



Mean One

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Description: 'Tis the season for revenge.

This is a dark romance/horror retelling of the Grinch. Please check triggers prior to reading.

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Prologue

THE GROUCH

“You’re a mistake! A fucking green freak no one wants!” The words hit me as hard as his fists. Warm blood quickly filled my mouth as my head sank into the cold snow.

“Gus, no! Leave him alone!” Her cries made my heart leap as I tried to protect my face from his blows, my ears ringing from the impacts. She rushed to us, hitting Gus on the back, trying to force him off me.

“No. He needs to learn his place!” Gus shoved May-Martha aside, her body falling roughly into the snow. Seeing him push her so aggressively infuriated me, and I groaned, swinging my fist into the fat fuck’s face and watching as he wobbled back.

“Why you—” He spat a mouthful of blood out into the snow as he rolled up his sleeves. “You’re going to regret that, you abomination.”

“Gus, please! Just let him go! He-he means nothing to me! Nothing!” May-Martha’s statement stung more than Gus’ blows as I stared at her, my heart shrinking.

“You hear that?” Gus grinned, blood staining his teeth as he punched me again. “No one wants you here, Grouch! No one! You’re nothing!” He swung one last time, knocking me into darkness as a loud ringing filled my ears. “Nothing!”

My body shot from the bed, my heart racing as I gasped. I had to blink a few times before realizing it was only a dream, a painful memory that haunted me almost every

night, my childhood clinging to me as if it were my shadow. I spent years trying to forget, trying to start over, but every night, I was yanked back, forced to relive the painful memory over again and again.

My hand rubbed my face in frustration, my fur soaked in a thin layer of sweat. The thin sheet around my waist pulled as her soft voice whispered in the darkness, barely awake.

“What’s wrong?” she asked.

“Nothing,” I groaned. “Go back to sleep, Max.” Her naked body rotated beneath the sheet as she rolled to face me, her emerald-green eyes staring into mine.

That fateful night I left town, Max, who was only a child at the time, had stupidly followed me all the way out here. I spent days trying to scare her off, to make her go back home, but she always refused, the stubborn ass. Eventually, I gave up, accepting I was stuck with her. As much as I hated it, it was rather pleasing not being alone all the time. It was just the two of us hiding away out here, away from everyone else. Over time, she grew up from the lost child she was into a surprisingly attractive yet annoying woman. She was no longer some innocent young school girl who followed me around like a lost puppy. No, not anymore. She was a woman now, a woman whose only goal in life was to make me happy—something that annoyed the hell out of me at times but came in handy during certain times of...need. I’d be lying if I said I didn’t enjoy her company, but no matter how much she sexually pleased me, I always felt empty in the end.

“You’re always such a meanie.” Max played with the long green fur on my chest, twirling the strands between her fingers as her bare leg gently rose up mine. My body instantly reacted to the familiar touch as her fingers slowly trailed down my chest. “Was it another nightmare?” Her hand dipped below the sheet, slowly palming my hardening cock. I nodded, slightly thrusting my hips into her hand. “You know I can

help take your mind off it. Let me replace that hovering darkness with better things.” She stroked my shaft, tightening her fingers as she reached the tip, running her thumb across it gently.

Max’s hand moved faster, touching me the way she knew I liked, kissing my chest as her copper curls fell across her face. I laid back, pushing my pelvis further into her grasp as she quickened her pace. Despite her hand being unable to fully wrap around my girth, she was still able to guide me to the edge, the tip of my cock weeping as I tried to hold myself back, enjoying the slightly painful edging. Her free hand gripped my neck, forcing me to look at her as she grinned, her mouth hovering over mine.

“You’re so close. I can feel you soaking my hand.” She dragged her grip down my shaft as I leaned into her, moaning softly. “That’s right.” She kissed me fiercely. “Let it all out.”

As much as I tried to focus on her naked body and perfect touch, all I could think about was May-Martha and those ruby-red lips, imagining they were gliding along my shaft in place of Max’s hand. The idea of her alone nearly sent me over the edge.

Max’s grip on my neck tightened as her tongue ran along mine, her other hand forcing me to come beneath the sheet. I couldn’t help but moan and thrust into her palm, soaking it completely as I came. My cock contracted as I pushed every drop of my excitement out of my body, ramming my mouth against hers. My hand gripped her bare breasts, playing with her pretty dark nipples as she melted into me, moaning alongside me.

“Forget her,” Max breathed into me, playing with the tip of my cock, her hand sticky and hot. “Just be with me. You don’t need her. You don’t need May-Ma?—”

I pushed Max’s body away, my sour mood instantly returning at her words. My body shot from the bed as I stood and looked back at her.

“You don’t get to say her fucking name,” I growled.

Max crawled on all fours across to bed towards me, her eyes wide with regret and longing. “I-I’m sorry,” she whimpered. “I didn’t mean it.”

“Yes, you did.” Even if we did fuck around, there was one thing I never tolerated from Max, and that was her badmouthing May-Martha. I’d listen to her talk shit about anything and anyone else, annoy me however she wanted, but not May-Martha. She didn’t get that privilege.

Max stepped from the bed, dropping the sheet as she stood in front of me, fully exposed. The sight of her was hard to ignore—her large, full breasts, perfect curves, and that juicy mouth of hers. It pissed me off how much my body liked hers, but fuck, even being pissed at her, I liked what I saw a little too much. It made me weak, and she knew it. She cautiously stepped closer, those fucking green eyes of hers staring deep into mine as she played with the fur on my chest.

“You know you can’t stay mad at me,” she teased, bringing my cock back to life with a single sentence. Her eyes fell, noticing my reaction, a soft, prideful grin pulling at her lips—her wet, full lips. “Don’t be so mean. Let me fix that?”

I grabbed her neck, her mouth slightly gaping as she gasped softly. My eyes bore into hers, anger and sexual frustration both fighting inside me, burning through my veins. Fuck, she knew how to play me. Her body was a weapon made to destroy me, and she used it well.

“You want to fix it?” I leaned close as I growled the question. “Then why don’t you put that pretty mouth and sharp tongue of yours to good use?” I pulled her neck, forcing her down to her knees as my cock hovered in front of her face, dripping both from when she made me come and at what I planned to do to her. “The only thing I want to hear out of you right now is the sound of you choking on my cock as I fuck

your face.” My hands gripped her curly hair, thrusting my large self into her moist mouth. She nearly gagged, her jaw popping, unable to fully fit the length inside as I grunted, pushing harder, unleashing all my rage and frustration.

Max gripped my legs, holding tight as I continued, growling at her muffled moans. Her tongue barely had any room to move, gliding alongside my shaft, her hands playing with my fur as she let me take everything out on her.

It didn’t take long for my orgasm to build, and I held nothing back as I shot my cum down her throat with a loud roar. The sounds of her gagging made me smile as I looked down, pumping the rest into her mouth. She stared up at me, eyes watering as she clawed at my legs, swallowing. I could feel her tight, hot throat contracting around me, causing me to flex and twitch until the high of it all slowly began to fade away.

I released Max’s head, pulling my cock from her wide mouth as she gasped, drops of my cum dripping from the corners of her mouth, stringing from my body to her tongue. She wiped her mouth, licking her fingers clean with a devious smile. Fuck, she was irresistible, a fucking vixen sent to torture me in all the best ways.

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“Always leaving such a mess,” she purred, leaning forward as her tongue flicked the tip of my cock. “Let me clean that up for you.” Max continued to run her tongue along me, cleaning every bit of my cum and her saliva from my body. I had to control myself, resist the insane urge to fuck her again. I pressed my cock against her lips softly, her kisses causing my eyes to roll back. “You could always bend me over and?—”

The sound of distant laughter echoed through the cave, cutting through the thick, hazy moment.

“Someone’s here,” I grumbled, pulling away from Max and towards the mining entrance.

When I ran away as a teen, I found this old mining quarry, abandoned and tucked away in the mountain caves. It seemed perfect, a hole deep in the Earth I could make my own. Over the years, staggering lost folk would lose their way, wandering the woods and stumbling around my cave. I’d always scared them off, terrorizing them and sending them away. This was my place, and I was going to keep it that way. Aside from Max, no one was welcome here.

Moonlight peeked through the gated entrance of the quarry, the world drenched in a cool hue of blue as snow coated the woods. The laughter was clear, coming from nearby. I carefully opened the gate, stepping into the snow to hunt the source of it down.

As I traveled through the woods and stomped over the snow, my foot met something, the sound of wood crunching beneath my weight. I bent down, wiping the cold aside

as I realized it was a fallen sign. Anger boiled in my veins, my heart racing as I read the hand-painted letters to myself: Beware. Here lives the abomination, a green monster no one wanted. The Grouch. My arms bulged with wrath and fury as I snapped the wooden sign. Laughter erupted through the trees as birds flew into the night sky, startled by the sound. I watched as they flapped their midnight wings, an idea hatching inside my brain, my lips curling upwards in the most unnatural smile.

A monster, huh?

I closed my eyes, sniffing the air as I caught a trail of not one, but two scents, twisted together. Oh, what fun this will be. My feet continued, picking up the pace as I followed their trail, eventually finding a stumbling couple in the woods. They were drinking, wandering around in the dark without a care in the world.

“I think it’s this way,” the man slurred, his arm wrapped around the woman’s neck. He was holding a shovel, using it as a cane to walk.

“Oh, stop. There’s no Grouch up here. Gus was probably just telling another one of his stories. You know how he is!” she teased him, taking a brown bottle from his mouth to take a sip. “That man is full of bullshit. Now, give me that before you hurt yourself!” She snatched the shovel from his drunken ass.

The sound of Gus’ name made me snap.

I lunged from behind the trees in their direction. The couple screamed as I tackled the man into the snow, knocking the frantic woman over in the process. My legs straddled his feeble body as I roared and growled, slicing his torso with my claws, ripping his body to shreds. Hot blood spewed in all directions, soaking the fur of my chest and face, hitting my tongue as I savored it. He pleaded and cried, clawing at the air in a desperate attempt to escape, but it was no use. I was seeing red, and nothing could stop me. I clawed at his skin, forcing his head to the side as I exposed his neck,

widened my mouth, and bit into his flesh, crunching his bones beneath my sharp teeth, breaking his neck. His body fell limp as his life quickly faded away.

My tongue licked at his blood as it ran down my lips, the woman screaming as I turned to see her backing away from me, tears drenching her reddened face.

Oh, no, you don't.

I crawled towards her as she scuttled back, turning to run with a second scream. She whipped around as the spade of the shovel slammed into her skull, knocking her into the snow. My eyes raised to see Max standing there, holding the tool with a giant grin on her face.

“What a pleasant surprise this is,” she cooed. The woman groaned, blood pouring from the head wound as she slowly began to regain consciousness. Max raised the shovel, whacking the woman's face again, hammering away as the woman's features began to smoosh together, becoming nothing but a bloody pile of flesh and bone. The sound of the metal meeting bones echoed through the trees.

“Easy, freckles,” I stated, honestly impressed.

Max landed a final blow, breathing heavily as she glared at me, her body caked in blood and brain matter. She pierced the shovel into the snow, glancing at the man's corpse behind me as I rose to my feet.

“What were these two even doing out here? Don't they know not to come here? This is your land.” She leaned against the handle.

“It seems I've become something of an attraction. Thanks to Gus, everyone now knows where I live. The home of the Grouch, a monster, an abomination to gawk at from afar.” I examined my bloody claws. “I think it's time I show them just how

much of a monster I really am.” I looked over at Max with a smile. “What do you say we pay little ol’ Whoreville a visit, Max? It’s time they learn what happens when a monster finally snaps at the hand that beats him.”

Max lifted the bloodied shovel over her shoulders, approaching me as she stood on her toes. “Just say the word. I’ll follow you anywhere. Besides, I rather enjoy killing people.” Max’s eyes sparkled at the bloody shovel, turning her head to lick it. I couldn’t help but grin, gripping her face as I leaned down, breathing into her bloodied mouth.

“Good. No more hiding.” I slammed my mouth to hers, nearly lifting her off her feet as we embraced, excited by the taste of blood.

I’m coming for you, Gus. And you too, May-Martha.

Chapter 1

May-Martha

Gus’s sweaty, exhausted body dropped next to mine as he grunted, huffing and puffing. I waited patiently for him to move before I did, knowing that was what he preferred. He was always dominating me.

“Oh, May-Martha,” he wheezed, exhausted from fucking me too hard, something I was going to regret allowing him to do. “You always know how to get me just right.” Gus smiled as I reflected the gesture, faking it as always.

“Yes, well, I try.” I just wanted him to leave.

I was glad he was finally done. Normally, I could slip something in his drink or get him to knock out sooner, but today, he was a bit more determined than usual.

Gus rolled from the bed to his feet, redressing as I slowly sat up and adjusted my lingerie and disheveled hair. He walked to my side, tossing a few folded bills on my nightstand. It was noticeably smaller than our usual agreement.

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“That’s it?” I softly scoffed, reaching for the money. The fucker was shorting me. Gus grabbed my face and stopped me.

“Next time, show me a little more excitement.” His thumb ran along my lower lip, smudging the red color. “Then, I’ll pay you more.” He pressed harder against my mouth, hurting me. “I like hearing you make a little noise. Shows me you’re enjoying yourself as much as I am. You may think this is business, May, but deep down, I know it means more to you than that.” He kissed my forehead, lingering.

The unexpected sound of screams outside startled us both, and he quickly grabbed his coat and police hat, rushing from my room. “Stay inside!” Ignoring him, I grabbed a long robe and followed, dashing down the brothel stairs.

The street was packed with muttering townsfolk huddled over something just outside the brothel. Gus pushed his way through, his police chief hat now back on his head as he resumed his public image.

“Step aside!” He blew a whistle, and the people obeyed him, something I knew he liked a little too well. “Hells bells.” He dropped the whistle from his mouth, his pale face draining of all color.

My curiosity got the better of me as I forced my way through the crowd, everyone pushing and shoving me as I nearly bumped into him. Gus pushed me back as I finally saw what horrified him so, my own scream bleeding into the crowd as my eyes widened in fear. It was a man and what seemed to be a woman, her face destroyed, unrecognizable. They had been slaughtered and left in the street, their blood soaking into the snow around them like a blanket of velvet red. The man’s

chest was shredded by what must've been an animal or beast of some kind, his throat torn apart.

“What creature could have done such a thing?” I asked, looking up at Gus.

He turned, and we both noticed something sticking out from the man's jacket. He reached for it, pulling out what appeared to be a blood-stained piece of paper, and examined it close.

“May,” he quivered, handing me the paper. I gave him a confused look as I took it from his hand, reading the handwritten note addressed to me.

Did you think I was gone?

Say hello to Gus for me, May-Martha.

I'm coming for you.

“It can't be,” I whispered, my eyes watering as I looked up at Gus again.

“He's back, and it seems he's coming for all of us.” My eyes frantically began to search the crowd, fear and anxiety consuming me.

He's back. He's really back, and he's coming for me.

