



Obsessed-

Author: *Ever Lilac*

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Description: On the outside, I look just like everybody else. But on the inside, I'm not. On the inside, I'm a man obsessed. With her...only that she doesn't know it. So when I show up at her house as her new roommate, I hide my true feelings. She has no idea what simmers beneath my calm surface. No idea just how wild and untamed my love is for her. I've never met anyone like her and I crave her affection, her touch. Her love. But when my walls come tumbling down and she sees who I truly am, will she run and hide from me... Or will she stay.

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1

Amber

Lying in bed and staring up at the ceiling, I squeeze my eyes when Gina's words from yesterday spin in my head.

"It's not that nobody wants to sign you," she had murmured, before her face turned pitiful, "it's just that they want a different sound from you. It needs to be...edgier, sexier." She raised a thinly plucked brow, taking a sip of her martini, adding, "Darker."

We'd been sitting in an open roof bar, crowded with people and I'd nearly burst out into tears, right in front of everyone. I didn't know what she meant, I still don't know what it means.

My music is uplifting, serene, the kind that comes from a girl who used to be a cheerleader in high school, always wears her hair in curled ringlets and thinks that loose, buttoned up cardigans are high fashion.

I'm not edgy. I'm not sexy. I'm definitely not dark.

Maybe I should just call Gina and tell her to give up on me. Nobody will ever sign me and I'll only prove my parents right when they said, that the musical gene was lost on me.

Everyone in my family is a musical genius, my mom, my dad. My older sister who's

a famous pianist, living in London. My older brother who's violin play can even make the dead shed a tear.

And then there's me. The cellist. The one who obviously should have chosen a different career path.

Ripping the covers off in frustration, I jump out of bed, telling myself to stop sulking. I need to plaster a smile on my face, pretend that I'm happy because my new roommate is coming today.

For being a close to starving artist, I know I'm living well beyond my means. I live on a nice street, a little outside of the city center in Chicago.

My house is both elegant and cute, painted in a faded white with a navy roof and my neighbors are a bunch of doctors and lawyers. Gina used to live with me before but she recently got married and moved out. For a while there, I thought I'd be forced to move out too but then I decided to take my chances and put up an ad on a website for roommates. I specified that I wanted it to be a girl, but the only girl who responded seemed crazy.

Luckily there was this guy who sent me a private message. He seemed a lot less crazy. Friendly and we hit it off. I don't know much about him, but he told me he's coming down to Chicago because he's a mason and is transferring to a new company here.

He seems reliable, he's already paid the rent one month in advance, so I doubt there will be any problems with him.

Walking into my bathroom, I turn on the light and sigh at my appearance. My eyes are red from crying myself to sleep previous night and my hair looks like a birds nest.

Hopefully my look won't freak out my roommate and I brush my teeth and wash my face, before putting on a dress that looks similar to a bathing suit if it weren't for the flaring skirt.

I've already set up his bedroom, the one that's just down the hallway right next to mine and when I told Gina about this, she gave me a snide side eye.

"You're going to have a man, a stranger, live in your house and sleep just a couple of feet away from you." She'd shaken her head. "Are you sure about this? What if he turns out to be a psycho?"

I had laughed because Gina is suspicious of every guy that's not her husband or her family member. Obviously, I'm not like that. And I would never want to be. I prefer seeing the good in people.

Even if I sometimes have problems with seeing the good in myself.

Down in the kitchen I have my usual breakfast, consisting of frozen berries and milk and ice coffee. I read through the morning newspaper as I eat, the actual printed one because I'm the kind of person who likes the tactile stuff.

I like to brush my fingers over different kinds of textures, the same way that I like to brush my fingers over my instrument. Chewing, I throw a glance at the cello that's in the corner of the living room and my stomach drops at the sight of it.

There's a concert next weekend, one that might get me signed if I'm extra, extra lucky but I doubt it. Usually I practice almost every minute of the day before a concert, but now I just don't feel like it. My inspiration is gone.

At least for now.

I'm busy cleaning up after myself when the doorbell rings and I freeze, looking up. So soon? He was supposed to come in the late afternoon, not this early. Why is he here so early?

There's still some things left to do in the house, dirty laundry in the bathroom and I haven't made space in the closet for outerwear in the hallway.

When the doorbell rings again, I brush my wet hands off a towel and jog towards the door.

"Be right there," I call, my brows rising curiously at the tall shadow standing outside. "Sorry that I kept you waiting..." My voice dies at the sight of my new roommate and a nervous trickle cuts through my lower belly.

He's not what I expected, I expected someone younger but instead he seems to be seven or eight years older than me (I'm twenty-two). He's dressed in a dark green Adidas tracksuit, leather sneakers and a thin chain necklace around his throat.

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His face is both serious and playful, with acerbic cheekbones, highlighted by his undercut hair that's a mix of light and dark brown. And strangely his eyes are the color of angelite, a rare bluish crystal. He's handsome. A little mysterious.

He reaches out a tanned hand with a chain bracelet around his wrist. "Amber Abbey?" He smiles, showing perfect teeth. "I'm Stanmore Sadler."

"Hey," I murmur, feeling a little flustered at the touch of his palm against mine, "I wasn't expecting you so soon."

Shrugging he replies, "The plane I was supposed to take got cancelled so I had to take an earlier one." He frowns, clearing his throat, "If that's a problem, then I can..."

"No," I interrupt quickly, giving him a rapid smile and something flicks in his eyes that makes me feel like the clocks just stopped, "it's not a problem, not at all. Come in."

Obviously I can't be rude and I hope I wasn't but for a second there, he hesitates. Looking at me as if thinking, are you sure you want to do this?

Is that a warning...?

I throw him another glance and this time, he looks completely normal, making me think I must've imagined. I turn to the side to not block his way, lowering my head as my cheeks heat when his body comes in contact with mine, making me prickle with electricity.

Combing a couple of fingers through my hair, I anxiously throw my tresses over my back, trying to pretend like I'm not bothered by his presence. His presence that suddenly seems to have taken over my whole house.

I'd say it's pretty spacey but with Stanmore here, it feels like it can never be big enough, his energy so tangible, so carnal that I can almost taste it. He looks out of place amongst the dark, antique wood and the floral wallpapers. Like his natural habitat is a tad more brutal.

Licking my lips, I try to make small talk.

"You didn't bring that much with you," I say, nodding at his luggage. "You're not planning on staying here for just a little while and then bail on me, are you?" I smile, noticing just how broad shouldered he is and how narrow his waist is, his chest as wide as a smaller football field.

"Never." He looks at me like that was an outlandish question. "I doubt anyone would be stupid enough to bail on you."

Oh, then he should see my history of managers and representatives.

"We'll see if you feel the same after a couple of weeks," I joke, letting out a laugh and he laughs with me. Humorlessly. Like he doesn't like the idea of leaving this house.

Maybe he really, really needs a place to stay. I rub my palms together, trying to calm the flutters in my gut and lead him farther inside. He walks in a way that I've never seen a man walk before. Smoothly like he's stalking through water, like a predator and yet his energy is soothing.

As we pass the living room, he jerks his head at my instrument. "Are you a cellist?"

He doesn't say in the way that other people say it, which is usually surprised.

"I am," I nod. "So far at least, but things haven't been that good lately."

Tensing he asks, "Anything I can do to help?"

Looking at him in amazement because he offered so quickly, I shake my head. "No, but thanks though."

"Just tell me if you need anything."

"Okay..." I say, feeling a little awkward at the sudden intensity, "Sure." Pointing at the staircase I add, "Your room is up there by the way. Follow me."

We walk under silence and the hush between us is pressuring. Too loaded, too intimate too soon. I'm not sure why I'm having this reaction to him. He's not even touching or talking to me but it still feels like he's all up in me, whispering words he shouldn't in my ear. Swallowing, I open the door to his bedroom and croak. "Ta-da! All yours."

He snaps a glance my way, a suddenly possessive one and it makes my body break out in small tremors. All. Yours. I swallow again, leaning against the wall as he inspects the room. It's clean and tidy, white walls, black and white sheets on the bed and small frames with photos of different streets.

I watch his reaction carefully and he seems to like it. Definitely doesn't seem like the kind of roommate who would bail on me. And he doesn't look messy or like a douche, who's used to getting everything he wants.

He looks like the kind of man who works to get whatever he wants. And judging by the powerful but still relaxed way he holds himself, I have a feeling he knows exactly

how to get everything he desires.

“Where do you sleep, Amber?” he asks and the simple, completely natural question makes my limbs feel indecently heavy and numb.

“Just down the hallway.”

It's not until now that I realize how on top of each other we're going to be. We're going to be so close that I won't even be able to walk to the bathroom without putting on a robe.

“And you're okay with me being this close?” he replies. For some reason, Gina's words run through my mind. A stranger? Right next to you? I shouldn't let her get to me like that, but it's already too late and I chew on my lip.

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“Aha,” I answer but my voice sounds hoarse. It embarrasses me and I try to come up with some excuse when he asks,

“Is there a second bedroom?”

My eyes flare a little. “There is. A guestroom but it’s down in the basement...”

His head jerks as if we’ve made an agreement. “I’ll take that one instead.”

I stare at him. He sounds resolute. He wants to change rooms? Why, because of me? Because he registered I was getting uncomfortable? That’s so...

