easy to slide off my body. Keeping eye contact, I grip the hem of the skirt and pull the dress off. My hair bounces around my shoulders when the material clears my head. I drop it on the floor by his t-shirt.

Luke hisses through his teeth as I kneel on the bed in front of him in my red shiny costume shorts and red lace bra. I bite my lip and slowly drag the shorts down my thighs and over each knee, before letting them drop to the floor. Now I am wearing my red lace bra and knicker set and the red shiny knee-high boots.

His eyes narrow in on my boobs, then slowly travel down my body. He licks his lips and my core weeps with want and need.

“The boots stay on,” is all he says, and I nod. Luke silently watches as I bite my lip and reach for the button on his trousers. Not making a sound or move. My fingers tremble but I soon finish, and I am pushing his trousers and boxer briefs down his hips, over his thighs. No point in prolonging the desire between us.

We need to be naked.Now.

His cock springs out of its confines, and I gasp at the size. My head snaps up to see Beast smirking at me. Cocky bugger.

“That...” I point at him. “How the bloody hell is that going to fit inside me?” I trace the small dusting of dark hair that goes from his belly button down to the beast resting on his stomach.

Holy cow.

Beast chuckles and lifts his hand to my shoulder. He hooks his finger under the strap of my bra, slowly pulling it down. He does the same with the other strap. I reach behind my back and unclip my bra, letting the material sit there, hanging loosely. Luke’s eyes widen a fraction, before he pulls the bra clear of my body. My boobs are not what they used to be, hell, what mothers are perky after having kids. I don’t mind how they look, though I would rather they were plump like when I was eighteen.

“Fuck,” he mutters, before taking a breast in each large hand. I moan when he pinches both my nipples at the same time, the action sending electric currents straight to my pussy. “Eyes open, baby. I want you to see who’s making you feel this good.”

“Like I could forget,” I gasp. My reply obviously makes him happy, because he pinches harder.

“Beast,” I moan.

“What, baby? What do you want?”

“More.” I close my eyes as the hot sensation runs through my blood.

“Then you’ll have more.” I open my eyes to see a smirking Luke looking at me. I lick my lips, and Luke lunges for me, taking my mouth in a passion-filled kiss. Our tongues move together like they’ve done it a million times before. He tastes like the popcorn he ate at the party.

I feel his hands roam my body, making sure they touch every inch of me. They drop to my hips, pulling at the lace of my knickers with a tug that snaps the material from my body. I gasp, pulling away from his lips, and look down at the scrap of red in Beast’s hand.

“You did just tear them off me?” He nods, looking very pleased with himself.

“Yup.”

“Luke, they were expensive.”

“And? I’ll buy you more. Fuck, I’ll buy you anything you want.”

“But still...”

“Deal with it, sweetness. Now lay down.” He winks at me. My body heats up ten

degrees. I do as he says and lie back on the bed. Luke grips my ankles and drags me to the edge of the mattress. I squeal, and he just laughs.

“Need to taste you, babe.” He kneels on the floor and hooks my legs over his shoulders. My core clenches when I feel Luke’s puff of air on my wet pussy. The first swipe of his tongue has my back arching off the bed.

“Yes, Beast.”

“Fucking hell, baby, you actually taste and smell of peaches and cream. Damn, this shit is good.”

“Luke,” I scream when he goes back to licking and sucking on my clit. It’s amazing how that little bundle of nerves could bring so much joy to a woman. Who the hell needs to spend money on shoes when you can get free orgasms from Luke Baker?

“Come for me.” He slides a finger inside me, and my climax slams into me, making me scream out Luke’s name, telling everyone within a one-mile radius who is making me come. I ride out my orgasm while he moves his finger in and out of my wetness, slowly bringing me back to earth. I pant out big puffs of air as Luke slides up my body.

“You coming is the sexiest thing I have ever fucking seen. I need to make you come more often.” I nod my head, unable to speak.

Chapter 11

Luke

Holy fucking shit, she tastes like heaven in a fruit basket.

The taste of her juices still lingers on my tongue. I want them there every fucking day

for the rest of my life.

Damn, she tastes good.

I look down at the woman who has captured my heart in such a short period of time, but time holds nothing back. Lives can be cut short so quickly. All time does is count down to things that can't be stopped. Things happen for a reason, and there is nothing anyone can do about it. One little action can forge the path your life will take.

"Luke." I hear her voice, bringing me back to the place where I belong.

"What, baby?" I ask, leaning in for a kiss before she can answer.

"Can I taste you now?" she whispers, her cheeks reddening. I know her wanker of an ex didn't do oral, because he thought it was beneath him for some fucked-up reason.

"Baby, you can taste me anytime you want. You just say the word." I lay kisses across her collarbone, loving the little sounds she's making.

"And what 'word' is that?" she breathes out. I bring my eyes back to hers.

"Non-public." I wink at her.

"Non-public? What the hell does that mean?" she asks. I chuckle and explain.