Just then, I heard an odd and eerie laugh. It reminded me of someone I knew long ago, someone I had almost forgotten about—a child from school.

I spun, searching the many faces, noticing something peeking out from the shadows across the street: a set of glowing yellow eyes. I knew those eyes. It was him. It was the Grouch.

He's really here.

As I blinked, those burning, menacing yellow irises disappeared, leaving only a faint trail of that same eerie laughter. After all these years, he'd finally returned for his revenge.

I pushed through the crowd and rushed back inside the brothel, locking my bedroom door behind me. His note remained in my hand, the man's blood now smeared across my skin. I threw it down and began to search my dresser, tossing clothes and belongings aside, rifling through every drawer.

"Where is it?" I snapped, distressed. "I know I had it somewhere. Where is it?" I pulled one of the wooden drawers out, groaning as I threw it against the wall. My heart was racing, my thoughts jumbled and conflicted.

It has to be here somewhere. It has to be!

I dropped to my knees, grabbing my head as I groaned and cried, frustrated with losing something so important.

Where is it?

I slammed my fist into the floor at the same time as I noticed something under my bed. I reached under, grabbing the small square tucked tightly between the boards. I pulled it out, standing as I stared at the dusty box. Relief and old feelings seeped from my body as I looked up at my reflection in the dresser mirror. The box brought a wave of buried emotions to the surface, forcing me to truly look at myself for the first time in so long.

I didn't like who I saw looking back at me. After all these years, my features had remained the same despite my heart hardening. My hair was still long and brown, the

curls framing my face as they reached my chest, my cheeks flushed a faint pink. The only physical change was the absence of the life that once danced behind my green eyes. It was gone, leaving them dead and dull, much like my soul.

Look at what you've become.

I held the box close, closing my eyes as I reminisced about the day it was given to me. I carefully opened it, staring at its contents, running my fingers along it while a single tear fell down my cheek.

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

MAX

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Both my own laughter and distant screams filled my ears as my hand held his, my feet skipping down a dark alley, guiding us back toward the woods. I felt so electrified and alive, excited by the chaotic and murderous spectacle we had caused. I was bursting at the seams with pride and adrenaline, and seeing that mean old meanie happy was the best fucking part. We'd terrorized people before, but killing them? Oh, that was a whole new level of intimacy. It almost felt as good as sex with him. Almost.

"Oh..." I spun, turning to face him. His yellow eyes glowed like golden fire, his grin stretched high and unnatural. He was dripping with such rage and power, the air thickened with it, the buzz of his own excitement mixing with mine, swirling and vibrating between my legs. I felt more alive than I had in years. "Did you see the looks on their faces?" My eyes were burning with life. "I bet?—"

His mouth crushed to mine as he shoved my body roughly against the wall of a building. My spine throbbed at the impact, but I enjoyed the pain.

"You were perfectly wicked," he grunted as he lifted me higher, my legs automatically wrapping around his torso as he kissed my neck.

Perfectly wicked... What a beautiful thing to be called.

"I need to fuck you, freckles. Right here. Right now." He bit my neck, his sharp teeth piercing my skin. I gasped, my body leaning into his, his claws scraping the skin of my thighs as he raised my skirt. "I need you so fucking bad."

He wasted no time and, without warning, he forced himself inside me. My body

jolted at the immense pressure, unable to fully stretch around him as he pushed harder, again and again. His tongue glided over the fresh blood beading from his bite as his hot breath caused my skin to prickle. I couldn't breathe, enjoying every second of this moment as my back ground against the harsh brick wall.

"That's right," I breathed, grabbing his neck for support, my nails digging into his fur. "You need me? Take me. Fuck me as hard as you can. I'm yours to break." A low, animalistic rumble vibrated through his chest as he pounded into my aching pussy, unleashing all his desires and feeding his carnal hunger. I didn't stand a chance, overly excited that someone might see us. I struggled to control myself, fully dissolving into him as I cried out, coming around his furry cock. The cold air dried out my throat as I contracted and squeezed around him, smiling so hard, it hurt. Being fucked by him didn't just feel good—it felt right. So right.

He braced his arm against the wall, his claws digging into the brick as he came inside me, pumping me so full, it began to seep from my pussy and drip down my thigh.

"Fuck," he moaned, slumping over, his large frame pressing me harder against the wall. We stood there, panting, burning up despite the cold and snow. I wanted to pull him closer, to hold him tight, but I could feel his cock slowly sliding away. He was finished.

"We should go," he whispered, his eyes staring into mine as he lowered me to my feet. His claw fixed my skirt then quickly adjusted his pants as he stepped away. "They're going to be searching for me."

"Forus," I bit. "You didn't kill them alone." I raised a brow. "Just wait until May-Martha hears of what we did."

"I'm sure she already knows. I left her a note." My smile dropped at his snarky tone.

“You did what?” My head tilted as I impatiently waited for him to respond. He simply ran a claw along the underside of my chin as I shivered at his oddly gentle touch.

“Don’t sound so sour. I only warned her I was coming for her, just like everyone else. Try not to let your jealousy show, Max.” He walked past me, heading towards the woods.

Jealous? No, I’m not jealous. I’m territorial. You’re mine. Despite all these years with me, you’re still thinking of her. My chest burned with rage. You don’t need her.

“Come on, freckles. I need you to help cover our tracks.” I turned around to see him standing at the edge of the woods, those yellow eyes glowing in the night as his smile sharpened. I shook the negative thoughts away and skipped towards him.

That’s right. You need me. Me. Not May-Martha. And I’m going to spend every moment reminding you of that.

Chapter 2

The Grouch

For the first time in years, I was able to sleep without experiencing the haunting nightmares of my past. It was a blissful surprise, allowing me to sleep all night and well into the day. As I forced my consciousness from the gripping darkness, I realized I was alone in the cave, greeted by unnatural silence.

“Freckles?” I called out. There was no response, only the distant sound of water softly dripping from the ceiling.

That’s odd.

Max was nowhere to be seen, an extremely unusual thing to wake up to. It was nearly impossible to have a few minutes without her lingering around, let alone a few hours. She was always glued to my hip. As the day began to melt into the evening, I became worried. It wasn't like her to just disappear like this.

The sound of footsteps, followed by a familiar scent, eased me as Max skipped into the room with a grin. Her hands were behind her back, as if waiting to surprise me. Wonderful. I rolled my eyes, crossing my arms as I sat in a chair, facing away from her.

"Where the hell have you been?" I refused to look at her; I only stared into the flames of the makeshift fireplace I had crafted.

"Aww, what's wrong? Did the big, mean, old monster miss me?" She stood behind the chair.

"No," I scoffed. Honestly, I did.

"Well, that's too bad." She swung around and plopped her perfect ass in my lap as if I was Santa, her breasts bouncing as they nearly popped out of her dress. I struggled to contain my excitement, my eyes moving up and down her body as my mouth watered. "I have a surprise for you," she sang.

"What now?" The question was more of a whiny groan.

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Max slapped a folded newspaper in her lap, tapping the title with her index finger.

“You’ve made the front page.” She leaned close, kissing my cheek as I gripped the paper and flipped it open. “See?” She pointed again. My eyes scanned the text, reading aloud.

“The Grouch is back! Whoreville is in a panic, its townsfolk watching over their shoulders as the shadow of such a monster haunts us all. Despite years of peace, the once-forgotten Grouch has returned and seems to have one thing on his mind: revenge. Even his mother has sat down to share her thoughts on?—”

I stopped, my stomach dropping as I silently reread the last sentence. Max leaned in, curiously reading the sentence out loud, my claws digging into the leather with each word. “Even his mother has sat down to share her thoughts on both his horrendous past and current crime. She claims he is no son of hers, or her late wife’s, and vows to seek justice for the slain couple found in the street late last night, stating ‘he got away with it once, but I won’t let him get away with it again.’ Whoreville’s police chief, Gustopher, has refused to release a statement at this time.” She looked at me, her green irises watching me closely. “Don’t you listen to this.” She crumbled up the newspaper and tossed it into the fire. “Whoreville has no idea what really happ?—”

I stood, and Max slipped from my lap and fell to the floor.

“Fuck Whoreville! My own mother hates me, Max.” I stared into the flames, watching as they danced and devoured the newspaper. “After what happened, I’m not surprised. I hate myself for it.” Max quickly stood.

“We should kill all of them.” She stomped her foot. “She doesn't deserve you. No one does.”

I couldn't help but laugh lightly at her protectiveness as I crossed my arms and glanced back at her. “Even if she does hate me, I'm not going to kill an old woman. Death is already knocking on her door. But,” I looked back into the fire, watching as the embers of the newspaper drifted into the air, “I know exactly who we could kill to make ourselves feel better. Why don't you show me where that newspaper was printed? I think it's time to add some color to their dull print.”

The snowfall softened as we approached the back door of the printing press. Max watched, checking the dark alley as I used the tip of my claw to pick the lock. The back door easily opened for us, slightly squeaking as we slithered into the building.

The sound and warmth of large printers filled the air, the smell of fresh ink and newly-printed paper clogging my nostrils as we ventured deeper, searching the seemingly emptied building. If my memory was correct, there would be at least one person lingering behind to ensure this wretched little newspaper of Whoreville was running sufficiently. It was something I was personally betting on tonight. Max stopped me with her arm as we approached the back of one of the large printers. I listened, hearing a faint whistling coming from the other side. I was right; someone was here after all.

Max's grin made me giddy as I nodded and stepped around the machine to find an older man comparing a few prints. My sudden appearance must have startled him, as he nearly fell over.

“Y-you're the—the?—”

“The-the-the. Go on.” I flexed my claws as saliva dripped from my teeth, my mouth watering with anticipation. “Say it.” He stepped back, his spine hitting a wall as he

shook with fear. “Say it!”

“T-the Grouch,” he stuttered. I tilted my head, a low snarl escaping my clenched teeth.

“Bingo.”

My arm swung, slicing his torso as his body flung across the room. He groaned in pain, blood soaking the scattered newspapers around him. I picked one up, folding it as my claw tapped the article featuring me and my mother.

“Did you write this?” His dark eyes just stared ahead. “Answer me!”

“I-I-I—” was all he could manage.

My hand gripped the front of his shirt, pulling him from the ground, raising him off his feet as I slammed my forehead into his, my brows furrowed and full of anger.

“Answer me!” The room vibrated with my roar while my nostrils flared.

“I-I only print the papers!” I scoffed at his statement. “P-please!” Weak, pathetic old man. Max suddenly appeared, swaying her hips and twirling her hair.

“I found something I think you’re really going to like.” She winked. “Follow me.” My eyes returned to the bawling man, dropping his body as I grabbed one of his arms and dragged him behind me, his blood smearing along the floor as we followed Max. She led us around the corner to what appeared to be an old-school printing press, one with a large metal plate that hovered above the base. She skirted around it, tapping it with her fingers. “I think we could put this beauty to use, don’t you?”

“I like the way you think, freckles.” God, she was beautifully insane. I turned to look

at the man over my shoulder, his wounds leaving a trail of blood behind him as I dragged him closer. “Since you don’t want to tell me, I’m going to force it from your mouth with the most excruciating pain. Get ready, old man. You will tell me who wrote that article.” I yanked his arm up and slammed it onto the base of the press.

“No! No! Please!” the man begged and pleaded, trying to rip his arm free with the other, scrambling to escape my grip.

Max pulled his free arm, forcing it to the ground as she stomped on his hand, crunching his fingers beneath her shoe as she giggled at his screams and cries. I gripped the handle of the hovering plate, grinning as I stared down at him, raging with power.

“Tell me.” I squeezed the handle. “Who wrote the article?” The man sobbed uncontrollably, unable to answer me. Pity. “Fine. Let’s see if you can print these newspapers with only one arm!” I yanked the handle as the metal plate began to fall.

“Wait! Wait!” I stopped the heavy plate just in time, the bulky slab hovering an inch above his shaky arm. “I-it was that female reporter! T-the one with a silly name.”

“What name?” I demanded. He didn’t answer, only begged. “Tell me their name, or I’ll peel your flesh from your skull.” I bore my teeth.

“Cindy! Her name is Cindy!”

“Cindy what?”

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“Cindy or something!” Max and I looked at one another. Interesting. “Please, please let me go. I did what you asked. I gave you her name. Please!”

“Go?” I laughed, Max mimicking me as we looked at the old man. “Oh, no.” I let go of the handle as the metal slab fell and crushed his entire arm, his bones breaking and squishing, followed by his unnatural cries. I bent down, gripping his jaw as I stared into his fear-stricken eyes.

“Who said you’d be walking out of here alive?” My hand flexed as my claws began to brutally shred and tear away at his flesh, reaching deep into his stomach as I played with his organs. His eyes bulged, watching me as I gripped his intestines and ripped them fully from his gut. His blood ran down my hand, coating my fur in such a deep, dark crimson. “Besides,” I played with the blood between my claws, “I need ink to leave a message.”

Max stood behind the man, snapping his neck gracefully as I rose to paint my words across the wall: You’re next, Cindy. I’m coming for you.

I stepped back, admiring my work. Max rested her head against my chest, raising my claw as she sucked it clean, her tongue gliding along my fur. I stared down at her, our eyes locked as she grinned, my finger between her teeth.

“So fucking wicked.”

Chapter 3

May-Martha

“May? May, open up! It’s me.” Gus knocked against the locked door of my room, impatiently waiting for me to let him in. I hesitated before unlatching the many locks as he burst into the room, his face red and sweaty, as if he’d been running for hours. I could tell something was wrong by the look plastered across his face.

“Gus?” I gently grabbed his arm, helping him to the bed as he tried to catch his breath. “What’s happened? What is it? Gus, what’s wrong?” He struggled to speak, panting as he looked at me, his eyes soaked in fear.

“The Grouch,” he wheezed. “He’s killed again.” My heart sank at his words. “He... Fuck, he brutally murdered the old man who works down at the printing press. There’s blood everywhere. Everywhere! The whole place is a bloodbath, May. Fuck, and he—” he gagged, “he used the old man’s blood to leave a message on the wall right next to his corpse.” He painted the most disgusting, sickening image as I tried not to imagine what he must’ve seen.

He left a message? Another one? My face burned with fear, wondering what it must say.

“What is it?” Gus rubbed his face, struggling to control his temper. “Gus, what did the message say?” He looked at me, his expression stone cold.

“He’s coming for Cindy.”

“Cindy? The reporter?” He nodded. “But why?” Cindy never did anything to him.

“My guess is he didn’t like the piece she did with his mother. So, naturally, he’s targeting her. A bit extreme, if you ask me, to want to kill someone over a fucking article. But then again, that monster isn’t just someone. He’s an abomination.” Gus spat on the floor, grumbling to himself. I hated when he called him that.

If the Grouch was going after Cindy, I needed to warn her, and sooner rather than later.

“Why don’t you make yourself comfortable, and I’ll run down and get you something warm to eat?” Gus eyed me closely before nodding, leaning back on my bed.

“Get me some water real quick, will you?”