Sweet.

“Are you sure?” I ask in a low voice, feeling a bit bad. There is nothing out of the ordinary about him. He has a normal job, normal clothes. Normal name.

“I’m sure. Your house is nice enough, you could put me in one of your closets and I’d be fine.”

I laugh. “Okay. I just want you to like it here, Stanmore.” “Oh, I will.” He gives me a smile, his teeth suddenly seeming as sharp as the teeth of something not fully domesticated. “And call me Stan.”

2

Stanmore

Close up. Face to face. Finally, and a shudder moves through my body. For months I've been waiting for this. Waiting to be in close proximity to her. The woman, that is all mine. But she doesn't know it yet and I tell myself not to push her.

I even put on a tracksuit to look more non-threatening and it seems to have worked. She let me in after all, didn't she?

At the first sight of her, casually at home, casually dressed in a tight dress I was overwhelmed by an urge to mark her. Sink my teeth into her graceful neck, just to feel her pulse jitter. Her guard is down, defenses low and I'm working hard to hide how much that pleases me.

It pleases me that she trusted me so much the moment she saw me. And there is nobody on this earth, she can trust more than me. Her hands are delicate and frail but she's got me in an iron grip. Whatever she wants from me, she'll get it. No questions asked, nothing required in return.

But everything, all of her is wanted.

I listen to her talk as we walk down the staircase, her voice making me feel like pure air is sinking down into my lungs and every time she throws a look over her shoulder to give me a sweet smile, it makes my chest swell.

She doesn't know what she means to me, the painful need she makes me feel in my bones. The girl has been living rent free in my mind ever since I saw one of her concerts a couple of months ago. I'm not much for music, or concerts, or crowds but her face was up on a poster.

It was the face that made me walk inside, those green eyes with that secret glimmer in them, the dimples in her cheeks... but it was she who put a spell on me. In that concert hall I could barely breathe, feeling like I for the first time had been brought to

life again.

The colors seemed brighter, the sounds loud and clear and my body started buzzing. After that I was a man obsessed, constantly plotting how to get closer to her, how to get her to say hello to me. To smile at me. I've kept an eye on her, learning a thing or two. On one side she's one of the most passionate, hardworking women I've ever seen, playing so ferociously on her cello like she doesn't care if her fingers bleed.

On the other side she's a little spoiled, her manager doing her grocery shopping, buying her clothes and that annoying manager is always by her side, like a yapping Chihuahua whenever Amber is out. Getting close to her was impossible.

The only time she's out without her manager is when she jogs in the woods. But I couldn't stop her there, not wanting to scare her. I was running out of ideas when I got a google alert that she had put up an ad for a roommate.

I jumped at the chance, going frantic at the thought that she might reject me and accept someone else. She didn't. Answering my prayers, just like I will answer hers.

"You're a brave man, Stanmore...I mean Stan," she muses, opening a door, "for choosing to live in a basement."

"And you're a brave girl. For letting a man stay in your basement."

Amber snickers, but despite the laughter it's obvious something is up with her. The reddened edges around her eyes, the way she looks like she's carrying around a weight. I want to lift that weight off, comfort her. I want to make her feel good.

"It's not much," she says, glancing at me, "changed your mind yet?"

"It's perfect," I answer and it's true. The naked walls, the pipes up in the ceiling and

the small window remind me of my childhood. I lived in similar conditions, for years all the way up into my late teens without child protective services ever noticing.

“Do you think the bed will fit,” Amber asks, “it won’t be too small for your size?”

She blushes at her words, glancing at the door like she should give me some privacy but that’s exactly what I don’t want. I don’t want any privacy from her. If it was my choice she’d be by my side at all times.

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“Let’s try it out,” I say, jumping down on the bed and it lets out such a whine under my weight that Amber puts a hand in front of her mouth, her eyes widening in distress.

“It’s pretty old, forgot to tell you that. Maybe you won’t be able to sleep at night?”

I shrug, putting my arms under my head. “The sound doesn’t bother me. As long as it doesn’t bother you?” Her hand traces the wall. “Won’t be able to hear anything. The basement is sound isolated.”

My brows rise. “Sound isolated?”

“Mhm,” she murmurs, shooting me a curious glance, “you’re from Colorado aren’t you?”

Tensing, I just nod because I don’t feel good lying to her. I’m not from Colorado, I’m from here and I gave up my apartment in the city to move in with her. The thing about me needing a place to stay because I found a new job, was something I made up to seem less suspicious.

“You don’t have an accent,” she continues and I clear my throat.

“My parents were from Chicago,” I answer because that’s not a lie at least.

Her eyes go to mine in pity. “Were?”

“Car accident. Old, wooden bridge. River. They didn’t survive.”

But I did. I was there with them, held my mother's hand until the pain in my lungs from holding my breath under water, got too great and I managed to wiggle free and swim up to the surface. They didn't.

I was eleven at the time and lived on my own ever since. No relatives, nothing. Just me in the basement of our old house, living on scraps from the neighbors thrown away food like a rat. "I'm so sorry," Amber murmurs, that secret glimmer in her eyes getting replaced by compassion, "I shouldn't have asked."

"I don't mind it when you ask," I rasp and her eyes arrest on mine, something passing between us that makes her all jittery.

"I should let you get settled. When you're done, maybe you could come up and we'll have lunch...or well, maybe that's brunch." Taking a deep breath, I watch her cheeks turn pink and then she turns around. "See you soon." Smile. Dimple. "Roomie..."

Rising in bed, my fists tighten and I almost reach out for her but she's already gone. My heart starts pumping and I rub a hand over my face. Relax. She's still here. Just upstairs and within my reach.

Closer than she's ever been.

She never wears her hair up, always lets it coil in thick, brown ringlets between her shoulder blades. She always wears it down, like she doesn't want me to get to her neck. I stalk over to her as she has her back turned to me. My footsteps are soundless and she doesn't notice me, humming a song to herself that for some reason makes me feel drowsy, like I'm underwater with her.

She jerks, and I realize that I'm brushing against her and she turns around with a

surprised look on her face, before her eyes go hooded, her gaze going down to my mouth.

“Ah...didn’t see you there. “ She bites her lip and her mouth is neither too big nor too small. Perfect. “You sure unpacked fast.”

That’s because I hurried, not wanting to waste any time with her. This is my first time being this close, my whole body spattering with animated energy but I try to hide it, shoving my hands in my pockets and casually lean back.

“Didn’t bring much,” I answer. “You said it yourself.”

“Think I did.” Her eyes dart and she looks like she has something she’s hesitant to say on her tongue. “Were you smelling my hair?”

Her voice is breathy, like the thought of me doing something like that excites her. It excites me too.

“No,” I answer, giving her a relaxed, charming smile. But I was. And she smells like sugar and cinnamon and once she’s allowed me in, I’ll bury my whole face in her. “Of course,” she shakes her head as if she’s being silly, “I don’t even know why I said that.” Walking around the kitchen island, she hands me a plate. “You like vego tacos, right?”

I’ve never had them before. “Love them.”

Smiling, she hands me my utensils and shoves forth a couple of small bowls. “All I had was vegetables. I need to go and tell my manager to go to the grocery store.” She glances at me. “She spoils me like that, because usually I’m too busy to do it myself.”

Biting into the food, I reply, “I’ll do it for you if you want.”

She bites into her food too, her bites so small it makes me want to feed her myself to make sure she's satiated. "That's okay. Gina's got it covered."

"Maybe her services aren't needed, now that you have me." I say it casually. Suggestively and she stops chewing, glancing at me.

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“Maybe you’re right,” she murmurs then smiles at me, making me feel like I’m growing taller and heavier in my seat. “I think I’m going to like having you around here.”

“Think I’m going to like it more.” So much more.

Her eyes flicker and when our legs brush against each other under the table, she doesn’t immediately pull away. She lets it linger, causing a current to rise up and finally explode in my groin. I don’t know how much longer I’ll be able to stop myself from touching her.

It’s already taking a toll on me.

Taking a sip out of my coke, I ask, “What’s the neighborhood like?”

Amber squirms. “Pretty prissy unfortunately. Rich, snobby people but at least they never play music that loud and they never complain when I do.” Grazing her lip with her teeth, she says, “Think you told me you were a mason...?”

“Yes ma’am,” I answer, making her burst out into a short laugh. “It’s in my blood. My father was a mason and my grandfather before him.”

There’s something satisfying about using bricks, or my preferred favorites, natural stone to build walls, fences, chimneys. It’s hard work, but it’s exactly what I need. Building walls that can be torn down, when my own can’t.

Except by...her if she’s willing.

Amber nods with interest while I keep making small talk, but I leave some things out. Such as that I own a decent amount of property and definitely don't need to be sharing house. She'll find out all that about me soon enough but right now, while she's still testing the waters, I don't want to make her distrustful. After we finish eating, I grab our plates to go and wash up when she stops me, but I shake my head.

"I insist. You made the food, I'll clean the dishes."

"My manager would love you..." she muses and then a shadow crosses her face. "I should probably go and practice on my music."

But she doesn't move, sitting in her chair like a wooden doll and I throw her a worried glance. She wraps her arms around her body, swallowing and flickers of insecurity start playing in her eyes. I don't like them there, they have no place being with her.

I'll chase them away if I have to.

"Amber...?" I say softly and she twitches, looking at me and embarrassment floods her face.

"Right...I'm totally not procrastinating by the way."

"Not judging." Why would I when I know that she's amazing. When I know that she's so much better than she gives herself credit for.

Tilting her head to the side, she murmurs, "No, you don't seem like the judgey type."

Don't think I have the right to. It's not exactly like I have a halo around my head. Amber does, on the other hand. "I'm not," I answer, finishing up with the dishes and I cross my arms over my chest. "You?"

The question makes her fidget. “Sometimes...but I suppose it depends on the situation.”

Will she forgive me when she finds out about me? When she finds out about the lengths I’ll go to make her mine? Will she be as blindingly forgiving toward me as I want her to be?

“How do you feel about people who do things that seem immoral in other people’s eyes?”

A frown forms between her dark brows. “Immoral? As long as they don’t cross a line, then I guess I don’t mind.”

I need to know where she draws that line. Need to know, so that I don’t step over it.

“And what’s that line?”

She runs her fingers through her hair, nonchalant, not knowing how important this is to me. “Hurting someone.”

Fuck, I’ve hurt a lot of people. I’ve been entangled with people who were better left alone. Criminals, gangsters, murderers. But they deserved it. Besides, it’s in the past. History. And what matters is my future with her. A future where she’s all mine and everything that entails.

Her mouth pulls to her side and she looks at me with playful eyes. “Why are you asking me this? Are you planning on doing something immoral?”

Not planning. I already have.

For her. Anything and I mean anything, for her.

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3

Amber

My new roommate has been living with me for three days. And those three days have gone better than I expected, making me triumphant because Gina was all wrong when she thought it was going to be troubling.

As suspected I like him having here and we've already slipped into a rhythm that's entirely our own. Even if he's the one busy for work, he lets me have the first shower in the morning and most of the warm water.

When I come down to the kitchen for my breakfast, he already has it ready, frozen berries and milk and ice coffee. He already knows what I like. He's considerate. Kind.

And strong.

I try not to stare when he leaves for work, dressed in worn out denims and t-shirts that show off his rugged muscles. He always wears light colors, white or pale grey or any other non-threatening shade. By the door he always turns and waves goodbye, his eyes simmering with something that makes my whole body tingle.

I wave goodbye back, watching him in the window as he leaves and I almost feel like a little wifey. My cheeks heat at the thought, because there's been times when I've caught him staring at me, his eyes like pure velvet but his mouth is hard. Like he wants something, sink it into my flesh just to see how I taste. Or maybe to leave a

mark.

My heart speeds up at the thought, a slight tremble moving through my limbs. I've never been much for men before, always caring more about my music. Music was always number one. The thought of it being replaced by something else, or someone else is terrifying. And thrilling.

Stan has only been in my life for a little while, but I already can't imagine him leaving. His presence is strangely supporting. He doesn't even have to say anything, I just have to look into his eyes to know that he'll have my back no matter what.

But it makes me wonder why. He barely knows me and yet he makes me feel as if he would try to turn the world on its axis just to see me smile. He seems to love my smiles, getting a funny look on his face every time I give him one.

A look that says that I'm all his.

And there's a threat in his eyes. A threat that says that he's going to strip me to my most basic self and demand things from me in return that nobody else has needed from me.

I've never really belonged to anyone. My body has never really belonged to anyone but me and lying in bed, I stroke my soft curves, wondering what it would feel like to have Stan touching me. He has perfect hands, the caring hands of a maker.

Turning to look at the clock by my bedside, I sigh. Yet another sleepless night. It's two in the morning and pitch black outside. I couldn't sleep at all last night either. My mind is too preoccupied with thoughts about Stan and my body is different too, now that he's here. It seems to be overflowing with a red energy that I just don't know how to calm down.

I try not to think about him, but it only makes it worse. I keep seeing his eyes in front of me, that grin that says I'm harmless but not quite. I wonder what that slightly ruthless streak on his mouth would feel like on mine.

Would he be ruthless with me or would he try to be gentle for my sake? I wouldn't want him to hold back with me. Maybe because a part of me is curious to see where the road leads if he decides to take me on a ride. Maybe I would love it. Maybe I would regret it...

When my throat constricts with thirst, I get out of bed to go and grab a glass of water.

I tiptoe down the staircase, careful not to stumble on any steps. Turning on the light in the hallway, I flinch when I notice that a light is already lit in the living room.

Did I forget to turn it off?

Walking into the living room, I freeze in the doorway at the sight of Stan sitting on my cream couch, wearing only grey pajama pants. He looks up when he hears me, his eyes tightening but he doesn't scramble. Doesn't even try to hide what he's doing.

I just stand there, not really understanding why he would be doing this.

On the TV there's a home video playing, the sound muted. It was taped during one of my rare vacations. Me, bicycling down a dusty road and waving at the camera. Me, climbing up a mountain with cheeks that look like two red apples from the effort.

Me, spinning on a square in Milan while doves are flying around me. And then there's the photos of me, that he has spread out over the coffee table. I swallow, because I didn't expect this. It's so personal somehow. A little intrusive. Which is why I have no idea why my body is acting like it's just been dipped in a pool of gooey, warm honey.

“Stan...” I say hesitantly, rubbing sleep out of my eyes, “where did you get those?”

His brows knot, a first flicker of nervousness like he’s worried I’ll have a breakdown.

“I was looking for a file. There’s a leaky pipe in the basement.” He gestures with his hand. “But then I found these and I just couldn’t stop looking.”

It’s late. He should be asleep. He’s got work tomorrow, hard work that requires a lot of physical strength and he’s going to need his rest and yet he decides to sit and look at...

Little, old me.

I don’t need a mirror to know that I’m turning pink. “Why?” I whisper and a frown shows on his face like he’s not entirely sure himself.

“I just couldn’t.”

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It's such a simple answer. Honest somehow and I can't help but to smile at him. And he gets that expression on his face again. All mine.

It makes me squirm. Makes me feel warm all over and I smooth my hair with my hand. "Do you mind if I sit down and join you?"

He puts his arm over the couch's back, making space for me and giving me his answer. I curl up next to him, fully aware of that I'm skimpily clad in satin pajama shorts and a short sleeved night shirt. But he's not wearing much either, a slight sheen covering his skin and he's got a fine smattering of golden hair on his chest.

His chest looks comforting and safe, making me want to rub my face against it just to see if he's bristly or soft. And if his chest looks safe, then his arms look like two weapons with well-defined muscles and they move under his skin every time he shifts his position.

"Couldn't you sleep?" he asks, his eyes going to my mouth because they tend to do that a lot. And my throat. He looks at my throat a lot too.

I shake my head. "Nervous."

It makes him tense a little, the veins on his arm popping. "About what? About me?"

He sounds so worried that I let out a little laugh. "You? No. Why would I be worried about you when you make me feel so..." I search for the right word, "secure." "Is that what you need from me?" A determined streak flares in his eyes. "Protection?"

Our knees brush together. Barely but that small touch, makes my body fiercely reactive.

My mouth drops and I grow flustered. “I...d...don’t know what I need,” I stutter, my eyes darting and they go to one of the photos. It was taken a couple of years ago in my garden and I’m squinting at the sun.

The expression on my face is confident. Probably different than it is now. Can Stan tell? Can he tell how doubtful I am these days? Does he even care?

I glance at him and he looks like he cares. He looks like he cares more than anybody else ever has.

“Then will you do something for me that I need?” he asks and my eyes flare in surprise but I nod. He jerks his head at my cello in the corner. “Will you play something for me? I haven’t heard you play ever since I came here.”

Fidgeting, I’m tempted to sneak away with my tail between my legs. “That’s because I don’t like an audience. Not anymore at least.”

“Why not?” “Because I...suck,” I breathe and he looks like he’s about to let out a curse but then he doesn’t. He seems to be treading carefully, suddenly treating me with velvet gloves.

“How about you play and I won’t even look at you and you can pretend I’m not even here.”

“Easier said than done,” I reply but I don’t want to say no to him and I get up, hoping he doesn’t notice my legs shaking and then I take my cello and sit down on a chair. With the instrument in a firm grip, I throw him a glance and he looks away, keeping his promise.

Taking a deep breath I start playing, tensing when I mess up on the first note and I expect at least a chuckle from Stan but he stays silent. Reverent. It spurs me up with some courage and I start playing, classical tones filling my small living room.

I feel his energy coming at me again, surrounding me, enveloping me in a cocoon and it fills me with a courage I've never felt before. Not even pep talks from Gina or any of my siblings, whom I respect more than anything, fill me with this kind of audacity.

It's strange and I'm not sure what to do with it, my knees trembling as I play. How can he have this effect on me? I don't know and maybe I don't need to know but I can feel it pull us closer, creating an invisible string between us.

Or maybe it's a chain. Something indestructible.

Throwing him a quick glance, I gasp at the look in his eyes. Absorbing. Intense. Devilish.

He averts his glare, remembering his promise but I almost panic. I want those eyes back on me again. I need them! Suddenly I don't know how I could ever play without them.

Licking my lips, I whisper, "Please...I want you to l...look at me."

Stan doesn't say anything, but his eyes move as quickly as a whiplash back on mine again. It relieves me, grounds me and our gazes lock as I play. I stare at him in fascination. The lights in the living room seem to have dimmed or maybe that's just my imagination, but I know I'm not imagining that his eyes are changing.