I offered a forced smile, stepping to my dresser as I poured him a glass, facing away from him. Without drawing attention, I carefully retrieved a small pouch from my corset and dumped the powdery contents into his glass, waiting until it fully dissolved. My eyes stared back at their reflection through the mirror, and I found no sympathy for what I was about to do to him.

“Here you go,” I chimed as I turned, handing him the water, watching as he raised it to his lips.

Yes, drink it all, you fucking pig.

I waited until there wasn’t a drop left before grabbing my coat and rushing to the door. I stopped and spoke to him over my shoulder, my voice low and gentle. “Sleep well.”

“I’m wide awake, May. Just...hurry back with the-the food—” He slumped over onto the bed, sunken into a forced sleep. I shut the door behind me and quickly made my way out of the brothel, down to the snowy street.

Thank God for fucking drugs.

Cindy wasn’t far from the brothel, working her usual night shift at the bar around the corner. I carefully ducked inside the smoky building, brushing the snow off my jacket

as I approached the heavily tattooed woman behind the counter, her blonde hair pulled back into a high ponytail as she tossed her dish rag over her shoulder and turned to face me.

“What can I get you—” Her smile dropped as she recognized me. “Well, if it isn’t the infamous May-Martha. Tell me, did you finally run out of dicks to ride in that brothel and decide to come down here and give us ladies a try?” Cindy winked, leaning forward as her breasts pressed against the top of the bar.

“If only women paid to fuck me,” I teased.

“Nah, us ladies don’t have to pay for sex. Forcing people to fuck us with fake smiles until we leave the room—that’s what men do.” She sucked her teeth, looking at my outfit. “So, are you still dealing with Gus?”

“Unfortunately. You know he’s always taken an extra liking to me. Thankfully, I have a little friend that makes it bearable.” I lifted the small bag from between my breasts as she smiled.

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“Drugging the head of Whoreville’s finest? Classy,” she laughed while I stuffed the bag back into its hiding spot.

“What about you? Why are you still slinging drinks down here if you’re reporting? Need someone to fill your position? I wouldn’t mind bartending, you know?” I was envious of her job—fuck, all, really, wishing I had anything instead of my current one. Sadly, it was all I could find. After what happened, no one in this town trusted me.

“Having the infamous May-Martha serving drinks would bring in more business,” she chuckled. “But, unfortunately, I got bills to pay. Reporting for that newspaper and writing articles may seem promising, but they only pay so much. A real hit or miss.”

“I hear that. Gus has every other person here terrified to visit me. He doesn’t exactly like the idea of sharing. Don’t get me wrong, he pays well, but playing favorites isn’t exactly good for business.”

“Gus has been possessive of you for as long as I can remember. Especially with that Grouch.”

This was the moment. “Hey, speaking of—just curious, but back in the day, did you ever interact with the—” I stopped, hating the words that were about to come out of my mouth. “The Grouch?”

“The Grouch?” Her brows pressed inward as she tried to think. “Can’t say I have. Outside of my friends, the only person I really interacted with was...” Her words trailed off, her eyes focusing on a deep thought as she began to pour me a shot of

whiskey.

“Who? Who, Cindy?” I pressed.

“Ah, no one. I mean, we were kids and it was years ago. It probably has nothing to do with him. It’s nothing worth bringing up.” She bent down, messing with things beneath the bar.

“Maybe, but...I’ve come to warn you, Cindy.”

“Warn me?” She scoffed, sitting up with a glass in her hand as I leaned in close.

“The Grouch. He’s...he’s killed. Again. Only this time, it seems your words really set him off. He didn’t like what you wrote about him in the paper, and now, he’s coming for you.”

Her face froze as the color slowly drained from it.

“Me? Over the article quoting his mother? Seriously?” She slammed the cup down, shattering the base. “Fuck,” she groaned. Cindy began to clean up the broken glass. “My dad warned me to stay out of journalism. I should’ve listened, followed in his footsteps and worked at the fucking post office just like he wanted!” She froze, wiping her forehead. “What am I going to do, May?” I could feel the fear in her voice.

“I’ll let you know when I figure that out myself.” I picked up the shot glass, shooting the whiskey as it burned my throat.

“Yourself? Did he threaten you too?” she asked. I nodded.

“The night they found that couple in the street outside the brothel? Well, turns out, he

left me a note.” I pulled the bloodstained paper from my coat, slapping it onto the bar before she picked it up and read it. “I think I might’ve even seen him watching from the shadows across the way.” I grabbed the bottle of whiskey, pouring myself a second shot.

“No shit? Is he as frightening as they say? I mean, we all knew him as kids, you more than anyone else, but that was ages ago.” I took the second shot, pouring myself a third as she watched me with a raised brow.

“Don’t know. I only saw his eyes. But there was this eerie, familiar cackle I recognized, this almost child-like laughter, except when hearing it, it shot a shiver down my spine. It was the strangest, creepiest thing.” Cindy watched me as I rubbed my temples, trying to forget.

“Max,” she whispered beneath her breath.

Max?

The name sounded familiar, but Cindy’s expression told me there was more to the story.

“Who’s Max?” I drank the third shot, slamming the glass onto the bar with a groan.

“She was this kid we went to school with, but she was younger than us. She had copper-colored hair and green eyes, dark freckled skin, striking features. She was always following people around, searching for a friend. But she was weird as fuck, May. She would always pick fights with the bigger kids, begging them to hit her and stuff. And when they did, she’d laugh through it all with that creepy-ass cackle. I’ll never forget the sound. I’ll admit, I may have bullied her from time to time, but May, the girl was fucking crazy. I remember one day, me and some friends were pushing her around when heshowed up. He threatened to hurt us if we didn’t leave her alone.

He scared the shit out of me then; I can only imagine how he looks now. After that, he and Max seemed to have this...thing where she followed him around like a lovesick puppy, always hovering and hanging off him at school. And he just let her, even though he looked miserable the whole time. I'm surprised you don't remember her. Truthfully, I always thought he would snap one day and hurt her, but he never did. I guess since she liked him, she was the one person he didn't hate. Well, besides you, of course."

Faint memories of her flashed across my mind. I'd seen her prancing around him at school, but I tried to keep my distance around the other kids. "After what happened when we last saw each other, I'm sure he hates me more than anyone else."

Cindy scoffed at my words.

But why Max?

"Not more than Gus," she taunted. "I've never seen two people hate each other more than them." I shot her a look as she quickly changed back to the previous subject. "The day the Grouch took off, after everything happened, I remembered seeing Max. She wandered off into the woods and never came back. I guess she must've followed him and has been living up there with him ever since. Shit, those two are probably up in that cave of his, keeping each other company, as we speak." I shuddered at the idea of them together. "Look, I'll try to be careful. But May, if anyone should be scared of that monster, it's you. You broke him. You and Gus." Cindy patted my hand. "I would be extra cautious if Max really is involved with him. She's psycho, May. If she's anything like the child she once was, you're fucked. The only thing she cares about is him, and you, my friend, are the only person in her way of having him all to herself."

I exhaled, my spine tingling, as if someone was watching me. I scanned the bar, searching every face, but to no avail. I wasn't sure what was happening, but I

couldn't shake the feeling.

“I think I need a stronger drink.”

Chapter 4

The Grouch

I pulled a few stray pine needles from my fur, flicking them across the room as I groaned. Max had begged I cut down a tree for her to decorate, and as much as I hated the idea, I didn't want to listen to her whine. So, I chopped one down and dragged it all the fucking way back here just for her. The entire mining quarry had transformed overnight, as if Christmas had thrown up, leaving holiday decor scattered across every inch. Multi-colored lights hung from rigid sides of the cave, wrapping around every surface as they warmed the dark, damp tunnels. Red velvet ribbons and hand-cut paper snowflakes were stuck to everything. It made me sick. I fucking hated Christmas after what happened, but I knew it made Max happy, being her favorite holiday. So, I kept my mouth shut and pushed through the trauma for her. Still, I always wondered how she was able to collect so much fucking shit over the years. She was always showing up with stuff, crafty in her own way, sort of just making things happen.

Max's scent quickly filled the cave as the sound of her footsteps shadowed, followed by the sound of her soft laughter. My body eased at her presence. I had asked her to go back into town and see if she could locate Cindy. It still baffled me that Max's childhood bully was the very same reporter who was printing such shit about me from my own mother. It was like a weird cosmic joke lining up for the final punchline, one I planned to have Max deliver personally. It was only fitting.

She walked into the room with such grace, smiling as her curls bounced. Her bronze skin filled the room with warmth, those eyes of hers shining like two emeralds in the

sun. Between the anticipation of her news and seeing her fucking perfect body strutting around, my cock twitched, slowly hardening as she pranced to my side and bent down, her lips hovering over my ear.

Control yourself. You can't just keep fucking her night and day.

"I have news for you," she whispered. My claws dug into the leather arms of my chair as her hot breath danced along my fur, causing it to stand up along the back of my neck.

"What is it?" I breathed. Max slid her hand down my chest, playing with a few strands of my fur. Goddamn tease.

"It looks like Cindy isn't only writing articles but also works part-time down at that corner bar near the brothel. I saw her last night, speaking with someone. Someone you'd never expect in such a place." She leaned in closer as her tongue gently traced my ear. My body vibrated as a low snarl built deep in my throat, and she snickered. She knew exactly what she was doing to me.

"Who?" I exhaled. "Who was she meeting?" I swallowed, trying to force my urges back.

"May-Martha." My entire body tightened the second her name hit my ear.

MAX

"Did you say May-Martha?" his voice whispered the question with no emotion as I observed his face closely. There was an odd shadow cast over his eyes, like a storm brewing in the distance.

"Does that really surprise you? Cindy tortured me as a child." I kissed his cheek.

“She was always a ruthless bitch who took too much pleasure in hurting others. It only makes sense that your little miss May-Martha would befriend her, after what she did to you?—”

The old meanie grabbed me by the throat, yanking my body down towards his as he stared into my eyes, a low and threatening snarl fuming from his chest. I couldn't help but smile, enjoying his rage. I loved it when he got rough with me and didn't treat me like some delicate flower.

“I've told you,” he squeezed me tighter, “you don't get to speak of her.” I gasped, trying to breathe as he constricted my airway. He tossed my body aside, and I hit the cold floor, coughing, my throat aching from his grip. His temper always tickled me, the way he tried to act so big and bad when, really, he was just as fluffy on the inside as he was on the outside.

“Why are you always so mean to me when I say her name?” I asked, sitting up. “She's no one. She doesn't deserve your thoughts, not after what she did.”

He growled, baring his canines at me.

Go on, show me that temper of yours. It doesn't scare me. Just a big old teddy bear.

“I'm warning you,” he huffed. “You better watch your mouth, or?—”

“Or what?” My brow raised. “Are you going to hurt me? Kill me?” He squeezed his hands into fists at his side as I rose to my feet. “No, I don't think so.” I slowly walked to him, gazing into those menacing eyes. My hand trailed up his chest, feeling his chiseled muscles beneath his thick fur as I leaned in close, standing on my tiptoes. “You know why? Because you like me. More than you want to admit. So, if I want to speakherfucking name,” I ran my finger along the underside of his chin, “I will.” He glared back at my smile, grumbling.

That's right, show me your inner beast. I'm not scared of you.

"You think you're so safe with me." He gripped my throat again as I gasped, lifting me off my feet. "But you're wrong." He was wrong. I wasn't scared of him.

My hands gently grabbed his wrists, allowing him to manhandle me.

"Y-you can't hurt me. You l-love me. You know y-you do." His brows furrowed as he released me, once again dropping me to the floor.

"That's where you're wrong, freckles. The only heart I have is tattooed across my chest." He lifted his fur, showing the old red heart tattoo. "This belongs to one person, and that's not you." He scoffed as he began to turn and walk away.

Lies.

"You can lie to yourself, but don't lie to me!" I shot after him, grabbing his arm. "I know you love me. I know it!" He lifted me by the neck yet again, slamming me against the cave wall as his nostrils flared. My chest heaved, ignoring the throbbing pain coming from the back of my body. His eyes stared into mine, sparking.

There. The edges of my lips curled as I realized what I was doing to him.

"Go on. Do it." His claws constricted. "Break me. If you don't love me like you say, then it's an easy choice. Do it. Snap my neck and be rid of me." I ran my tongue along my lips, and his breathing picked up, his arms flexing and bulging with raw strength, fighting his instincts. His thumb ran along my lower lip as he groaned, a low growl grasping the end of his sound. "See? You can't." He huffed, leaning closer, his mouth hovering over mine. "You may not say it, but I know, deep in your rotten core, your mean heart beats for me. Same as her." His body fell rigid as he roughly broke away from me.

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“You’re wrong,” he grunted. His words stung, igniting anger within me.

No, I’m not! I struggled to breathe, lightheaded and frantic to make him stay, to make him see.

My eyes scanned the room, noticing a nearby strand of lights hanging along the cave wall. Without thinking, I snatched the strand and rushed after him.

“Don’t you walk away from me!” My voice growled through gritted teeth as I lassoed the lights over his large frame, hooking his neck. He stopped, unsure of what was happening. My hands pulled, yanking him back as he tried to grab the lights looped around his neck. I pulled again, knocking him to his knees as he tried to turn and face me.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing?” My hands curled around the light strand, closing in on him as I forced his head up to stare at me. “You—” I yanked the strand again, stopping his words as I bent down, my curls bouncing around my face.

“I’m simply reminding you how much you really do like me.” My back straightened as I lifted my leg and pressed my foot into his chest, the heel of my shoe digging into his fur. “I know everything that dark, twisted little heart of yours desires.” My hands tugged, yanking his face closer with the strand, my heel digging deeper. “I know exactly how to make you beg.” I kicked his chest, loosening my grip on the light strand and knocking him onto his back as he groaned. “I know how much you want my body.” I stood over his face, my feet on either side of his thick neck, tugging at the lights. “And, in spite of everything you say, I know just how much you fucking need me.”

His claws moved from protecting his neck from the strand and grabbed my ankles. His hands slid delicately along my skin, causing it to tingle, before reaching the back of my knees, whacking them. The force caused my legs to buckle as I plopped onto his chest, my knees bent and spread around his face. His hot breath seeped under the hem of my skirt, teasing my aching pussy. I could hear the hunger in his breathing, the craving he had for me and only me. I knew what my body did to him, and right now, he was exactly where I wanted him.

I grabbed his hand, guiding it up my legs to my waist, taking my time as I glided it over my breasts, kissing the top of his hand lightly. I then used his sharp claw to cut the straps of my dress, rolling the material down and freeing my chest. A low rumble rocked from his chest and up my body as I moved his hands back to my breasts, softly moaning at how he felt against my bare skin. My heart raced with such excitement and enjoyment as I lightly ground against him.

“You bring that wicked, greedy little pussy of yours over here,” he demanded, playing at my now-hardened nipples, tugging at them while he licked his lips. “Now.”