They're going from that crystal blue, to a darker brown and then black. They stay on the black, holding me in his grip, haunting me. He looks...

Infatuated. Smitten. Obsessed.

When I stop playing, his eyes and the lights in the room return to normal and I put the cello away. “You’re a good audience, Stan,” I whisper, my voice breaking a little from emotion. “If everyone were like you...” I search for the right words, “then I’d probably never doubt myself ever again.”

“You won’t,” he says with a lot of certainty and I look at him in surprise. “I’m here now.”

He is. And it seems like he’s a blessing in disguise.

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He seems so dedicated to me somehow and it heats me up, heats up the cold I've been feeling inside. I'm so grateful for the warmth that I invite him to the concert on Friday.

It's risky because I could make a fool out of myself but deep down I know that Stan would never hold that against me. Instead he'd probably do everything he can to make me feel better about myself.

"I'll be there," he answers in a low voice. And then he reaches out his hand toward me and I don't even hesitate, reaching out my own and our fingers twist. It's a slight, innocent touch but for some reason it doesn't feel so innocent at all.

4

Stanmore

I could barely keep it together yesterday when Amber walked into the living room, wearing her little pajama set, looking good enough to eat. First I thought she was going to get angry that I was invading on her privacy.

But instead she walked closer, driving me crazy at the feel of her being right next to me. So close that I could touch her, fist her hair and run my tongue wherever there is a pulse on her body.

She played for me. She wanted my eyes on her at all times.

She's unaware that they already are on her at all times. I'm preoccupied with her, I

eat, sleep and breathe her. She's taken over every part of me and made it hers.

I'm already all hers. All 6.3 of me and now I just need to make her mine. All 5.4 of her with pretty lips and generous hips.

Living with her, has made me learn things about her I wouldn't have known otherwise. Her favorite newspaper is the Chicago Tribune, she's allergic to red wine, almost only watches dating shows and laughs so hard at dirty jokes that she gets a hiccup.

She hates having the windows shut in the house, always preferring to leave them open even when it rains and she loves laundry day. And for some reason she doesn't freak out, when she finds me doing things I shouldn't.

Yesterday she caught me red handed. I wasn't looking for a file, I was looking for something else but I couldn't find it. There's a question I need answered. One that's been plaguing me for months.

The problem is that she's usually in the house, making it hard for me to search through every corner. She's in the shower right now and I should be in her bedroom but just for a couple of minutes I can't help but to lean against the bathroom door, lean my cheek against the frame and close my eyes in delirium.

Steam seeps out of the crack, the smell intoxicating and I run my tongue over my teeth, imagining licking and swallowing her. I know she'd be all silky, no rough edges anywhere. Smoothness.

There's nothing sharp about her, nothing harsh. She's soft. And that's why she needs me. She's the diamonds on the handle of a dagger and I'm the blade, striking down on anything and anyone that tries to harm her.

If anything happens to her I'll...I freeze when she lets out a shriek and there's a thumping sound and I pound my fist on the door.

"Amber!" I bark and there's a second, smaller shriek that makes me grind my jaw from worry. "Are you alright?"

"F...fine," she stutters, doing nothing to calm me and I drag aragged breath.

"You don't sound fine," I frown. "Open the door and let me see."

"Can`t," she answers, "think I've cracked open my skull."

What the..."Amber, I'm kicking the door in, stand back..."

"No, stop!" A stream of sniggers reach my ears. "I'm kidding, it's nothing. I just dropped my soap then slipped a little."

"Did you fall, hurt yourself anywhere?"

"Ego's pretty bruised." She lets out another titter before taking a breath and relief floods me that she's okay but I would have preferred if she didn't play with me like that. "What are you doing outside the bathroom?" Hell, how do I explain this away...?

"I was downstairs when I heard your scream and I rushed upstairs," I try, hoping she'll accept it. There's a slight pause before there's a response.

"Wow, you're pretty fast then," she murmurs and I graze my lip with my teeth.

"Used to run a ton when I was younger." Not a lie, I'd been chased by thugs with knives and guns until I learned how to defend myself. "But if you're sure you don't need anything, I'll let you finish your shower and I'll go to bed."

“Kay. Good night...Stan.”

I love it when she says my name like that, softly but with enough sultriness to drive me mad. And then when I finally get her to be mine, I'll make her say my name like that over and over. Only that then, she'll be screaming it.

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Amber's taking her time in the bathroom, the water still running which is good because I need to search her room. I tried doing it yesterday but she was in there almost the whole day, playing on her cello.

I frown when I remember that she didn't technically play. More like played around and then it was silent in there for hours. My brilliant, little cellist is blocked. But I'll make sure she loosens up within time. With her music and with me.

Walking into her bedroom, I inhale the smell of her that seems to be sticking to the walls. Leaning my head back I pull in as much as I can down my lungs. Her room reminds me of her, clean and polished with a queen sized bed and linen curtains in the window.

She left a pile of her clothes on the floor before walking into the shower and I pick up her skirt, smelling it, breathing the area that crinkled up in between her legs. Smells like concentrated ecstasy and I grind my teeth when my mouth waters with need.

Walking over to one of her drawers, I open it, finding neat rows of lingerie and picking up one of her thongs, I imagine it decorating her spiffy ass. The colors remind me of jewels, emerald green, ruby red...

They'd look like pieces of art on her feathery skin. Skin that I can't wait to brand with little love bites.

Skin that will only ever feel my teeth and my claws and nobody else's, I'll familiarize her with my touch, make her used to it, make her addicted. I want her undone, so greedy for me that every day that I come home from work I want to find her naked in

my bed, baring the most intimate part of her to me. Her body needs to be exposed. Her heart exposed. No walls between us. Not like there are now.

But if I'm going to have that, I'm going to have to tell her the truth about me. Tell her who I really am and that I have come for her. Then I want her to welcome me with open arms. No pushing away.

No fucking pushing away. Ever. She can't do that to me.

It would kill me. Make me feel like I'm under water again. Drowning. But this time there wouldn't be no surface. No surface without her. No air. Only a choking stone cold, that would paralyze me from the inside.

I drag a ragged breath and close the drawer before walking over to her desk and sit down in front of her computer. Her desk is spotless but still personable, a yellow, plastic flower, a half-eaten tootsie roll and a small stack of books and I throw a glance at the titles.

Dracula, Frankenstein, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde... They look untouched and no wonder because the books in her bookshelf are all Amish romance and women's fiction. It makes a smile pull at my lips at her attempt to bring something with more of a bite into her life.

She thinks she has to because she's insecure. Because some asshole has told her, her music isn't good enough. I want to crush anyone who's against her in my fist. Give them what they deserve. My eyes return to the screen and I search for her website. I'm already familiar with it. I've read every one of her blog posts several times. So many times that I've almost memorized them.

I know her dream and aspiration is to play abroad. I know her dream is to be signed. I know she gets stressed whenever she's had a bad concert and that she always

comforts herself with a bowl of pistachio ice cream.

But I've never had access to her website this way before, never been in this much control. And maybe that was a good thing because I do not fucking like what I see.

Bile rises in my throat when I read her inbox. There are messages from men, asking her to take off her clothes when she's on stage the next time, asking her to spend a night with them in exchange for money.

Asking her to send them pictures of herc...my fists clench in fury...cunt.

Their words make my heart hammer in my chest, throwing a haze over my eyes. There's so many of them. Did she read them? She must have. She must have read what they think of her, what they want from her.

Want what's mine and grabbing one of her pens, I shove the tip into my palm, making it hurt just to make sure that I don't destroy the computer. I feel that familiar shove in my chest that pushes me to take action and it takes all my willpower to not throw the computer out the window. I decide to just delete every message coming from a male, cursing every single one of them as every one of their disgusting messages disappear. But it doesn't end there. There are messages from women too.

Jealous ones. Messages that are green with envy. Wounding.

I can't have Amber reading them. It's bad for her and knowing how sensitive she is right now, I couldn't live with myself if I allowed someone to hurt her like this.

Seeing no other option, I terminate the domain.

When the question "are you sure?" pops up on the screen, a satisfied grin spreads over my face and I click on yes. She's safe now. Shielded.

The website disappears, a feeling of calm spreading in my body, leveling out some of the raging jealousy I felt when reading those messages.

A jealousy I can't ever let myself feel again. It's dangerous. An entity of its own that even I can't control. Getting up, I search through the rest of her room but I don't find what I'm looking for and I let out a low curse.

Where the hell did she hide them? I need to find them. Are they even in her house? I need to know...

A low humming travels into the room from the hallway and I go rigid. She's out of the shower and she's going to walk in any second and I'm still here.

She can't find me like this. I wouldn't be able to give her a good explanation. To my annoyance she doesn't have a closet where I can hide and having no other choice, I dive under her bed. There's a fluffy sheet on her mattress, the frill going almost all the way down to the floor and giving me a good cover.

I don't breathe when I catch her walking in, leaving wet footprints over the floorboard and her ankles look so clean, that I almost brush my knuckles against them. She's still humming to herself and I bite my tongue when she drops the towel.

Torture. An exquisite pain ripping me up from the inside.