“No,” I breathed, shaking my hair from my shoulders as I quickened my grinding, leaning into his touch, using one hand to tug the lights around his neck. “You’re going to listen and watch as I use your body however I want until I come all over it.” I gasped, moving faster. “Time to suffer for being such a bad boy.” He snatched the colorful light strand from me and forced my hands forward, wrapping it tightly around my wrists. I laughed at his aggression as he yanked the strand and forced my body over his, my pussy hovering over his face. “So needy,” I teased. He grabbed the hem of my skirt, ripping my clothes open like a present.

“I’m not a fucking boy,” he snarled, slapping my bare ass hard as I gasped, inching closer to his lips. “I’m a goddamn monster.” His tongue flicked my swollen clit, my spine straightening and back arching at the contact. I couldn’t help but faintly cry out, rocking my pelvis as he snaked closer, tasting my wet, aching pussy. My bound

hands pressed against the cold floor, the warmth of the lights contrasting against the cold air as I began to sweat, my breasts swaying with my movements.

“That’s right,” I breathed. “Now eat me like the big, bad monster you are.”

His tongue stretched deeper inside me, his hot breath covering my body as his claws dug into my backside. My back arched further as my spine ached, pushing me harder against his soft, furry face as he fucked me with his tongue, devouring every bit of my weeping excitement. It didn’t take long to feel the pressure building within my core, but I refused to let it surface, biting my lip as I held it back and embraced the painful resistance. I was determined to draw it out and live in this moment forever. With him.

“I can feel the fever burning between your legs,” he breathed into me. “Go on and soak my face, freckles. Suffocate me with your tasty cum.”

“No,” I cried, forcing the wave of excitement down. “Not yet.” He growled, clawing my legs for support as he flipped our bodies, rolling, slamming me on my back.

“I wasn’t asking,” he gritted, rising onto his knees and unbuttoning his pants. His hands quickly unleashed his cock, a vibrant green, hairy beast that had grown three sizes larger. I could feel my eyes twinkling at the sight of it, my mouth watering with anticipation. He grabbed my legs and yanked me close, rubbing his wet, sticky tip along my center and against my clit. Fuck, he felt so good. His fluids mixed with my own as he stroked me with his enormous cock, finally finding my orgasm.

“There it is.” He grinned while forcing himself inside me. The immediate pain and pressure made me scream as my eyes watered and lips curled. I loved the way his cock felt inside me.

“Yes, take it from me,” I whimpered. “Take my cum. It’s all yours.”

He raised my legs over his shoulders, pinning my bound arms above my head as he rammed further into my cunt, grunting as he quickened his pace and fucked the hell out of me. I tried to scream, to cry out in ecstasy as my climax built, but my throat was noticeably dry, burning from my insanely rapid breathing.

No. I knew he liked hearing me. I tried to swallow, but it was no use. I didn't have enough spit.

"Let me help you." He gripped my face and forced my mouth open, my tongue curling out as he spit down my throat, his saliva coating it enough to let me scream as he forced himself deeper into my pussy.

"Yes. Yes!" I couldn't stop myself, pulsating around his cock as he forced every drop out of my body, making me squirt all over his cock, allowing him to move a little easier. I knew he was holding out on me, trying to resist his own urge to come. Despite how much my body shook and ached with absolute pleasure, I slapped his hands from my wrists, hooking his neck instead as I yanked his face closer. "You better come inside this pussy, or I'm going to fuck you from behind with one of your favorite little toys." His eyes ignited, his body thrusting harder into mine, again and again, until he couldn't hold back.

"Yes, ma'am."

"That's a good boy." I squeezed my legs tight around his neck, moving alongside him. "Fill my pussy." He growled, his claws tearing into my skin as he began to roar, coming hard inside me.

"Fuck, Max!" Hearing him scream my name, knowing how good I made him feel, made my heart glow with absolute joy.

"That's right, say my name," I whispered, smiling as he continued to fuck me,

pumping his hot cum into me until it dripped and seeped out of my body. “Say it.”

“Oh, Max,” he whined, jolting as he slowed his pace, the lust-filled haze beginning to clear from his eyes. He watched me closely, pulling his wet cock from my body as I moaned, already missing the way it felt. He silently removed my arms from his neck and unwrapped my wrists as my hand touched his face gently. For a minute, we sat there, trying to catch our breaths as we simply stared at one another, completely lost in our sinful moment.

“What do you say you grab one of those toys, and we enjoy ourselves just a little longer?” His eyes twinkled, a devious little grin peeking from the corner of his mouth. I raised a brow, knowing I had won. He was mine and always would be. His thoughts may be stuck in the past, but his body was here, with me, and I knew exactly how to please it.

“You going to get on all fours and let me fuck you from behind this time?” I asked, biting my tongue softly. He leaned down, kissing me fiercely, his claws gliding along my body, feeling my curves.

“Just promise to fuck me real good, and I’ll let you do whatever you want, freckles.”

THE GROUCH

Max wrapped the opposite end of the lights around her hand, whipping them as they smacked my ass hard, one of the bulbs popping from the impact. I instantly moaned, liking the pain. The strand remained wrapped around my neck as she tugged again, constricting my airway, the bulbs slightly burning me.

Fuck, yes. Make me gasp for air, you wicked thing.

Her soft, warm hands gently wrapped around my legs then, gliding up as she clawed her nails into my ass cheeks, on her knees, same as me. She made the most delicious noises, kissing my body as her mouth made its way to my backside, swirling around my fur. She ran a hand around to my cock, which had hardened once again.

“You better not fucking tease me,” I breathed, her fingers curling over my shaft as she began to stroke my cock, eating me out from behind with that pretty mouth of hers. Fuck, she felt like heaven, meeting my every desire with such excellence. Max tongued me for a few more minutes before she leaned back and spat into my ass, laughing as she began to finger me, removing her hand from my cock.

“I’ll tease you as much as I fucking want.” I could hear that devilish smile of hers in her voice. “But I’d rather you watch me as I fuck the hell out of you.” She removed her fingers, flipping me onto my back with surprising strength, wearing nothing but a black harness around her pelvis, a candy-cane-striped toy attached and ready for me. I exhaled deeply, licking my lips as she crawled over me until it was near my face.

“Now, open wide.” She sat up, gripping my chin and slowly pushing the toy into my

mouth. “That’s right, get it nice and wet so Mommy can fuck you real good.” Fuck, I had to control my breathing, too damn excited as I lathered the toy in my saliva. I squeezed her thighs, my cock growing as she lightly thrust the dildo into my mouth, the tip tapping the back of my throat as my tongue wrapped around it. She moaned, melting me as the dildo fucked my mouth gently, warming me up. “There,” she moaned, gently removing the toy and kissing my chest as she crawled backward. Her eyes remained glued to me as she flicked my cock with her tongue before repositioning herself between my legs.

“Don’t you dare go easy on me,” I warned, greedily eating up the sight of her. Max’s smile grew as she gripped the toy and lowered it to my ass, rubbing the wet tip around my body before aggressively forcing it inside. A whimper escaped through my teeth as she went.

“I don’t plan to,” she winked, shoving it deeper until her pelvis nearly slammed into my backside. Fuck, yes.

Max began to fuck me, grunting as she used all her strength to ram into me, one hand bracing herself on my thigh, the other stroking my cock the best she could. My legs wrapped around her waist, forcing her closer as my orgasm quickly started to build. I watched her breasts bounce, her body glistening with sweat, looking absolutely phenomenal as she fucked me. It was almost too much.

Fuck, no. Not yet. I struggled to keep my eyes open, my body fighting itself as I clawed at the bedding beneath me.

“Hey,” she snapped, yanking the lights around my neck as my head shot up. “You better keep those eyes on me. I want you to watch as I make you come.” Her hand twisted, reeling in the strand as my breathing restricted further.

“Oh, Max,” I whined, “don’t stop. Don’t you fucking stop!” I came as the words

ripped from my mouth, my body thrusting as my cock spazzed, my cum spewing into the air. “Fuck!” Max leaned forward, still driving the dildo into my ass as my cum began to splatter along her bare chest and torso, covering her skin.

“Yes,” she moaned, closing her eyes as she continued. “Come all over my body.” I could hear her own orgasm growing between her moans as she quickened her speed, coming with me, the two of us nearly screaming.

I couldn’t control myself. I needed more.

Letting the toy slip from my ass, I wrapped my body around hers, moving us around until her face was buried in the bedding, her perfect ass raised high for the taking. My hands bound hers behind her back, wrapping the lights around her wrists once more as I quickly removed the wet dildo from her harness, spitting onto it before shoving it up her ass with no warning, my own cock, suddenly hard again, sliding into her dripping pussy with a loud moan. With one hand, I held the candy-cane-striped toy against my abdomen while the other gripped a handful of her curly copper hair, fucking her senselessly, drawing out our orgasms as long as possible.

“Fuck, Max.” I relished in her loud moans and screams, drinking them in. “You’re so fucking intoxicating. I can’t get enough of you, of your body, of that pretty little cunt of yours.” I slammed both the dildo and my cock harder into her, listening to her scream as she dripped with ecstasy. “Don’t you ever fucking leave me,” I whined, my body buzzing with a drunken haze. “Please.”

“Never,” she whispered into the sheets.

Chapter 5

May-Martha

The night was colder than usual, the wind blowing as my hair danced with it. I tried to pull my coat closer and preserve what heat I could, but it was pointless. Whoreville always had the coldest winters. It had been a few days since I'd spoken to Cindy, and I wanted to check in on her, so I snuck away from the brothel to see her. My bones ached and my body shivered as I continued to walk towards the bar, full of anxiety and caution. Being alone in this town at night was scary enough, but knowing that the Grouch was haunting the shadows, killing every chance he could? Well... that frightened me more.

As I passed a dark alley, the sound of metal trash cans clattering nearby made me jump. That same devious, eerie laughter broke through the darkness, causing the hair on the back of my neck to stand.

Max. What was she doing here?

My curiosity got the better of me, guiding my legs as I slowly stepped into the dark alley, the sound of my heels tapping against the cold, wet pavement. My heart began to race, pounding behind my ears as I moved deeper into the abyss, the laughter growing, as if it was reaching out and wrapping me in a blanket of fear. I nearly screamed, my hands covering my mouth to snuff it out as something fell at my feet with a splat, making my stomach turn.

"Well, if it isn't little Miss May-Martha herself," the voice sang as the laughter turned into a cackle. The sound of footsteps grew, my hands trembling as I reached for the lighter in my coat pocket. My breathing became frantic, fogging my view as my thumb flicked against the lighter, dead sparks shooting into the night as the footsteps neared.

"Oh, May," the eerie voice sang, getting closer. I tried again and again, my skin rubbing raw until the lighter finally ignited, a single flame burning in a sea of blackness.

A small radius around me was drenched in a warm, orange hue, easing my fear just a bit. I glanced down at what was at my feet, realizing it was a dismembered hand. I nearly screamed, covering my mouth. Specks of blood were cast across my shoes, a small trickle flowing from the raw, exposed flesh. The wind blew with the sensation of someone near me as I began to panic. My eyes lifted, a single tear falling as I looked past the flame into the darkness. The sound of footsteps echoed as her face slowly bled into view, grinning in the most unnatural way, her skin and clothes drenched in blood.

Max.

“Boo.” The flame of my lighter blew out.

Something kicked my legs out from under me as I fell, my face hitting the bloody hand with a smack. I gagged, nearly throwing up at the thick, metallic smell, feeling blood smeared across my face. My fingers scrambled for the lighter, flicking it to life as I looked up at Max. She was leaning over the handle of an axe, the bloody heel of it on the ground facing me.

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“May, May, May,” she sang, swaying her body back and forth. Cindy was right about one thing: Max was shockingly beautiful. She seemed almost normal, despite holding a bloody axe and grinning like I was some prey before her.

“Max,” I stated, trying to swallow my growing fear.

“At your service.” Her vibrant eyes remained fixated on me as she offered a sarcastic curtsy. “Now, tell me: what is little Miss May-Martha doing all the way out here on this side of Whoreville?” She raised the axe, the blade scraping the underside of my chin, slightly lifting my head. “You’re not going back to say hello to your good ol’ friend Cindy down at the bar, now are you?” I swallowed again, the sharp metal nearly piercing my skin.

So I wasn’t crazy. I was being watched that night. By her.

I tried to remain calm, but I was petrified. I just needed to find a way to escape, to distract her so I could run. But how?

“W-why are you here?” I blurted out, my eyes falling to the hand on the ground. “And whose hand is that?” My stomach churned, unsettled by the messy body part.

“Not that it’s any of your business, but I’m here doing whatever needs to be done to keep him happy.” The way she pronounced the word ‘him’ was odd.

“Him? You mean the Grouch—” Max silenced my voice as she nicked my skin, a single bead of blood running down my neck as I winced.

“Don’t fucking call him that!” she growled through clenched teeth. “The Grouch,” she mocked, spitting on the ground. “He deserves so much more respect, more than you or any other person here have ever shown him!” Her rage and temper shocked me. She was so protective of him, so...

Of course.

“You love him,” I stated, but it felt more like a question. Max’s face softened for a moment.

“Love?” She laughed. “Oh, May-Martha, love is such a simple term, one that can’t even begin to describe the connection he and I share.” She pulled the blade from my neck as I gasped, my body nearly buckling from the relief. Max examined the sharp edge, licking the mixed blood, closing her eyes as she savored it before sucking her lips with a soft moan. “We are one and the same, he and I; two souls stitched together in the shadows of our pain. The world hated us, and in that rejection, we found each other.” Her eyes shot to me. “He may be stuck in the past, grasping onto the memories of the ‘relationship’ you two once had,” she gripped my face harshly, “but I plan to spend every second of every day reminding him just how fake it really was. Of what you did to him. I know what’s best for him, and you, May-Martha, are not that.”

Stuck in the past? Was he... After all these years, was he still thinking about me? Max seemed so sure he had moved on, but her jealousy... Was it a sign that, deep down, his heart still longed for me? Even after everything?

The faint sliver of hope made my own heart leap as I glared into her dangerous green eyes, a color so similar to my own. My fear was fading as my dull heart beat stronger, and something new began to peek through.

“You may think you know him, Max, but he and I share something you’ll never

have.” She furrowed her brows, baring her teeth like an animal.

“Oh, really? And what is that?” Her face nearly slammed into mine, the axe returned to my neck.

My fingers shook as I ripped the front of my coat open, revealing my chest bulging from my corset. Inked into my pale skin was a red heart, a matching tattoo we once got in secret to always remember the one thing we’d always share.

“Our hearts are one, always and forever. He can’t give you what isn’t his.”

Max’s eyes bulged, obviously recognizing the tattoo. I tried not to smile, enjoying her rage as she screamed, roughly kicking me back onto the pavement. My spine ached from the impact, my head slamming onto the concrete as she stood over me with the axe, fuming. Her finger curled around the handle as her nostrils flared.

That’s right. No matter how much you try, he’ll never be yours.

I watched her irises as they fell, examining my body closely. She suddenly began to calm, switching from rage back to her frightening, playful self. That seamless fade of personalities horrified me more than anything as she laughed.

“May-Martha!” She used the axe to fully open my coat, pointing to my outfit, which was nothing more than a corset, lingerie, and netted tights. “You work down at that nasty old brothel, don’t you?” Max inhaled deeply. “Oh, you do. I can smell it all over you! Ha! What a naughty thing you’ve become.” My cheeks burned at her laughter. “Oh, I must say: this,” she swirled her finger in my direction, “is better than I ever could’ve imagined. You had such a bright future ahead of you, and you burned it all down. Now, here you are, wasting away in that brothel, fucking people for money!” Max squealed, pissing me off as she quickly snapped into another personality.

“Tell me,” she crouched down, tilting her head, “how does it feel? Knowing you let such a beautiful future slip through your delicate fingers? To know that the only worth you have left in this world is between your legs?” Another tear rolled down my cheek at her hateful words.

My temper took control, my hand slapping her across the face as I gasped at my own action. Max scoffed, smiling as she turned her face back to me. Her hand gripped the collar of my coat, yanking me like a doll.

“I can’t wait to see what he has planned for you.” She slammed her lips to mine, kissing me roughly as I froze. Her teeth bit down on my lower lip, causing it to bleed as I cried, my blood spilling into both our mouths. She released me, running her tongue along her lips. “Ahhh,” she exhaled. I didn’t know how to feel, but Cindy was right. Max was a fucking psycho.

“Tell Gus he says hello.” She winked, dropping my body as she rose to walk backward into the shadows, twirling the axe. “It’s almost Christmas, May-Martha,” she sang as she began to disappear. “Santa is coming. Too bad you’ve been a naughty girl.” Her laughter echoed, quickly fading away with her. I couldn’t move, horrified by everything that just happened.

What the fuck?

My eyes fell back to the dismembered hand next to me.

I once again flicked the lighter, the flame allowing me to peer closer at the hand, noticing the distinct tattoos. My eyes wandered, catching sight of a nearby trail of blood. I stumbled to my feet, my heels tapping as I followed it, the smeared trail leading to a large red puddle. I screamed as my gaze rose to the familiar body before me. Cindy was propped against the metal trash cans, her body mutilated and both her hands missing. Her neck was barely attached, as though it had been hacked at

continuously, nearly decapitating her.

“Oh my—” My cries were silenced as I looked at the wall above her body, a warning painted across the wall in her blood, the letters dripping.

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You're next, May-Martha.

Chapter 6

The Grouch

"Where the hell have you been?" Max skipped into the cave, swirling a bloody axe, her body soaked in blood. Fuck, what did she do now?

"I was taking care of something." She tossed a dismembered hand at my feet with a smile. "Can't write a report without hands." She wiggled her fingers.

Ah, Cindy. I picked up the bloody, tattooed hand, examining the hacked flesh closely.

"Thanks for handling that for me. Looks like you finally got your revenge, freckles." Max snickered as I eyed her with a grin, watching a blush rise to color her perfect dark cheeks. Such a wicked thing.

"That's not all." She placed her hands behind her back, her breasts pressed forward as she slowly stepped toward me, dragging the axe behind. "I ran into May-Martha."

My grin fell.

"What happened?" A hint of fear tugged at my dead heart, dreading what she might've done to her. She had a temper and was full of jealousy towards May. Who knows what she would do if given the chance? Max made a face and began to walk deeper into the cave.

“Max?” The sound of the axe dragging behind her mixed with her echoing laughter.
“Max! If you laid one hand on her, I?—”

“What are you going to do? Punish me?” She laughed again, stepping from view.
“You’ll have to find me first,” she sang. Ignited with anger and the need to know what happened, I tossed the hand aside and followed her deeper into the quarry.

The cave was filled with tunnels, twists, and endless turns. It was a damp and cold maze that would make anyone crazy if they tried to explore it. Max and I had memorized nearly every inch over the years as I chased her through it, loving what usually happened next.

“Max,” I snarled, checking every tunnel I passed, searching. Her laughter led me deeper as the light faded away from our dwelling. “Max, where are you?”

“Did you know your pretty, perfect little May isn’t as sweet and innocent as you think?” she sang, her words echoing in the distance. Where the hell was she? I needed to find her, to know if she hurt May-Martha.

My heart raced, my breaths coming out as heaves as I picked up my pace, slamming my fists into the rocky wall as I growled.

“Max!”

“Naughty May-Martha,” she hissed.

Where the fuck are you?

“She even showed me her heart.” I stopped, my eyes searching the darkness for any sign of her, fearing what she might say next. “The one inked into her pale flesh, its twin attached to yours.” No. My body bulged with anger, fearing the worst. “Don’t

worry,” she whispered, sounding close. “I didn’t kill her.” My body exhaled, relief flooding my veins as I relaxed at the statement.

“Max,” I softly called her name. “Please. Where are you?” The sound of rippling water pulled my attention. I knew exactly where she was.

“Max?” I stepped from the tunnel, the walls of the cave lined in a single strand of faint Christmas lights, the room soaked in a red hue from the quarry light still powered and peeking from the rock. Max was wading in the dark water of the flooded cave, naked. This had always been her favorite spot, the place she loved to escape to when she wasn’t bugging me.

She was wading in the dark water, the shallow depth allowing her to stand on her toes as the soft ripples brushed her body, reaching her breasts. Steam hissed around her, thick in the air. Despite my frustration, I was starting to feel a familiar hunger growing between my legs, which only angered me further. No, not now.

“What’re you doing, Max?” I asked, adjusting my bulge. Her eyes sparkled in the light as her arms swayed and moved in the water, creating ripples.

“I’m cleaning myself.” She raised a hand, covered in blood. “Hacking apart someone’s body can be pretty messy.” She slowly moved to the rusted railing, raising her body from the water as it trickled along her breasts, mixing with the blood as it dripped down into the pond.

“What happened with May-Martha?” I demanded. “You better not have hurt her?—”

“Oh, don’t be such a meanie.” Max smiled, looking me up and down. “Why don’t you join me? Come put those big hands of yours to use and help me wash her blood off my skin. I feelsodirty.” She caressed herself, running her hands across her curves.

Fuck, she looked like a goddamn snack in that water. I had to control myself, to find some kind of restraint if I wanted more information. I needed to play along with her sinful little game if I was going to learn anything.

I swallowed, keeping my pants on and slowly stepping into the pond. The water was warm, the steam making me sweat as I moved closer to her. She was waiting for me, a tempting smile on her face, her cheeks smeared with blood. Hopefully, it was Cindy's and not May's.

“What did you do, freckles?” She waded closer, staring up at me with those emerald irises of hers. Fuck, my cock was straining beneath my pants, begging to come out and play.

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“You forgot to take those off,” she teased, pressing her hand against my bulge. I groaned, trying to hold back as Max wrapped her arms around my neck, standing on her toes. “Stop thinking about May-Martha. She’s not here, but I am.” She pulled her body up, locking her legs around my waist. “I’m always here.” Her lips met mine, clouding my thoughts as I instinctively began to touch her, the blood from her flesh sticking to my fur. She was my weakness and she fucking knew it. I was losing her game.

“Max,” I breathed between her kisses, her tongue dancing with mine. “Just tell me. Did you hurt her?” She pressed her teeth against my lower lip, pulling it as my claws dug into her skin, making me moan. The fucking tease.

“No, I didn’t hurt your precious May,” she growled as blood began to seep from beneath her teeth. “I only gave her a little kiss.” Max released my lip, running her tongue along the roof of my mouth as I quivered, struggling to keep my composure from crumbling, holding her in my arms as her body ground against mine. “Now, stop talking about her and focus on me.” I could hear her climax growing closer as she breathed her words, my own building as she touched me.

Her hands unlatched my belt, freeing me from my pants, and all thoughts of May quickly evaporated, leaving all my attention on her as I slid my cock up her tight cunt. In that moment, she became my sole purpose. The only thing I could focus on or think about was fucking her, listening to the sounds she made, feeling her contract around me as I quickened my speed. She was batshit crazy, but she was mine. All mine. And in this moment, all I wanted to be was hers.

“Fuck,” I moaned as her back slammed into the railing, one hand holding her body as

the other gripped the rusty metal for support. “You’re a fucking drug, Max. A toxic and wicked habit.” I licked the blood from her breasts, moaning against her nipples as my tongue played with them. “So fucking bad.”

“Admit it,” she rasped, clawing my back and thrusting her pelvis against me. “I may be bad, but I feel good.”

“So good,” I breathed.

“Tell me you want me. That you need me.” Her back arched, and she sounded like she was about to come, my cock slipping deeper into her. Fuck yes.

“I want you, Max,” I whimpered. “No, I fucking need you. All of you!” I roared, releasing inside her. My chest ached, my orgasm nearly breaking me as I crumbled into her, losing the game way too easily, struggling to catch my breath, my eyes focused on her body. I didn’t deserve it. I didn’t deserve her.

Max’s hand tilted my chin, her eyes burning into mine as she forced me to look at her. She grabbed the railing, lifting her body from my cock as I groaned and flexed, dropping from inside her.

No.

“Fuck.” I nearly caved over, grabbing her legs. She reached over with her free arm, grabbing a handful of my hair and roughly directing my head.

“Get on your knees and show me just how much you need me.” Her grin grew as she pushed my head down and I fell to my knees, lifting her legs, resting them on my shoulders, my face now firmly placed between her juicy thighs. Her foot kicked behind my neck, pushing me closer as the water sloshed around us, hitting her lower abdomen.

“You’re fucking insane, Max.” My eyes stared up into hers as my arms dipped into the water, wrapping around the outside of her legs.

“You know you like it.” My head slowly sank beneath the water as she pushed me toward her pussy.

God, yes. I really fucking do.

Chapter 7

May-Martha

My fingers grazed the faded red heart, feeling the raised skin of the tattoo we shared as I stared at myself in the vanity mirror. We had gotten these so long ago, when we were just teens, hiding our relationship from everyone else. I’d hoped that, despite the way things ended, he would know my heart had never changed—never wavered. But I guess he didn’t, and after everything that happened, he had every right to feel that way. Even now, I felt the same as I did that day. I may work in the brothel and fuck these men for money, but my heart was and would always be his.

The fur-lined robe lay around my elbows as I examined the nick along my neck closely, the wound still sensitive to the touch.

“Fucking psycho,” I hissed. Cindy was right: Max was insane, absolutely fucking insane. I needed to be careful. She slaughtered Cindy and was coming for me next. They both were.

I dipped my fingers into a small jar, applying a thin, pasty balm to the wound. It burned, causing me to wince as the balm seeped into the cut. I deserved this pain for what I did to him.

“May?” A heavy knock tapped at my door, causing me to jump.

Gus.

I quickly shoved the jar into the vanity, frantically applying powder to my neck to hide the wound as much as possible. The last thing I needed right now was Gus seeing it and accusing me of something. He was overly protective in the worst possible way. I might deserve pain from the Grouch, but I didn’t deserve it from Gus, even though he liked to give it to me as often as possible.

“May!” The sounds of his fists banging against the locked door frightened me as I readied myself, glancing into the mirror one last time to ensure perfection before unlocking it.

“Sorry, Gus,” I forced a smile. “Here for your usual?” His usual being me drugging him unknowingly before he could finish. I hoped by jumping to the point, he'd focus on sex and nothing else, particularly the cut on my neck. I didn’t feel like dealing with him tonight—or any night, really. He’d always get a few thrusts in before passing out, allowing me to clean whatever mess he’d make off my body and pocket the rest of my time as he snored in the bed, dreaming our exchange was more than it was.

“May,” he groaned, shoving past me as he shut the door. His eyes fell to my chest, glaring at my tattoo, filling with disgust. “I thought I told you I didn’t like seeing that? Cover that shit up. Now.” I quickly raised the robe, wrapping it around myself.

“What can I do for you?”

“You can marry me.” His words pierced my heart as my body stiffened with shock.

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What did he just say? Did he say...marry him? This had to be a dream. No, a nightmare.

“May.” Gus struggled to bend down to one knee, his sweaty palms snatching my hand as he stared up at me. “I can’t protect you from him if you’re working here, but I can if you’re my wife. Think about it. You can leave all this behind and come home with me. I’ve loved you since we were kids, and, in spite of your struggles and current occupation, I’m willing to make this work, to give you a better life...with me. Only me.” He played with a strand of my hair as I stared at him in shock. “No one would touch you anymore?—”

“Except you,” I whispered in horror.

“Of course me.” His tone began to shift. “May, this is no life for someone like you. You need to marry me and be my wife. I’ll take care of you, protect you—we can even have a nice little family.” A family? “No more whoring yourself out. Just comfortable living. No one would be allowed to touch you anymore. You’d belong to me.” His grip on my hand tightened as he began to hurt me. “Just say yes, May.”

“Gus, I-I appreciate your offer, but?—”

I don’t belong to anyone.

“But what? You’d rather stay here, fucking anyone willing to pay?” The snarl of his voice made me anxious and on edge. His temper was growing.

Gus squeezed my wrist, yanking me down towards him.

“Now you listen here, May. I’ve waited years for you. Years! I’ve given you time to get over your ridiculous childhood trauma. It’s time to face the truth. He’s gone, you hear me? Gone! And you’re mine! You always have been; you just haven’t realized it yet.” His strength seeped into my bones, bruising me as he stood, towering over me.

“Gus,” I whimpered, “you’re hurting me.”

“Good.” He yanked my body from the floor, staring down at me with disgust. “I’ve been patient long enough, May. You will be my wife, even if that means I have to buy you like the fucking whore you are.” My eyes began to water as he grabbed his coat and opened my door, purposely hitting me in the process. “You will be my wife whether you like it or not, so get fucking used to it.”

The door slammed shut as Gus left with angry haste.

I remained on the floor, forcing back tears. I didn’t want this life anymore, any of it. I wanted to go back in time and run away into the woods, something I promised to do long ago and never did. Everything had fallen apart. Everything was wrong, so very wrong.

My hand slid under the bed as it pulled the small box from its hiding spot. I opened it and immediately began to sob.

“Please,” I ran my fingers along the contents. “Forgive me.”

Or kill me. Either way, just make it end. All of it.

Chapter 8

The Grouch

The axe rested on my shoulder as I trampled through the snow, searching for the perfect tree to cut down. The fire had burned all night, thanks to our sexual endeavors, and now, we needed more. Cutting firewood was therapeutic, allowing me to express my anger in a less painful way, though truthfully, I suspected Max liked it when I got rough with her. I chuckled at the thought.

Fucking Max.

I stopped to examine a tree closely, feeling its rough, cold bark, when an unfamiliar scent hit my nostrils. Inhaling, I realized it was two scents—no, two people lost in my woods.

Oh, now what do we have here?

Axe in hand, I crept through the woods with stealth, following the trail of their smell until I could hear them, making such intriguing and inviting sounds. I placed the axe down, peeking around the large tree to find two people in a rather compromising position. My grin slithered high as my claws dug into the bark, pleased by what I was seeing.