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I'd refrain from water for days, just to catch a glimpse of her, satiate the curiosity that's been plaguing me. Finally knowing whether she is all smooth or fuzzy like a sweet peach between her legs, knowing whether her breasts would feel heavy or light as air in my hands.

My fists clench, my teeth driving so far into my lip that I taste a trace of blood. Want her so damn much. Would kill for her. Ruin myself for her.

Her humming stops as she's standing by her desk and she lets out a small gasp. It fills the room like a shocked scream and I tense, wondering what's gotten her so bothered...For a while I think that maybe she hurt herself, stepped on something or pushed against a hard edge and it nearly brings me out of my hiding place.

"Hey G, it's me," she says seconds later, sounding perplexed and panting a little. I lift my head to be able to hear her more clearly.

She's talking on the phone with someone. I'm assuming G is that manager of hers.

"So you know that I always obsessively check my website?" Pause. "Yes, I know it's bad for me but that's not why I'm calling."

Pause and I can hear some yapping on the other side.

"Listen, the website has crashed or something. I can't find it anymore." Pause. "Why is this happening now...no, I swear I didn't touch anything. Aha, all gone."

"My roommate?"

I freeze.

“Why would he have anything to do with it?” She sighs. “Come on G, why do you always think the worst of people?”

I did it to help her. Shelter her.

“No, he’s great actually. He’s really...” Her voice fills up with emotion and I stop breathing, waiting for her response.

“Nice.”

Nice? That’s it. Nice?

“He’s so gentle. Caring. No it’s not a bad thing, I like that about him but there’s just something about him. Almost like he’s holding back a part of himself, some...secret he wants to tell me but can’t....I know I sound crazy now, let’s just hang up and forget I said anything.”

“Kissed? No we haven’t kissed,” she almost squeals. “And I’m hanging up now. Make sure to get the website fixed. Bye G. Love you.”

Cut. A trace of jealousy spikes in me.

Sighing, she mutters something to herself about the website then crosses the floor over to her bed. My eyes squeeze when she sinks down on the mattress, letting out a comfortable moan that shoots straight through my brain.

I feel her moving around on top of me, bury herself in between her frilly covers and cushions and I press down on my shaft with the heel of my palm, gritting my teeth. I listen to her inhales and exhales, counting her breaths. They’re deep. Relaxed. Good, I

don't want her to have any fears. Or nightmares.

And she won't, now that she has a guardian monster under her bed.

5

Amber

When Stan came home from work today, the first thing he did was to check in on me. I was busy procrastinating, trying to teach myself to knit and the reprimanding look on his face was so funny that I nearly burst out into laughter.

Shaking his head, he walked over to me, still wearing his cognac colored leather jacket and grey hoodie underneath. He smelled amazing of aftershave, physical labor and hot afternoon sun.

"You know what you should be doing," he rasped, his eyes attentive as always, "and this is not it." Then he scooped me up, making me squeal, put me down on a chair and handed me my cello and stroke.

Taking my wrists he placed my hands on the instrument, his touch so overwhelming that I felt it in my whole body. Bending his face down, I could barely breathe as he stood behind me, his cheek brushing against my temple.

"Play," he said, sounding like he wanted no protests. Like he knows what's best for me. And judging by how well I played afterwards, maybe he's right.

Sometimes it feels like he knows everything. Like he knows my dreams and little secrets that not even I am aware of. Sometimes it feels like he's going to pull them out of me.

And I know that they'd be safe in his hands.

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Putting my cello aside, I rise, stretching my neck and my arms. I could use a break. I've been going at it for hours now and weirdly I feel somewhat okay about the concert tomorrow. Maybe because Stan is here, my security blanket.

My unexpected hero.

He's down in the basement, taking a nap because he was exhausted when he came home from work. And after looking out for me, he went to bed. I don't want to disturb so I don't tell him that I'm heading out for a run in the woods. It's pretty nearby and I don't have to walk far to get to the runners trail. It's nice here, the sun is slowly going down the horizon and there's a slight breeze in the air, birds chirping in their trees and I can still hear the sound from someone mowing their lawn.

Inhaling the woodsy aerosol, a smile pulls at my lips at how pretty the lush tree crowns look with the sun shimmering in between them and then I start running.

It's just me out, I don't meet anyone, except for a middle aged man jogging with his white golden retriever.

Next time, maybe I could ask Stan if he wants to join me. Though I doubt I'll be able to concentrate on exercising with him right next to me, doubt that I'll be able to turn my gaze away from those intense eyes of his that sometimes seem to be tricolored.

When they change like that, he seems to be staring straight into my soul. I can't do the same with him on the other hand. A wall seems to be up but I don't know why.

Why do people put up walls in the first place?

To protect themselves? Or maybe sometimes it's to protect others...

I shudder, suddenly cold even if the temperature hasn't changed and my panting increases the farther I run. I'm on the yellow trail, but maybe it would be a good thing to get rid of as much nervous energy as possible so I switch to the red instead.

It's a longer one, blinking like a beacon and it takes me farther into the woods, where I no longer can hear any sounds from the street and where the vegetation seems denser, the branches a little sharper.

At least it's not dark out yet but the trees are closely knitted together here, making it harder for the light to pass through. I don't mind. I don't scare easily. Besides I have a man back home, who I have the feeling would come to my rescue faster than I could blink if anything would happen.

The way he held me today was different. He's touched me before of course, when handing me something or when we brush against each other in the staircase. But today he was different.

Impatient.

Hungry.

It made me hunger for him too, making me fantasize about our lips clasp in a rosy kiss, his hands holding me gently, his mouth whispering romantic words in my ear before his lips go lower and...

Corrupt me. My fists clench at my waist because I don't know where that thought came from. I'm not that kind of girl. I'm wholesome. I like hearty things, not dark ones.

But I like Stan, and there is something dark about him even if he tries to hide it. In the very beginning he had me fooled. I confused him for just a regular guy. Then I caught him looking at photos of me in the middle of the night, caught the look on his face when he watched me play.

A look that I will never forget for as long as I live.

A look that makes me feel feverish. Edgy. Like it could make me risk anything, just to have him watching me like that. It's a drug. One that can't be bought and sold. Its special. Rare.

Belonging to a rare animal.

And there is something animalistic about Stan. Underneath it all. He's casual otherwise, bends his head back when he laughs out loud, causing faint lines to spread around his eyes. He smells good. Fresh and crisp.

Normal.

Sometime he watches baseball on the television and waves and chats with the neighbors over the fence. He plays with their fluffy, spoiled dogs and kicks the ball back to the kids whenever they kick it into our yard. He's funny too, joking around with me until I laugh so much that it feels like I'm being tickled to death. And the other day he went with his colleagues to grab a beer after work, just like any other guy.

But sometimes all that feels like an act.

Underneath it all he is different. His body language always alert like he doesn't miss a thing. He doesn't move the way normal people do. His movements too fluid, too determined.

Like he has a single goal on his mind. It intrigues me, makes me want things from him that a regular girl like me shouldn't want.

I wonder what Stan would do if I told him that. Would he tell me to give in, ask me to dive into unknown territory? And if I was scared would he still manage to make me feel safe...?

I jump when a twig snaps from behind me.

It catches me off guard and I'm going at such a speed that I come to an abrupt stop. What was that? That sounded like quite the twig breaking, not done by a small, furry animal.

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A human?

Shaking myself inwardly, I scold my own mind for jumping to conclusions. Why wouldn't there be a human? This isn't my very own forest. Other people run here too. Yes, but on the trail...

Swallowing, I rub the goosebumps on my arm, trying to look in between the dense trees. There's no figure. No shadows.

Nothing to worry about and I take off again, a little happy that it won't be long until I've finished the whole trail. And maybe if there really was a person in there, then maybe they were picking something.

Flowers, mushrooms, berries.

Not spying on me.

But I still feel watched and my heart, picks up on my nervousness, immediately reacting. Suddenly I want Stan.

If he was here, I'd feel better. Whenever he's around, I never feel scared...

In my periphery I catch something swishing by and I let out a low yelp. Jerkily turning my head to the side, I register that there's nobody there but I know it's just pretend.

They're just hiding. Someone really is in there.

With a trembling mouth and panic in my eyes, I run down the trail until fire burns in my chest. Nobody is behind me but it still feels like someone is breathing down my neck. Trying to get to me. Reaching for me...

I want Stan. I need him right now. I need him so much, that I'm close to bursting out in tears.

Stan, Stan, Stan!

It's the only chant in my mind and I let out scared, little whimpers, somewhat relieved that soon I'll be out on the street again but it still doesn't feel like the danger is over. Whoever is in there could still decide to attack...

The panic makes my throat swell.

I can hear footsteps coming behind me, but when I look over my shoulder there's nobody there. It's like someone is playing a trick on me and I don't know whether to laugh or cry. My vision turns blurry and for a second, I see everything in double.

When I stumble, I let out a short cry, expecting someone to reach for me, throw me up into the air like a plaything but there's nothing and I get up. Whatever is chasing me, it's like it's holding back.

Why? Out of care for me?

I shake my head, leaping over a toppled tree and I gasp from happiness when I catch sight of the street...My breath punches out of me, when I slam into a tall, hard body, my eyes widening in fear when strong hands clasp around my upper arms.

"Amber?" Voice concerned. "What's the matter? Are you okay?"