The woman was completely naked, riding the man as they lay on a blanket in the snow. They must've been here for some time, their bodies drenched in sweat and cheeks red. As I crept closer to the tree, I watched them, consumed with the sight of her tits bouncing as she rode his decent-sized cock. They weren't shy, making delicious noises that made my own cock grow in my pants. Fuck, why not join them?

I pulled my cock out and began to stroke the shaft, focusing on them as I did so. It wasn't long before I caught up to the couple, fully erect and horny as fuck, thrusting harder into my own grip. The cold air blowing against my exposed body only heightened my excitement as precum slowly dripped from the tip. My claws dragged against the bark as I tried to hold on, so close to spewing all over, my breath nearly

fogging the air around me, when I felt something lean into my back.

“Shhh,” she whispered as her hands suddenly appeared, gently wrapping around my torso.

“Max—” Her hand covered my mouth as she leaned in close.

“You just focus on them and let me do all the dirty work.” She gently removed her hand from my mouth and replaced mine, stroking my shaft with just the right amount of pressure. Fuck, she felt so good.

My hands gripped the tree trunk, struggling as she made me come, my eyes on the naked couple, their moans filling my ears, the smell of their bodies and cum clogging my nostrils.

“That’s right,” Max whispered as I trembled within her grasp, my cum shooting all over the tree and dripping into the snow. “Yes.” Hearing her was the cherry on top of everything. My eyes rolled back as I tried to remain quiet, thrusting into her hands until nothing was left inside me. “That’s a good boy.”

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It took me a minute to calm my racing heart and collect my breathing. Max stepped back as I tried to clean myself, stuffing my cock back into my pants as I turned to face her. She was grinning, licking my cum from her hand, the other now holding her own axe.

“What’re you doing out here, freckles?” Not that I wasn’t grateful to her sneaky appearance. She had a twinkle in her eye as she licked her lips.

“I came to help chop some firewood.” She swung the axe in her hands, twirling it as he raised a brow. “But it looks like you found something better to do.” The couple’s moans grew as they began to both orgasm, nearly crescendoing into screams. I glanced back in their direction, a wicked idea popping into my mind.

“Hey, Max.” I slowly turned to face her, picking up my own axe. “Forget the firewood. Why don’t we chop something else down?” She squealed, prancing to me before kissing me roughly. We both smiled, my eyes staring into hers as I grabbed her chin. “Let’s get naughty.”

Max growled with excitement, rushing from my arms as she shot through the woods to the couple. She burst through the bushes, gracefully swinging her axe as it landed deep in the woman’s neck. Her blood spewed all over Max and the man, who screamed as he lay there, still inside the woman’s cunt. Max yanked the blade back, laughing as the woman eyed her with bloodshot irises, bleeding out, choking on her own blood. It poured from her mouth and neck onto her body, pooling around the man’s pelvis.

“What the fuck?!” the man screamed, unable to move, petrified by what was

happening on top of him. “Help! Someone!” Pointless. There was no one out here but us.

The woman tried to cup her neck, to stop the bleeding, but it was worthless. Max dropped the axe, positioning herself behind the woman. She met the man’s eyes, hers rising as I stepped behind him. He stared up at me, covered in the woman’s blood, sobbing.

“Please,” he begged, shivering with fear.

“Care to let us join?” I grinned, swinging my axe with all my strength as it decapitated him, silencing his cries as his arms fell limp at his side. Max straddled the man from behind the woman barely holding on to her life. I approached them, dropping my weapon and sitting on the man’s chest, my weight bearing down on him. I raised my hands, feeling the woman’s slippery curves as her eyes glared back at me, petrified. “Max,” I moaned, feeling the woman’s breasts. “She’s quite scrumptious, don’t you think?”

Max scooted behind the woman’s body, gripping her waist as our bodies roughly pressed closer, sandwiching hers between us, her blood seeping out. The color in her face was nearly gone from blood loss, leaving her pale as a ghost.

“Want to share this tasty treat with me?” I asked, my claw grazing her cheek.

Max snarled, gripping the woman’s hair as she began to pull, the flesh attached to her body ripping as she took her time tearing the woman’s head from her body. Blood spewed from her shredded neck, soaking us both. Oh, Max; she never did like the idea of sharing me.

“I’ll take that as a no.” My nostrils flared as I inhaled deeply, smelling their blood and cum lingering heavily in the air. What a delicious combination they made, the

aroma absolutely intoxicating.

Max reached around the headless woman, forcing my face to hers as she kissed me, barely allowing me to breathe. The headless body slid around ours, gliding across our chests until it slumped over in the snow, releasing the dead man's limp dick. I broke from Max's kisses, glancing down at it.

"Why don't you get rid of that for me?" Max smiled, the two of us standing as I stepped back and watched her raise her axe to chop the appendage clean from the corpse. She cackled, blood completely covering her body as she twirled with the weapon in hand. I raised my claws, applauding her craziness, and she stopped, looking at me with a smile before dropping the axe into the snow.

"I love you," she breathed, her breath fogging the air. My smile faded as my hands froze.

"Max—" She sprinted towards me, jumping as I caught her body, falling back into the snow as she kissed me. "Max," I whispered, unable to stop myself from kissing her back.

Together, we rolled around on the ground, taking turns dominating the other as we began to rip our clothes off, fucking in the snow. Blood was smeared across our bodies, the haze of what we were doing clouding our thoughts.

"I love you," she repeated, now riding me. I flipped us once more, bending her legs as I fucked her on my knees.

"Max," I groaned, enjoying myself too much. "You know I don't feel that way." She smiled, clenching her cunt around my cock as my head fell back on a moan.

"Yes, you do. I know you do." She squeezed her legs, pulling me closer as she began

to grind against my pelvis, taking every inch of me. “Admit it: you love me.” Her body arched as she pulled my neck, pressing her breasts into my face. “Just say it,” she begged. The veins in my body burned as I tried to resist her, failing as I sucked on her pretty nipples, flicking them with my tongue.

Max pressed her breasts harder against my face, moaning before pulling my mouth back to hers, begging, determined to have me say it. I had to break from her grasp, struggling to breathe.

“Max,” I pleaded, looking down at her perfect body grinding up against mine. “Please.” I didn’t stop, moving with her as we came together. “Fuck, yes.” Her eyes lit up as I continued to whimper. “Yes, I do. I fucking do.” It took me a while to come back down from the high, drunk on how she always made me feel.

She squealed, leaning forward as we kissed and embraced, still connected.

As much as I don’t want to admit it, I do. I fucking love you, freckles. You’re crazy and beautiful and a fucking mess, just like me. You annoy the shit out of me and piss me off more than anyone else... but God, I fucking love you. All of you. Just don’t leave me. Ever.

“I knew it.” She smiled, licking the tip of my nose. A soft chuckle escaped my mouth as I smiled back, stroking her cheek.

“You really are my weakness, freckles.”

After we calmed down, I helped Max to her feet, the two of us dressing before she pranced to the dead couple’s pile of clothes.

“Oh, look!” She waved a vibrant green scarf, wrapping it around her neck. “My favorite color!” I huffed at her ridiculousness, noticing a folded piece of paper

sticking out of the man's pants. Max followed my gaze, picking it up as she joyfully began to read it aloud. "Come join all of Whoreville this Christmas Eve as we celebrate the engage—" Her voice halted as her smile faded.

"Celebrate what?" She folded the paper, forcing an obviously fake smile.

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“It’s nothing. You know, we should really do something with these bodies. Oh! Why don’t we drop them off at May’s doorstep?” It was clear she was trying to hide something.

“Max...” I approached her, towering over her small frame as I held my hand out. “Let me see it.” She squeezed the paper, refusing to give it to me. “Max,” I growled.

“Fine,” she snapped, slapping the crumpled paper into my hand. “But it’s just going to upset you and ruin our moment.” Max crossed her arms, pissed as I grunted, unfolding it to read aloud, smirking at her childish temper.

“Come join all of Whoreville this Christmas Eve as we celebrate the engagement of—” My voice stopped, burning as I stared at the printed words. “The engagement of police chief Gustopher Mayhew and May-Martha. Wear your finest Christmas get-ups and prepare for a Christmas Eve like never before.” My nostrils flared as I clutched the paper in my hand, rolling it up into a ball and tossing it down like trash.

The past quickly began to boil and seethe beneath the surface, consuming me as all happiness from my moment with Max faded away. I had one thing on my mind: revenge.

Without hesitation, I grabbed my axe, huffing as I slowly walked toward the dead couple and began to hack away at their bodies, grunting and growling as I went.

All this time, and she still ended up with him. Him!

My arms began to hurt from swinging so hard, using all my strength.

Of course, she did. Why wouldn't she? She never loved me. It was a lie, all of it!

I continued to swing my axe again and again, blood splattering across my body and the snow, soaking my fur. I screamed, roaring as I raised the axe high and planted it directly into the man's torso, the blade sinking deep into his flesh. I tried to use my boot to steady myself as I yanked the axe out, falling back onto my ass as snow fell all around me. My heart was pounding, my face burning from absolute heartbreak and rage.

I'm going to free myself of Gus and May-Martha once and for all.

"Max," I breathed, looking at her as she remained still, wearing that fucking green scarf. "What do you say we go down to Whoreville and celebrate Christmas Eve this year? I know it's something you've always wanted to do." She stepped toward me, playing with the ends of the scarf.

"You just want to go so you can see May," she whined, plopping down next to me on her knees, her tits bouncing. She began to pout, pushing her lower lip out as she looked at me with those big green eyes.

"You're right. I do want to see May-Martha, but not for the reasons you think. It's time to get rid of her once and for all." My claws cupped her face as she leaned into my touch. "Oh, come on, freckles. Are you seriously going to make me beg?"

"I like you begging." She grinned.

"Max, will you please go with me to Whoreville? To the Christmas Eve celebration? I'd really like you to help me murder a couple of people. Pretty please?" She bit her lower lip.

"And what do I get out of it?"

“How about,” I drawled, leaning closer, hovering over her lips, “I let you kill whoever you want.”

“And?” Of course, there’s an and.

“And you can bring whatever you want back.”

“Anything?” Her eyes sparkled as she brightened at the idea. So fucking cute.

“Anything.” I kissed her gently before she pulled away from me.

“Fine. But you’re wearing a Santa costume.” Max shot from the snow, grabbing her axe as she moved to leave.

“What?” Hell no, I wasn’t. “That wasn’t part of the deal.” She turned to look at me, twirling her hair.

“It is now. Come on, you old meanie. We need to get your costume ready.”

Fucking Max.

Chapter 9

The Grouch

The sound of nauseating Christmas music filled the air, growing as we stepped down the incline from the woods toward Whoreville. Cheering, singing, and the smell of sweets choked the night as we traveled closer. Max led the way, dressed in a tight green Santa’s Helper costume lined with red fur and complete with her own jingling Santa hat. She yanked my arm as I reluctantly followed, wearing a ridiculous matching Santa costume and hat.

I blew the white puffball of the hat from my face, grunting and groaning as I pouted the entire way there, dragging my axe behind.

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The things I do to make her smile.

As we slithered to the edge of town, Max and I stuck to the shadows, watching as dozens of people passed, too absorbed in the cheer to even notice us. Max giggled and squealed with glee, completely enamored with the overbearing ambiance of it all. I, on the other hand, was struggling as flashes of my past returned, the sounds of it igniting my trauma, haunting me, reminding me of why we were really here.

“Look!” Max bolted from the shadows, snatching a freshly baked pastry as someone passed by with a basket full of them. They didn’t even notice, the sounds of the live band drowning any other noise out, Christmas lights flashing and blinking on every possible surface drawing their attention away. “Mmm.” She inhaled deeply, closing her eyes as she took in the freshly baked smell. “Apple pie! With cinnamon! My favorite!” Max took a bite, quickly devouring the pastry as she giggled.

“Focus, freckles,” I groaned, waving the lingering smell of the dessert away. “You can bring home all the apple pies you want after we do what we came here to do.” She rolled her eyes, huffing while crossing her arms.

“Fine.” Max turned as we both caught sight of Gus stepping onto the stage with the band, dressed in a ridiculous red and green suit, wearing a light-up Santa hat. What was everyone’s obsession with Christmas in this fucking town? As he waved his hand, the band stopped playing. He stepped to the microphone as feedback screeched and settled.

“Hello, Whoreville!” The town erupted in cheer, startling me as Max clasped her hands together and watched with wide curious eyes. “Thank you so much for joining

me tonight in this joyous celebration!” He turned away, motioning to someone. “Come on, get out here!” he snapped away from the microphone. Stepping from behind a large, lit Christmas tree was May-Martha. My heart stung and sank at the sight of her, the crowd once again hooting and cheering as she stepped to Gus’ side.

May was wearing a festive gown, the forest-green tulle skirt nearly swallowing her whole. The waist of her dress was pulled in tight by a vibrant red velvet corset, a pure white fur wrapped around her gloved hands, a deep green shawl around her shoulders, concealing her tattoo. Her brunette hair was free and curled around her face, encrusted with red sparkling accessories. And those fucking red lips. She looked almost the same as the day I last saw her, her body filled out and divine. My jaw nearly dropped as I watched her clap for Gus, quickly shaking my old feelings away.

“Yes, isn’t she perfect?” Gus eyed her body, taking his time. It made me furious, watching him look at her like a fucking snack. “Any who, as many of you know, we are not just here to celebrate Christmas, but also—” He stopped, turning to face May, dragging the microphone with him. “To celebrate my engagement to the lovely Miss May-Martha.” As expected, the crowd went wild, including Max. I shot her a look.

“Sorry.” She shrugged.

I watched May’s face, seeing a surprised look come over it as she froze. Gus bent down to one knee, retrieving a small ring box from his suit jacket and presenting it to her.

“May,” he raised her hand, “will you do me the greatest honor of becoming my wife?” People awed at his proposal, my stomach churning as I watched in horror.

She opened her mouth to speak, unable to form words. Gus’ smile faded as he pulled her arm, lightly forcing her closer. My fists squeezed in anger at seeing him handle her in such a way. Max placed her hand on my chest, holding me back as we watched

him mutter something under his breath to her, the whole town anxiously waiting for her response. He shot back towards the crowd, grinning like a child.

“She said yes!” Everyone roared with cheer as Gus forcefully slid a gaudy ring onto her finger, standing as he planted a fat kiss on her lips. She moved her mouth from his, unnoticed by everyone as they began to celebrate. “Now,” he shouted as he grabbed a bottle of champagne from nearby, popping the cork. “Let’s celebrate!” The music resumed as he chugged the bottle, May still frozen in place.

Her eyes began to water, glancing around the town before finding mine. They widened in fear as a single tear fell down her blushed cheeks. I bared my canines, rushing away from her eyes in a hurry.

“Hey, wait!” Max stumbled after me. “What about the plan?”

I whirled around. “Forget the fucking plan! It’s over, Max. He won!” I gripped her arms, shaking her fiercely. “I hope they get married and have the most miserable fucking life. They deserve it after what they did to me!” Max’s eyes began to tear up as she looked up at me.

“The world deserves to burn for how you were treated.” Her hand moved, touching my heart. “But, since we can’t burn it all down,” she wiggled from my grip as I eased up, “let’s at least finish what we started. Give them exactly what they deserve and show them hell.” She leaned closer, grabbing my face.

“Show them the Grouch.”

Chapter 10

Max

Hours feltlike minutes as we stuck to the shadows, watching as Gus finally announced his retirement from the festivities and took May by the hand, leading her away in the direction of the brothel. I knew this would be the perfect time to act.

“They’re heading to the bar,” I chimed to him as he watched them disappear into the crowd. “You need to hurry!”

“Are you not going to join me?” It tugged at my heart to ask such a thing in a sour tone. I knew he wanted me there with him, but I wasn’t sending him off to murder them. I was sending him away so I could kill May myself.

“I’m going to hang back and cause a little chaos of my own.” He pondered a moment before kissing my forehead. “Give them hell, freckles.” He grabbed the axe, winking as he snaked around the alley and further into the shadows.

“Oh, I plan to.”

I quickly rushed in the direction of the brothel, catching up as the two entered the building. My hat jingled as I kept a safe distance, following them up the building and eventually lingering on the other side of her door. My ear pressed against the old wood, listening as I heard arguing.

“Someone’s in trouble,” I tsked, crouching to peek through the keyhole. Inside, Gus was shaking May, her hair waving in every direction as she sobbed.

“I didn’t agree to this!” May shouted.

“You don’t have a fucking say!” Gus ripped the shawl from her arms, pounding his pointer finger into her chest, tapping the heart tattoo. “Maybe I should brand you, cover up that hideous tattoo, remind you and everyone else here who you belong to! I bought you, May, fair and square!”

“I’m not property!” She tried to run towards the door, but he grabbed a fistful of her hair, and she screamed in pain as he tugged harshly on the strands. Gus pressed against her back, his free hand wrapping around her tiny waist as he mumbled into her ear.

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“That’s where you’re wrong.” He pushed her to the ground, kicking her side as she groaned and remained there like a broken pet. He tried to compose himself, adjusting his suit as she refused to look at him. “I’m going down to the bar for a drink, and when I come back, you better greet me like the obedient wife I expect you to be.”

As Gus headed towards the door, I ducked against the wall, hoping to remain unseen. He swung the door open, exhaling as he rushed down the stairs, too focused on himself to notice my presence. Before her door could shut, I grabbed the knob, the hinges squeaking as I snuck inside. May grunted, tossing her brunette hair aside as she rolled to look at who was there.

“Did you forget you—” Her face dropped at the sight of me. “Max.”

“In the flesh.” I bowed, the bell on my hat jingling. “Now,” I rose, locking the door, “let’s have some fun.” I pulled a knife from the inside the corset lining of my costume as May scuttled to her feet, trying to reach for her nightstand. I quickly cut her off. “I did warn you I was coming for you.” I glanced at her vanity, noticing Gus’ ring in its box and no longer on her hand. “Aw, trouble in paradise?” I pointed to it with the knife.

“What do you want?” Her question was more of a snarl.

“Oh, what a temper. I like it!” I laughed, slowly inching in her direction. “To answer your question, I’m here to handle my own revenge. Sure, he wants to kill you himself, but I think it would be much more fun if I did it.” I lunged at her with my knife, missing as she jumped back.

“Kill me?” She nearly fell over trying to move away from me, knocking into furniture. “Why? I haven’t done anything to you!” I lunged a second time, cutting her dress.

“You’re wrong, May,” I sang. “You have done everything.” My hand raised the knife as I charged her, the two of us falling as I tackled her to the ground. We struggled, her arms slapping and hitting at me as I straddled her torso, holding my knife firm, my knees pinning her arms beside her as she wriggled. “You poisoned him!” I lunged my knife down as she whipped her head to the side, the sharp tip of the blade sticking into the floor. “You have this grip on him that he can never escape, bleeding into his thoughts and mind, haunting his dreams—” I tore the knife from the floor, slicing the skin of her collarbone as she cried out. “You’ve consumed his heart, leaving little to no room for me.” I gazed into my reflection of the blade, watching as her blood tainted the image. “As long as you live, he can’t fully give himself to me. And I need him.” My fingers curled as her wound bled out, tears streaking her perfect face as she glared at me in horror. I raised my arm, smiling at what I was about to do. For him.

“Any last words, May?” I tilted my head as she desperately tried to escape me. As I stared at her, my breathing erratic, May did something I never expected her to do. She laughed.

“Go ahead,” she swallowed. “Do it. But know that killing me won’t fix him. Oh, Max, you can fuck him every minute of every day, but you’ll never have his heart.” My face burned and trembled at her words as I screamed and raised my knife, ready to prove her wrong.

“May?” The pounding on her door stopped me mid-lunge as we looked in the direction of his voice. “May, I forgot my—” He jiggled the door knob. “May, why is the door locked? Open it. Open it now!”

My head snapped back to her, her face plastered in a ridiculous smile.

“Looks like you're out of time,” she laughed. “What’re you going to do now?”

Fuck, fuck, fuck!

My eyes bolted around the room; noticing her window, my confidence returned.

“I guess this goodbye.” I slammed my forehead into her face, her nose instantly pouring blood. “Christmas isn’t over yet, May.” I quickly shot from the floor and bolted to the window, unlatching it as I turned to look back at her, tucking my knife into the lining of my corset.

Gus burst through the door, nearly falling over as he looked from me to May, rushing to her aid. He helped her up, trying to stop the bleeding. I couldn’t help but laugh at them both, marked for death. They watched me as I climbed from the window, scaling down the side of the brothel.

“So long, May-Martha!” I called out, my laughter dissolving into a Christmas hymn.

I’ll be back, and sooner than you think.

Chapter 11

The Grouch

I paced back and forth, grumbling to myself as I tried to understand what happened. It wasn’t until I heard a familiar humming that I slunk back into the shadows, waiting for her to come near. Fucking Max; I should’ve known she was up to something. As she turned the corner, I shot from the shadows of the building and grabbed her by her throat, slamming her into the brick wall.

“Where the hell have you been?” I demanded, squeezing with little remorse. “I went to the bar, and May-Martha wasn’t there. I sat there waiting in the shadows like a fucking idiot, realizing no one was coming!” My hand tightened as my face crouched closer, my hot breath hitting her cheeks as she squirmed, gasping for air. “Why did you lie to me?”

“I—I—” she couldn’t speak.

“You, what? Knew I would take the bait? Tell me!” I shook her as she cried out.

“I—I went to see May.” My anger raged inside me as I struggled not to snap her neck. “S-she works at the brothel, and I-I knew she’d go there.”

“Why?” I growled.

“Because.” I pulled her body from the ground, her feet dangling as she clawed at my arm. For the first time, she was absolutely terrified of me. “I wanted to kill her,” she strained, her face beginning to change colors. Something inside me snapped as I forced myself to release her neck. She crumbled to the ground, choking and coughing.

“Go home, Max.” I turned and began to walk towards the brothel, gripping the handle of my axe.

“Wait,” she cried, struggling to stand. “Don’t go, please!” I ignored her, nearing the end of the alley that turned into the town, tossing all but my Santa pants aside. “She doesn’t love you! Please, come back with me. I love you!” I could hear the pain in her voice as she cried after me, desperately trying to keep me all to herself. It took every inch of my power to resist her, to not scoop her up in my arms and take her home. But I needed to do this.

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“Until I have her heart in my hands,” I whispered over my shoulder, “I can’t love you.”

I found the brothel on the opposite end of the same street as the bar. It was old and towering, but nothing I couldn’t handle. With the axe in one hand, I raised the other and began to scale up the wall, using the rigid, uneven bricks to pull myself up. As I did so, I peeked into the rooms, searching for any sign of her. It wasn’t until I reached the highest level that I found her in her room—and she wasn’t alone. She was with Gus.

I leaned against the window with my axe in hand, watching and listening, waiting for the perfect opportunity to attack, to finally get my revenge on them both.

“Why? Why would the Grouch’s whore try to kill you?” Hearing Gus call Max a whore made my grip tighten around the handle of my axe. If I didn’t already want to murder him, I sure as hell did now.

“You know why!” May screamed back, pressing a blood-soaked handkerchief to her nose. Fucking Max. “Him returning, Max killing Cindy and coming after me, the murders, it’s all happening because of us! It’s our fault Gus, ours. It was only a matter of time before the past caught up with us.” Gus rubbed his face, his temper rising.

“No. No, I’m not going to let some monster and crazy bitch come in here, after all these years, and take everything away from me! I fucking won’t let it happen!” He shot towards her, grabbing her neck. “None of this is my fault, you hear me!” He violently shook her. “This is all happening because of you. You’re the one who toyed with his heart, making him think he was worthy of being loved. You’re the one who

led him on, and you're the reason she died."

"Gus—" She tried to hit him and make him stop, but it was no use. Part of me wanted to jump in and save her, but another wanted to watch as he strangled the life out of her.

"That night changed everything. Do you think he would've been welcomed in this town if it didn't happen? Ha. The unfortunate tragedy merely set things straight." May reached behind her into the small drawer of her nightstand, her fingers grasping something as Gus continued to choke her. "I didn't know you two were sneaking around, that you would let him go. But here we are, because of your mistake. Maybe I should let them kill you. That is, if I don't do it myself first."

May swung her arm, a small knife ripping through his gut as he released her neck and stumbled back, bleeding out with a shocked look on his face. She gagged and stumbled as she eyed him, circling the room. Gus fell to his knees, trying to stop the bleeding as his guts spilled onto the floor.

"Don't you fucking dare blame her death on me!" She picked up her sheer shawl, twisting it around her hands as she slowly approached him. "You killed her!" She wrapped it around his neck, groaning as she dragged him, tying it to the wooden poster of her bed, his body raised slightly from the ground in a mini noose, hovering an inch from the floor. She then crouched next to him, wiping her bloodied nose as she watched him panic, trying to free himself.

"I've spent years fearing you, letting you use me however you wanted because I was haunted by the past. But I'm done." May spit in his face, falling back onto her backside as she hung her arms over her knees and exhaled. "If he wants to kill me, I'll let him." Gus strained, trying to free himself from the noose, his face turning purple. "My only regret is that I didn't tell him the truth."

The truth?

My hand opened her window, her head snapping as she stood, gasping at the sight of me. I crawled through the small space, stepping into the room, the ceiling inches from my head as my axe remained at my side.

“Crispin,” she breathed my name. It was the first time I’d heard it in years. Even Max didn’t know it.

We stood there, staring at one another, transfixed. My heart leaped uncontrollably at the realization that she was here, with me. After all this time... I tried to push those feelings aside, remembering why I was here, stepping past her as I kneeled next to Gus.

“Hello, old friend,” I grinned, his eyes bulging as he stared back at me. “Did you miss me? Did I grow into the monster you always claimed me to be?” He tried to speak but couldn’t, thanks to May’s ingenuity. I examined him closely, scoffing at his appearance. “God, you really let yourself go.” I stood, gripping the axe. “Good thing I got here when I did. Any longer, and May would get to claim credit for your death. And that wouldn’t be fair, now would it?”

“Crispin, no!” I raised the weapon with both hands, grinning as I swung, chopping off his head. It rolled to the ground and stopped at May’s feet, blood pooling beneath it. She covered her mouth, screaming as his dead eyes looked up at her, his mouth twitching for a few seconds.

“Well, that was a bit anticlimactic. All these years of dreaming how this would happen, and a hack to the head is all it took. Pity. Now,” I sighed, twirling the axe in my hand, “I’m going to give you one chance to explain.” May quivered, her eyes watering as she watched me. “What truth?” She just stared, horrified by what I’d done. “What truth, May?”

“Y-you killed him,” she stuttered. “You killed Gustopher.” A tear fell down her cheek as I rolled my eyes.

“I did what I came here to do. I know you loved him, but?—”

“I didntlove him.” The growled statement stopped me in my tracks, her jaw clenched as I looked at her, realizing she wasn't wearing his ring. “I have been abused by that man since the day you left!”

“Oh no,” I snarled as I charged her, lifting her chin with the blade. “Don’t you try and put this back on me. He tormentedme. And you...” I looked her up and down as she tried to hold her head high. “You used me.” I removed the axe and stepped back. “And for what you two did to me, what you took from me, I’m going to get my revenge.” My hands gripped the handle as she watched me raise it high, my nostrils flaring with rage.

“Wait!”

“I have waited! For years, May! I let you live your life, hiding away in that fucking cave after you stole mine from me!”

“I didn’t?—”

“Yes, you did!” I snarled. “You played me. You pretended to love me, to want me. We spent years sneaking around, making plans to run away from all this together. But when I needed you most, the truth came out.” Tears burned my eyes. “You never loved me. And when everything happened, you let her die!”

“I didn’t know!” May completely broke, falling to her knees. “Gus never told me what he was going to do! I knew he had something planned, but I didn’t think it wasthat! Crispin, please. I didn’t know your mother was inside!”

My fury and pent-up anger took control as I roared, grabbing her throat.

“Liar!” I yelled as May sobbed.

“Please,” she cried. “I only knew he was going to try and hurt you. That’s why I asked you to run away with me. I didn’t know he was going to set your house on fire!”

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“My mother,” I choked back tears, “was burned alive in that house, and Gus simply sat back and watched.” I dropped her neck as she fell forward. “I could’ve saved her if it wasn’t for you. We had come home just in time, but Gus and his band of misfits jumped me, keeping me from helping her. I had to sit there and listen to her screams as they beat me, May.” I bent down, yelling into her ear. “I listened to my mother cry out for help, calling my name as he beat the fucking shit out of me! And why? Because he didn’t want to get caught! And when you realized what was happening, what did you say?”

“Please,” she begged.

“What did you say?” I screamed as she tried to cover her ears.

“I only said those things to make him stop! I never meant them!”

“Ha!” I snapped back, pacing the room with absolute fury. “You told him I was nothing!Nothing!” My eyes landed on the axe. “And now, that’s all you will be. Nothing.”

“Crispin, please!” She rose to her knees. “If you want to kill me, fine, but I swear to you, I didn’t know. I tried to stop him. After you ran away, I tried to find your mother, but it was too late.”

My heart ached as I clutched my chest, the overwhelming trauma and old scars ripping open, flooding me with emotions.

“The fire department arrived and tried to make me leave, but I refused. They had to

physically drag me from your home. Once the fire was out, I searched the rubble for her, but it was too late.” She sniffled as I closed my eyes and sat at the foot of her bed. “Your other mother was distraught, too heartbroken to do anything, so...” She stood, cautiously approaching the bed as she kneeled and reached for something underneath. “I—” She held a little black box close to her chest, gazing up at me. “I saved what I could of her remains.” May extended her hands, offering me the box.

Her remains?