It's him. The one I wanted.

"Stan!" I croak, throwing myself around his neck and his arms cage me in. "I'm so happy it's you. I was so afraid."

His Adams apple bobs.

"You were?" For some reason his voice is tinged with guilt, like it's his fault I was scared. But it's not, he made it all better again.

Even this close to the forest and even though whoever was in there is probably still there, I feel like nothing can hurt me when I'm surrounded by Stan.

"Someone was chasing me," I say, not even aware of how hard I'm clutching the jacket of his tracksuit. "Someone was after me."

His hands rub down my shoulders, my arms, controlling the adrenaline.

"Let's get you home."

He puts his arm around me and I automatically lean into him for a second, before looking up at his face. "Stan," I whisper, like someone could hear us, "you don't understand...I think I know who it was."

Stanmore

Looking down at those green eyes, my heart jolts. She knows? Can't be. I doubt she would have thrown herself into my arms had she known. Yes, Amber is bold but she doesn't seek out danger.

"Who?" I ask, my arms hardening around her, so hard that she lets out a low whimper and I immediately loosen my grip, not wanting to hurt her.

"Think it's best if I show you," she whispers, glancing at me and then her cheeks turn red as if it's not until now that she realized that we're walking down the street like a couple, tightly together, looking deep into each other's eyes.

She tries to put some space between us. But I don't let her. I can't. The way she clung to me when she saw me, did something to me. It ripped me right open, shook me to my core. The way she said my name, the way her fingers dug into my shoulders, the way her eyes shone with a light that said,

I trust you.

What would she do if she knew it was me? Would she try to fight me?

Something inhumane stirs in me. She could try...

"Stan?" she says, jerking me out of my thoughts and I look down at her and she shivers when I stroke her back.

“Yes,” I say gently and she licks her lips, brushing some hair off her forehead.

“What were you doing out?”

I circle my fingers around her lower back, leisurely massaging her to make her relax and it seems to work because the worry in her eyes that was there before, starts to fade.

“Woke up, saw you were gone and figured you’d gone out for a run and I wanted to join you.”

Lie. It pains me having to tell them, but it’s necessary. I can’t tell her the truth. That I followed her as soon as she left the house, that I watched her as she ran like a prey and that thoughts I shouldn’t have started playing in my head.

Thoughts about how easy it would have been to lie in wait, take her by surprise, move her down to the ground and attack her sweet throat with my teeth. Keep her under my control.

Those thoughts...

They sickened me. They excited me.

Just like my obsession with her both sickens and excites me. I’ll never fully be able to accept it unless she does it too.

“Oh,” she murmurs, shaking her head, “I’m happy you were there at least. I was about to crawl out of my skin for a second there.”

Fuck, I never meant to frighten her. Never meant for her to feel me. But just like me, she’s an animal and she can feel her surroundings. She could tell she was being

hunted.

She still is. Only that now she's not running. Because she trusts me.

"Are you okay?" she suddenly asks and I want to kiss her mouth. "You're frowning?"

I make an effort to smooth out my features, trying to appear normal again but it's harder now. The façade is slipping. I don't know for how much longer I'll be able to keep it up. Until she gives into you.

How long will that take? Weeks, months, years? However long, I can wait.

"What was it that you wanted to show me?" I rasp and she nods, opening the front door and I walk in behind her. A neighbor is watching us from his garden, watering his flowers and my lips pull over my teeth.

Sooner or later, I'm going to have to get Amber out of here. Away from prying eyes.

Kicking off her running shoes, she tiptoes over to the closet in the hallway and then she rummages through it for a good while, until she finally pulls out a shoebox.

It's wrapped with floral paper, looking like the kind of thing a young girl would keep her diary in. That's what she wants to show me?

"In the kitchen," she murmurs and I follow and she puts the box on the table. Taking a deep breath and watching me with wary eyes, she opens the box and I freeze.

There they are. What I've been looking for. The thing I've searched her whole house after. Letters.

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All the letters that I wrote to her. She read them, she even kept them.

The notion makes me so hard, my legs go numb, my muscles straining and my mouth goes dry. But I hide my reaction to her, pretending to be aloof.

“This is what I wanted you to see,” she says, picking up the letters and she spreads them over the table. Her eyes are a little feverish, her hands trembling. “I started getting them a couple of months of ago and they’re pretty...” she bites her lip, “intense.”

My eyes go to hers, her own ones not revealing how she feels about the intensity. “Is that good or bad?” I ask.

“I don’t know,” she whispers, her fingers sliding over one of the envelopes. “The tone in them is so extreme. There’s been times when I’ve read them that I’ve started trembling and then I can’t stop for hours.”

I immediately start imagining her doing that. Reading those letters, then climbing up into her bed, wearing only underwear and riding the waves that my words give her.

“I have no idea who’s writing them, he signs them of saying The Admirer and that’s it.” The one who’s writing them is standing in her kitchen. And he was allowed in freely. He was welcomed.

“He sends me roses too. Two dozen, red ones after every concert.”

“And you think it was The Admirer who chased after you in the forest?” I say in a

soft voice.

She looks at me helplessly. “I don’t know. Maybe. Do you think that’s farfetched?”

I clear my throat. “I don’t think that whoever wrote those letters would want to scare you.”

“Really?” she shrugs, rubbing her arms, picking up a letter. “But listen to what some of them say.”

Amber reads me a couple of lines and I remember writing them, my need for her putting me in a trance , destroying me and nourishing me at the same time.

When she finishes reading, she looks at me with glassy eyes. “That’s not normal, right? Normal people don’t think like that. They don’t feel those things, The Admirer feels.”

“Maybe not,” is all I reply, my voice strained and she shudders, her lower lip trembling. “I don’t know why I kept them. I shouldn’t have.”

My fists clench. “Why did you? Why didn’t you throw them away?”

Her shoulders shrug frailly. “When I feel bad, I read them. They pull me up. His words nourish me.”

Her eyes fill with tears. “But it feels like they could destroy me too.”

Never! I heatedly yank her to my chest and she bursts out into tears. Never destroy. Only keep. And love and cherish in the only way that I can. Her whole body is on edge, her tears sipping through my clothes and a roaring wave of self-hate that I’ve never felt before, cuts in me.

How the fuck could I have written her those words? I should have taken more care, should have known they were going to be too much for her.

“I will burn those letters for you,” I murmur against her hair, “Rip them in pieces one by one.”

“N...no,” she stutters, sounding a little alarmed, “that’s not why I’m crying.”

I frown, cradling her to let her know she’s beloved. “Then why?”

“It’s just a lot right now. With the concert that’s tomorrow and...”

“You will be fine,” I say, stroking her back. “Don’t worry that pretty, little head. I’m here now.” “You’ll be sitting in the audience tomorrow won’t you? Just like you promised?”

I pull away a little to look at her as she peers up at me. “Wouldn’t miss it for the world.” Our eyes hijack, neither of us blinking. I feel her in every part of me. The good ones, the ugly ones. And they’re all hers.

In her hands they are bearable. She smooths the edges, easing the suffering. When she buries her face against my chest again, the pain in my shaft turns unbearable and I place a tender kiss against her temple.

She tenses but I don’t stop, tracing my mouth down her cheek, jawline, loving the powder soft skin. A pulse flutters on her throat and I catch it, crushing it like the wings of a butterfly. It’s a warning, a gentle reminder of my true nature.

To my relief she responds, tilting her head to the side, voluntarily giving me more access.

My eyes flare. All mine, you don't even know what you're doing.

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Her innocence makes me want to protect her from myself, but the other part of me won't allow me. It will starve without her, already hungry, greedy. Ferocious.

Pull away, Amber. Pull away before it's far too late...

The first touch of her tongue against mine, feels like a lash of fiery whip. I go from infernal hot to an icy cold, then back again. I'm in her mouth, I can taste her, I swallow her. She moans, stopping my heart for a second and I eat her mouth harder, needing to hear more of those sounds.

The kiss grows frantic, out of control. I feel undead. She's inside me now, lapping at me in rapid strokes, pumping my veins full with her poison and I pull back, my eyes shuddering.

"Fuck, you make me feel alive," I groan, staring up at the ceiling with hooded eyes and I feel like a fiend getting his crucial dose of goodness.

"Stan, I want more," she says, tugging at my t-shirt. "Don't stop kissing me."

She likes this. Likes what I can give her.

I kiss her, until my sanity is only hanging by a fine thread and she lets out little pants, her eyes flaring in shock, her mouth starting to burn under mine. I don't stop, ravished for her. I don't stop, not until she begs me to and when she pulls away, her lips look aching, her skin flushed and she wipes her mouth with her sleeve.

Rubbing my lips with my fingers, I savor the taste of her, before giving her a long

look. “Why did you end it?” I want to punish her for pulling away. For taking away what’s mine.

Her eyes dart and she whispers, “Had to.” Straightening she says in a clearer voice. “I thought I was going to...”

“What?”

She swallows, looking lost. “Lose myself.”

In my chest, my heart expands. Lost for me, when I am already so lost in her? We’ll find ourselves in each other.

Reaching my hand out, I murmur, “Come here.”

Amber hesitates and I don’t like it. I want her to come to me whenever I tell her to. No doubts. No questions. Nothing but surrender.

Clasping my hand in hers, she says, “Can we make it a little less intense this time?”