I hesitated, taking the box and lifting the lid. Inside was a small, silver antique urn covered in an etched filigree. On the front of it was a small plaque with my mother's name inscribed across it.

“You-you did this?” I asked, touching the urn.

“I knew you’d want to keep her safe, not buried in the ground. You always hated the idea of your mother one day becoming worm food.” She wiped her eyes. “I was going to give it to you, but you never returned. So, I’ve kept her here with me all these years, hoping that, one day, you’d come back for her.”

“May.” A tear slipped down my cheek as my heart completely broke. “I didn’t know.” My eyes met hers.

“I know we hurt you, Crispin. I can never make up for what happened, but you must know, I always loved you. I never meant for any of this to happen.” Her hand reached out, trembling as it touched my chest, moving my fur as she smiled at my tattoo. “I meant every word that day. You have my heart, always and forever.”

“May,” I choked out, sliding from the bed and embracing her, hugging tight as I cried into her neck. “I’m so sorry.” She sobbed with me, hugging me back as we unleashed years’ worth of pain and guilt.

“I’m so sorry, Crispin. I wish I could’ve saved her.” I stroked her hair, knowing in my heart that she meant every word.

Chapter 12

May-Martha

Crispin slowly pulled away from me, wiping his eyes as he stared at his mother’s urn. I exhaled, relieved I was finally able to tell him the truth. It didn’t matter if he forgave me; it only mattered that he knew what really happened and was reunited with her remains.

“You know,” he breathed, lifting his head as he looked at me with a smile. “After all these years of believing the worst, I really thought that when I saw you again, it would just click, that killing you would be so effortless, would fill the hole I’ve been drowning in all this time. But the moment I laid eyes on you, well, my heart skipped a beat, just like it used to.” My own heart leaped at his words.

“Crispin.” I sweetly touched his hand. “I never stopped loving you.”

He sighed. “As much as I tried, I don’t think I ever stopped loving you, May-Martha.” He leaned in close, and my breathing picked up as I remained still, waiting.

“What about Max?” I asked, immediately regretting the question. He simply smiled, his mouth now an inch from mine.

“I could never love her the way I love you.” Crispin kissed me then, years’ worth of agonizing torture and longing bubbling to the surface. My heart nearly erupted as I wrapped my arms around his neck, and he gently laid me on my back. “It has always been you, May,” he rasped, ripping a gasp from my throat as he tore at my dress and lingerie. My body yearned for him, missing the way he touched me, the way he kissed

me, the way he felt inside me.

“I want you,” I whispered, pulling him closer. “I need you, Crispin.” I kissed him again, running my tongue along his as he moaned into my mouth. “Take me,” I begged. It had been too long; I didn’t want to waste any more time.

“Fuck, May,” he whined, pulling his cock from his pants. I watched as it grew, aiming for my aching pussy. “This must be a fucking dream.” He pushed inside me, moaning as he forced himself deep, my mouth wide and gasping at the size of him. “You’re a fucking dream.” Crispin suddenly quickened his pace, pounding into me as his mouth trailed down my neck and falling to my exposed breasts. His tongue flicked my hardened nipples, sucking them hard before he bit down, tugging them roughly.

“Not a dream, baby.” I wrapped my legs around his waist, moving with him, our bodies one. “This is real. I’m real.” I arched into him as he moaned against my chest, his tongue tracing my matching tattoo. “I love you,” I cried, my climax burning beneath the surface.

The simple truth broke him as he roared, coming inside me, fiercely thrusting as fast as he could go, shaking my body as he filled my cunt. I tried to hold on to my orgasm, listening to him moan, smiling because I knew this was what he’d wanted, what he’d needed.

“What’re you grinning about?” he huffed, slowing his pace. I wiggled my hips, grinding into him as he twitched inside me, still sensitive.

“Nothing. I’m just trying to live in this moment a little while longer.”

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“Oh?” He removed my legs, flipping me onto my knees as he positioned himself at my ass, still inside me. “Let’s see how much you can handle now.” He slowly slid his cock back, leaving only the tip inside my cunt, teasing me with it. My hair covered my face as it rubbed against the floor, my moan soaking into the wood. “That's what I thought,” he purred.

Crispin eased his cock inside me, slowly taking his time as he moved back and forth, his claw massaging my cheeks before gently entering my ass. I cried out at the sudden pressure, clenching tightly around him as he played with me, once again sliding out to the tip. Without warning, he slammed his cock back into me, his pelvis bouncing off my ass cheeks as he slowly thrust into me. I screamed at each painful drive, smiling through it, welcoming it.

“Harder,” I begged, feeling my body boil near the edge. He fingered my ass harder, slamming his cock fiercely inside me again, this time with more power. “Harder.” He did as I asked, ramming into my pussy. I smiled, glancing over my shoulder to lock eyes with him. “Harder,” I demanded.

Crispin grinned, bracing himself on my ass cheeks as he drove into me, increasing the pain with each thrust. My body ached, swelling with excitement as I came, soaking his cock. I cried out and leaned further into him, raising my ass so he could completely destroy me.

“Fuck, May,” he moaned. “I could watch you take my dick all day. You take it so well,” he grunted, my pussy squirting down his shaft. “That’s right. Soak me, baby. Soak my fur with your juices and don’t stop until your heart gives out.”

“You can fuck me for the rest of my life, Crispin,” I cried, my body sore but still enjoying him. “I don’t care how much it hurts. You can fuck me until it breaks my body. I’m yours.” My breathing hitched as he leaned over to play with my breasts, his chest sticking to my back.

“Oh, May,” he moaned into my hair, tugging my nipple. “I never want to leave. I want to stay here, inside your perfect pussy, until I die.” My heart leaped again.

“Then stay.” He gently slowed his pace, brushing my hair from my neck as I looked back at him. “Stay with me.”

“What about Max?” He whispered the question, his claw gliding along my shoulder. “I can’t just leave her.” I slowly lifted my pelvis, sliding from his cock as he dropped from my body. I carefully rotated, laying on my back as I stared up at him, sweetly touching his face.

“Do you love her?”

“It’s not that simple?—”

“Do you love her?”

He clenched his jaw, thinking for a moment. “Not in the way I love you.” It wasn’t the answer I was hoping for, but it was enough.

“Then tell her the truth. I want you, Crispin.” My arms wrapped around his neck. “We’ve been separated long enough. Let’s not waste any more time. Be with me.” I pulled my body up and kissed him, remaining on his lips for a few minutes before letting go.

“At least give me tonight. Max has been there for me since the day I left. I owe her

tonight.”

“Why tonight?” I was genuinely curious.

Crispin gently unwound my arms, standing as he helped me to my feet. He adjusted his cock and began to fix his pants.

“She loves Christmas. Let me spend Christmas Eve with her one last time, and then I’m yours forever.” I rushed to his arms, kissing him once. His eyes twinkled as he smiled down at me. “I’ve fucking missed you, May-Martha.”

“I’ve missed you.” I poked his chest, playing with his fur. He stared at me, looking deep into my eyes as I breathed him in. My Crispin.

“I love you.” My heart danced at his words. He walked towards my bedroom door, but I stopped him.

“Crispin?” He looked at me. “Before you go, can you promise me one thing?”

“Anything.”

“Take the long way home.” He gave me a funny look. “If you have to spend tonight with her, at least take your time before you do so. Hell, use it to think of all the things we can do together now that you’re back.” He laughed, kissing my forehead.

“You got it.”

MAX

My heart ripped in half as I listened to him say those words to her over and over again in my head—the same words he refused to say to me. I was fuming, burning

with jealousy and rage. He was going to leave me for her!

As he closed her door, I waited outside her window, watching as he disappeared into the woods. Once he was gone, I opened the window and slid inside, finding May now wearing a sheer fuzzy robe as she brushed her long hair.

“Crispin! Back so soon? Did you forget something?” May turned, her smile dropping as she looked at me.

I grinned, retrieving the knife from my corset, her blood now dried across the blade as I slowly inched near her, seething and seeing red. She slowly stood, creeping towards the headless body.

“After all this time, he chose you over me.” I cocked my head, tears welling in my eyes as I cautiously began to approach her. “You, afucking whore!” May tried to snatch the knife from the dead man’s corpse, but I beat her to it. “Uh-uh-uh.”

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“It’s over, Max. Crispin loves me. He’s chosen me. It doesn’t have to be this way. Go back, be with him one last time before—” I swung my knife, cutting her arm as she stumbled back.

“No, this ends now. I will not lose him to you.”

“Max, please! I know you think you love him, but you don’t. This is just some sick obsession. You need help.” I swung again, screaming as she dodged my blow and shoved me over. She kicked my hand, knocking my knife from it and snatching it herself. “This doesn’t have to end this way! Please, for Crispin’s sake, stop. He wouldn’t want this.”

My eyes shot to the dead man’s gut inches from me, and May’s gaze followed. I grinned, cackling as I ripped the blade from his insides, blood spewing across the room. I crouched, May backing away from me in terror.

“Max, please,” she begged, raising my knife in her hand, her arm trembling.

“I told you, you don’t know what he wants. Only I do!” I screamed as I charged her.

Chapter 13

The Grouch

Christmas music played from inside the cave as I approached the slightly ajar mining gate, blood smeared across it.

What the hell? What did you do now, Max?

I took a deep breath and stepped inside, trying to muster the strength to tell her what had happened, to end things once and for all. If only I could find the right words.

As I stepped deeper into the cave, the music grew, coated with a familiar humming. I stepped into the room, the fire burning, my chair facing it, a small radio playing on a small side table. My heart sank a little knowing I was about to leave her—the one person who had been there for me all these years. I knew she wasn't going to take the news well.

It's now or never.

"Max," I called. "There's something I need to tell you."

A hand dripping red gracefully leaned over the leather armrest. It was Max's, but something about it seemed off—different. I stepped around, looking down at her as she sat there, her legs crossed and body covered in blood, smiling up at me.

"What the fuck happened?" I fell to my knees in front of her, examining her closely for any sign of harm, hoping she wasn't hurt. Thankfully, she was fine, unharmed in any way.

But then, whose blood is?—

"I missed you." She booped my nose with a giggle. Something was off about her.

"I missed you too, freckles. Now, are you going to tell me what happened?" I pointed to her body.

"Oh, this?" She grabbed her skirt, motioning to the blood. "Oh, this is nothing. In fact,

speaking of nothing, I have a gift for you!” Max bounced from the chair, rushing to the poorly decorated Christmas tree we had propped against the cave wall.

“Max,” I sighed as she picked up a small, neatly wrapped present, the blood on her hands smearing across the paper. “I need to tell you something.” She stopped, holding the gift with that beautiful smile of hers stamped across her face.

“Tell me what?” she asked.

“Max, I—” I struggled to form the words. “May-Martha and I?—”

“Hold that thought!” Max pranced toward me, kneeling as she placed the box in my lap. “Before you say anything else, here. Open it.”

“Max.”

“No, it’s okay. It’s my Christmas gift to you.” I scoffed, lightly laughing as I indulged her, pulling at the ribbon and unwrapping the box. I lifted the lid, my smile dropping as I stared at what she just handed me, praying it wasn’t what I thought.

No, please?—

“You told me the only way you could love me was if you had her heart in your hands.”

No!

My stomach sank as I dropped the box, the bloody heart rolling from inside as I stood, shaking with fear—fear of what happened, but mostly fear of Max.

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“Max,” I whined, pointing to the organ as she stared up at me. “Whose heart is that?” She picked the heart up, and it squelched in her fingers as she stood, slowly walking towards me.

“Why, May-Martha’s, of course.” She grinned, petting the organ as I fell back, knocking over a light. It shattered across the cave floor, the glass piercing my hands as tears rolled down my face. “Now, you can love me forever.”

My heart completely ripped apart, aching and shredding as I watched her just stand there, holding May’s heart as if it was nothing. She killed her. Max didn’t just kill the woman I loved—she murdered her, carved out her heart and gifted it to me. She was fucking crazy. May was gone. Gone!

“How could you?” I cried out, my chest aching with agonizing pain. Max’s grin fell, and she looked confused by my distress.

“I only did it for us.”

“There is no us!” I yelled.

“No, no, no. Shhhh!” Max ran towards me, dropping to her knees as she tried to console me, May’s heart still in her grasp. “She—she tried to take you from me. I saw her... I saw her use her body and seduce you.” She saw her? Was Max watching us? “It’s okay.” She crawled through the glass and hugged me as I cried, a broken husk. “I’m going to make everything better. Now that she’s gone, you don’t have to leave. We can be together forever.”

Max stroked my hair, holding me close as my horror began to melt into hatred. My eyes glanced around, searching for something, anything I could use to kill her with. She was a rabid dog that needed to be put down before she hurt someone else.

My gaze latched onto a larger piece of broken glass. My claws stretched as I grasped it, Max still trying to coddle and embrace me. If May being dead wasn't heartbreaking enough, I now had to kill the only friend I'd ever had. The idea made me hesitate, knowing she only did it for me, to protect me. Because she loved me.

No, Max can't love anyone. She's crazy.

"I'm going to make you forget all about her. You'll see. It's only you and me—" She gasped, the large glass shard piercing her shoulder as she dropped May's heart and stared into my eyes.

"You may have taken her heart, but you will never have mine." She fell back as I released the shard, my hand bleeding as I desperately crawled away from her, panting, disgusted by what I had to do.

Max fell, bleeding out onto the floor as her trembling hand tried to grab the shard, but it was too deep. I waited, crying as I tried to process everything, listening to her quiver and bleed out.

"Why?" she breathed gently.

My eyes fell to May's heart, and I picked it up as I turned away from Max, holding it close.

"I'm so sorry, baby." I clutched it tightly against the tattoo on my chest, my tears dripping onto the organ as I bawled, completely broken. "I'm so sorry!"

My eyes bulged as a sudden pain shot through my heart, piercing it perfectly. The

music from the radio began to slow as the room spun, my eyes rolling into the back of my head as her voice hit my ears, fading away with the world.

“I’m sorry too.”

Epilogue

MAX

I hummed along with the Christmas music that played from the small radio, lights filling the cave as the fire cracked before me. I pulled the needle and thread through the thick material, finishing the final touches as I squealed, wincing at the pain in my shoulder.

“Silly Max,” I said to myself, “got to be more careful.” My fingers ached from sewing all night, though I was relieved to finally be done with my own Christmas gift.

I switched stations, finding more Christmas music, gently rocking my head back and forth as I stroked the furry collar of my brand-new coat, proud of what I had made.

“Green is such a pretty color,” I chirped, wrapping it around my body, inhaling the scent of it. “Merry Christmas, May-Martha.” I looked down next to the radio, smiling at her heart as I stroked my coat, admiring it closely. “And Merry Christmas to you, you mean old Grouch.”

My fingers played with the green fur, still as soft as it was when it was on his chest. I burrowed myself into his skin, sinking into the chair as I inhaled his scent again. He was so warm, so inviting. Absolutely perfect. I grabbed the sleeve made from his arm and wrapped it around my chest, leaning into it.

“Now, we can be together. Forever.”

Merry Christmas