Slower. That’s all she asks from me. And I’m going to have to adjust even if I want to break her in pieces.

“Anything for you, all mine,” I say against her lips and they pull into a smile when I sit down, dragging her into my lap and we kiss like I don’t have something clawing at my chest, needing to be let out. I kiss her carefully, making her sigh and she digs her fingers into my short hair, her little body warm and safe against mine. I’ll satiate her. Slake whatever she needs me to slake.

She’s happy now. Comforted by my ability to rein myself in. For now she wants something normal.

I can be that for her. Act like a goody two shoes. Be a normal boyfriend.

For now...

7

Amber

He calls me all mine. The words are so romantic. Loving. Which is why I don't know why they fill me with shivers. The way he says them makes the hair on my neck prickle and yet they make me feel like I'm being ripped open between my legs.

Invaded.

Overthrown. Broken. Done for.

And that liquidizes me. It's like they mean more than what they sound like. They mean dark things. Things a girl should run away from and yet I smile at him as he sits on the edge of my bed.

He looks down right hot. Dressed in khaki pants, a pale blue shirt and a navy blazer. Every time I look at him, it makes me bite my lip like a lovesick teenager. But it's not just about his appearance.

It's his essence. The nitty-gritty that makes Stan him.

The concert is tonight and he's going to be there with me.

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Support me in that rare way that only he knows how. Personally, I don't know how he does it and it makes me curious about him and I ask a lot of questions. He answers them reluctantly, like he doesn't want to talk a lot about himself.

Like all his focus is on me.

To be honest...he almost doesn't talk about himself at all. All the info I've managed to get on him is that his life, especially in his younger years wasn't easy. It makes me ache for him.

But he doesn't seem to want me to ache for him. Not in that way anyway. Instead he wants my mouth. And my body. And all the rest of me.

When we kiss its fireworks. Crushing. So much so that all the four season could pass outside of my window and I wouldn't have a clue as long as Stan's lips are on mine. As long as he drinks me and holds me. Reveres me. We've only known each other for a couple of days but I already don't know how I'll ever be able to live without him.

It scares me. In a good way. Mostly in a good way.

Right now I have butterflies in my stomach, twisting and twirling in front of Stan because I want him to help me choose what I'm going to wear. His eyes watch me intently and he swallows hard like I'm poking at bottomless emotions.

"What do you think?" I ask with my hands on my hips and I push out a little more than necessary because whenever we kiss, his hands are always groping my butt which he seems to be extra fond of. "Too much?"

“You’re beautiful,” he says in a serious voice. “You always are.” He waves with his two fingers at me, the chain bracelet around his wrist flickering in the light. “Now enough prancing around. Get in my lap and let me taste you.”

My cheeks heat because that’s all we seem to be doing. Kissing. Nuzzling. Petting. The situation is different between us. We’re no longer roommates.

We might even be something more than lovers. But I don’t know if there is a word for that. We seem to be something undefinable. Something that shouldn’t even be talked about. Only whispered. “Patience,” I smile and he groans miserably, rubbing his forehead and his leg twitches. “Think I’ll change into something else,” I murmur. “Wait here.”

Going into the bathroom and getting out of my dress that was a little too cutesy, I step into my second choice and when I catch my own reflection, I bite my lip.

I think Stan is going to like this one. It’s risky. Maybe even a little too risky, but he’s a guy, right? Don’t they love as much skin as possible?

With my heart fluttering, I dance into the living room, pirouetting in front of him.

His face drops and I stop playing around. His eyes look cornered. Threatened. His hand that’s resting on his knee is clenched and his mouth turns into a firm line.

Maybe Stan isn’t one of those guys who likes this kind of look. At least not on me.

“What’s wrong?” I ask in concern. “Do you hate it?”

The dress is in a sapphire color, transparent just below my behind and around the cleavage. It molds around my body, showcasing every little curve. “Not that one,” he says in a strained voice, pushing his fingertips together and for a second he vaguely

reminds me of a gangster. "Take it off."

"What?" I jerk my chin. "But I like this one. It was expensive."

He doesn't seem to care one bit about how expensive it was. All he seems to care about is that it's showing too much of me.

"Put on another if you don't want me to pull you over my lap and make it sting."

The words sound both sharp and devoted and I gasp, looking at him in surprise. He doesn't take my surprise in consideration, still looking pissed. I thought he was joking at first but then I swallow, surprised that my body reacted with raising my temperature at his comment.

"Why can't I just wear this one?"

"Amber," he says in a stressed voice, his eyes filling with strange emotions, "please..." He looks like he's having a tough time with this. Like he's struggling against something. "There will be men at the concert."

"Always is," I murmur and his eyes go to mine. They're practically begging me.

"You're not meant for them. You're meant for me. You dress that way for me. You smile for me." His fists clench again and he takes a deep breath. "Nobody else."

"Because I'm all yours?"

Something harsh flickers in his gaze, his nostrils flaring. "Do you deny it?"

That would be a lie. Pointless.

I shake my head and he exhales, closing his eyes for just a second and when he opens them again, he's smiling. Looking...

Normal.

It makes me exhale too and I murmur, “Be right back.”

His face drops the second time too. But this time it’s in awe and it makes my pulse flutter. This dress has a dark color and a sweetheart neckline. It’s not my usual style. Makes me look a little nocturnal but maybe that’s not so bad.

Stan doesn’t seem to think so at least. He seems turned on by the look, more turned on than he was by the skimpy dress.

“I like those colors on you,” he says, “they suit you.”

“You don’t think it’s a little too murky?” I ask, running my hand down my body and Stan seems to appreciate the movement.

“No. You’re perfect in them.” I flush, pulling a strand of hair behind my ear because the way he says it doesn’t even give room for any protests.

“How are you feeling about tonight?” he asks and I shrug.

“A little nervous.” I twist my hands. “But...I shouldn’t complain since I have all the support that I need. I have you...”

He nods firmly. Like the two of us are entwined.

“And my brother and Gina are coming too.”

For some reason Stan doesn't seem to like the idea of that. Not that I know why. He has never even met them.

"They're joining us?"

I nod. "It'll be fun. I think we're all going to get along great. Just know that Gina is a little on the suspicious side and my brother can come across as arrogant, so don't take that personally."

A muscle ticks in his jaw. "I won't. But I thought it was just going to be you and me."

"You're going to have to learn how to share, Stan," I snigger, adding softly, "think you can do that?"

"Share you? Absolutely." He grits those words, making me jolt and I look at him with wide eyes. He sounds like he can't think of anything worse. Like sharing me would be a nightmare.

But then he seems to jerk himself, proceeding with telling me a funny story and it makes me laugh. Stan might be a little on the possessive side, but it's nothing that I can't handle.

I glance at his big, strong hands, the sharp cut to his jaw. Those eyes.

Swallowing I tell myself, that yes, I can definitely handle him. I can definitely handle him.

So far...

Tilting his head to the side, he suddenly murmurs, "Will you pull your hair over your shoulder for me."

I raise my brows but I do as he tells me. “Like this?” A long, dark wave falls beside my face.

“Like that,” he rasps before mournful pain marks his eyes. It frets me. I don’t want him to be in pain. “You remind me a little of someone when you look like that.”

“Who?” I ask in surprise, because this conversation doesn’t feel like our other ones. Usually it’s me talking about myself and I’m always expecting him to tire after a while but he never does. But I’m more interested in him and I get a slight kick out of this new information.

“My mother,” he replies and I perk my ears because he never talks about her. Or his family. “She was a cellist, just like you.”

That makes me sway a little and I take a step closer to him and he opens his legs, for me to stand in between them.

“I didn’t k...know that.”

“I didn’t tell you,” he says, doing a hard shrug before thoughtfully shaking his head, his eyes filling with memories. “My father was crazy about her. He loved her more than he loved himself. She was his everything.”

Giving Stan a warm smile, I murmur, “That’s so romantic.” My smile widens. “So sweet.”

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His eyes turn affectionate, like I'm being far too innocent and he raises his hand, gently wiping out my smile. "It wasn't romantic, all mine. It was dangerous."

I glance at him in surprise at the ruthlessness in his voice and he rubs his eyes, suddenly looking tired. "He damaged her." Stan's voice tenses from old anger. "He found out that she was going to leave him, give him up and replace him with her successful music career instead. The idea alone ate at him. He wilted away right in front of our eyes until he one day decided to something about it."

I'm afraid of his answer, but I still whisper, "What did he do?"

"He stuffed us all into his car..."

"No..." I gasp, putting my hand in front of my mouth, my heart hurting, chafing me.

"And drove us off a bridge," Stan finishes, shifting in his seat. He glances at me. "I've never told anyone what really happened. Always thought I'd take that dirty secret to the grave."

At first I don't know what to do or say. I'm still standing between his legs, the warmth from his skin seeping into mine.

His eyes flicker, like he's expecting me to revolt. Tell him to stay away and give me his key, because his history is so dark. But I would never do that. Feeling closer to him now more than ever.

"Thank you for telling me," I say in a low voice and then I clutch his hand. "Your

secret is safe with me.” I swallow. “And I want you to know that you don’t have to hide anything from me. I mean it.” “Do you?” he rasps, sounding like he’s doubting me. Like he wants to protect me from something and at the same time expose me to it.

“Yes.”

His fingers comb into my hair and he arranges it back to the way it was, murmuring something about liking it better that way, before yanking me to him, causing me to stumble into his body.

“Fearless.” His mouth pulls to the side in a half smile. “I’ve always liked that about you.”

We kiss and I get caught up in him. Entrapped. I don’t even register that he used the word always.

8

Stanmore

We’re standing in the hallway, my hands on Amber’s princely ass, my tongue grazing her teeth, the walls of her mouth and she’s pushed up against the wall, her one leg curling around my hip, the lower part of our bodies locked.

Her eyes are darkened from liner, her mouth painted a deep red that drives me crazy and her smell is so soft and sultry, I want to lick, drink and eat her.

I need more from her. Now...

When the doorbell rings, I let out a stream of furious curses under my breath, making

Amber snigger. She's wearing high heels, causing her mouthwatering curves to look even more appetizing.

"They're here," she says, throwing me a side-eye. "Behave."

"Always."

Saying that, I have no idea that a couple of hours later she will know just how false those words are.

Shoving the front door open, Amber lets out a squeak. "Gautier!" She jumps and hugs a man, a couple of years older than me, wearing dark clothes and thick framed glasses.

He pats her awkwardly on the back, throwing me a tight glance and I straighten. This is her brother. He's allowed to touch her. My fists clench. This is her brother.

"I was just telling your handsome brother what a weird name he has," Gina says. She has dyed red hair, wearing a too tight suit and her I'm familiar with because I've seen her with Amber before. She cheek kisses Amber, glancing at me curiously.

"What about my sister?" Amber says. "Her name is Rischa. And then our parents named me Amber."

Gina nods. "Almost like they knew you could always end up twerking a pole if your career goes to hell." Amber laughs, glancing at me and I can hear the emptiness in the sound. That insensitive bitch just insulted her and I put my hand on Amber's lower back and she gratefully looks up at me.

"This is Stanmore, by the way," she murmurs, "my..um..."

“You can say it, all mine,” I answer, enjoying the expression on their faces and the sight of Amber’s pink cheeks.” I’m her boyfriend.”

“Of course.” Gina’s eyes narrow and she looks me up and down. “So you’re the mysterious stranger who’s nestled himself into Amber’s life?”

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“Be nice,” Amber says, shaking her head and Gautier reaches his hand out.

“Pleasure, Stan.”

His hand crushes against mine and inwardly I grin, crushing back and his face pales. I smile, showing my teeth.

“It’s Stanmore.”

With a nervous laugh, Amber grabs her purse and steps over the threshold, clearing her throat. “All right then. Let’s go shall we?”

We’ve already booked tables at a restaurant, because apparently it’s a tradition before a concert. I’d rather not be here. I’d rather just have Amber away from everyone else because I’m stingy with her. Selfish. “I always feel so scattered before I’m about to play,” Amber twitters, pressing her lips that are still swollen from my treatment. “I feel like food helps.”

An orgasm would probably help too. It would have been cheaper had she just asked me to fuck her senseless.

My shaft is straining in my pants as we sit down and Gina tries to get Amber to sit on her side but I clamp down on Amber’s thigh, keeping her in place and Amber’s eyes flare.

“I’m f...fine where I am,” she stutters. She’s more than fine. She’s in the only place where she belongs.

Both Gautier's and Gina's eyes tighten.

I ignore them. Amber pretends to be doing the same.

The restaurant is a big one, windows everywhere, bright lights and frenzied waiters running around and I like none of the food on the menu. Too intricate and not spicy enough.

"Tell me Stanmore, since my sister doesn't tell me anything," Gautier says, putting the linen napkin into his lap when we get our orders. "How long have you known Amber?"

A little over six months. "A couple of days," I answer and Gautier lets out a cough.

"That's unnerving," Gina says, waving her fork around. "You already seem way too serious with each other."

"We are. Dead serious," I answer, earning a pissy glance from Amber's brother.

"We live together don't we?" Amber smiles, making my heart clench. But I like her private smiles more. The ones she gives me in secret, when nobody but me is watching.

"What do you do for a living, Stanmore?" Gautier pushes his glasses up. "Are you a musician too?"

"Does he look like a musician?" Gina laughs, already getting tipsy but her eyes coat with lust when they land on me.

"I'm a mason," I answer and they both stop eating, staring at me.

“Yum, this is so good, isn’t it?” Amber says anxiously, poking her food and her eyes go to them and then back to me. I wink at her, making her burst out into an unexpected giggle, before she abruptly stops laughing, the energy turning tense again.

“I see,” Gautier says, looking like he’s closet horrified and Gina snorts. “That’s so old fashioned...ouch!” She throws a rabid look at Amber and I figure she kicked her manager under the table. Violent for me. My lips twitch. Sweet girl.

When we finish with dinner, Gautier decides to get up and order us some drinks and desserts before we leave. Gina glares at me, then at Amber.

“Keep me company while I smoke?” she says, holding up her purse and Amber pinches her lips, looking up at me and Gina laughs. “What? Doeshehave to give you green light?”

Annoyance twists in me, turning into anger when Amber bends her head down as if hurt by the comment.

“Of course not.” Moving forward she brushes her lips against my cheekbone. “Miss me while I’m gone?”

Do I ever not do that?

“Oh for fuc...” Gina snarls, pulling at Amber, “let’s just go. Don’t tell me you can’t be apart for five freaking minutes?”

Throwing me an excusing glance, Amber lets herself be dragged away and I silently brush my fingers alongside her arm, my fingertips sliding down the skirt of her dress. She’s not even out of the restaurant yet and my longing for her already slices me. When she’s out, I throw an eye on Gautier who’s still pressing by the bar and then I get up and follow them.

They're at the back, standing on the parking lot and I don't pass the corner, making sure to stay hidden by the building. I don't like Gina. The condescending way she looks at Amber. The condescending way she talks to her.

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More importantly she dislikes me back and I don't want her to put any ideas in Amber's head. If she tells her anything that makes Amber pull away...

"You're unhealthy," I hear Gina say and then a lighter flicks.

"Look who's talking, and I'm not unhealthy. I take my gummy bears every day."

"You know what I mean. That man in there...you need to stay away from him."

My fists curl, fingers digging into my palms. Nobody keeps her from me.

"Stan? I don't want to stay away from him," Amber says so firmly that she makes me proud. "He's good for me, takes care of me." Amber pauses. "And...I think he's helped make my music a little bit sexier." "You know what's not sexy?" Gina snorts. "That dress you're wearing... too formal."

"Stan likes it."

"Are you freaking kidding me?"

"What? I'm not a bad person because I like to make him happy. And what about you, wearing those heels only because Roger likes them."

"I don't wear them because Roger likes them. I wear them because it's the only time he'll bone me."

Amber lets out a hearty laugh.

“And don’t compare Roger to that man in there. He’s a different kind. The way he looks at you, talks to you. The way he calls you all mine. Gave me the creeps.”

She’s right, I am a different kind.

“Oh, stop it...” Amber purrs, “why do you care so much about my love life anyway?”

“Because I expect to be making a lot of money off of you, sweetheart,” Gina says in a syrupy voice. “And I need to look out for my asset.”

Not anymore you won’t. “You’re heartless, G,” Amber teases, “and how about you mind your own beeswax from now on?”

“When you start dating a man whose name doesn’t spell Satan if you add an a, I will...”

I leave. I’ve heard what I needed to hear and I’m sitting at the table again, before Gaudier comes back. Amber breathlessly gives me a kiss on the lips, when she scoots next to me, earning two disproving glances.

I’m immune. But I don’t want them to cause any distress to Amber.

We finish our drinks and desserts, asking for the check.

Gautier clears his throat. “I’ll handle this,” he says, cynically glancing at my blazer but I stop him.

“Let me. I insist.”

The concert is held in one of the local, smaller concert halls. At the entrance, Amber is all jittery and I try to comfort her, touch her, whisper encouraging words but it's not working. It makes me feel worthless when she's not responding, her eyes glassy and her cheeks have paled. I can't have her feeling like this and I'm frowning so hard that people make an effort to stay out of my way. They should. I don't want their clothes nudging against Amber's body, want none of the fibers from their fabrics on her.

I don't even like her being in the same space as other people. But I don't let her know anything about it. She doesn't need my shit tonight. Tonight it's all about her. Then again in my world it's always about her.

"Okay you ready?" Gina says in Amber's ear but so loud I want to shove her away for probably bursting Amber's eardrum. "Head clear, nerves steady...wait, why do you look like you're about to hurl?"

"Because I am. Look who's standing in the corner."

She nudges her chin in the direction of a middle aged man, with wavy hair.

"It's Davidos," Amber says anxiously. "I thought Hermann was the one coming tonight."

"Hermann is in Vienna," Gina replies. "You're just going to have to suck it up..."

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Shaking her head in distress as if she's had it, Amber runs away and when I reach for her, she rejects me. It stabs me in a part so deep inside of me that I nearly stagger. But I'm not letting her get away this easily.

"Hey, what's going on with your eyes...?" I hear Gina say behind me but I ignore her, making my way through the crowd to get to Amber. She runs into the ladies, her dark hair flying behind her and I'm on her like a shadow.

When I walk inside, she's standing by the sink, splashing her face with cold water and her mouth tightens when she sees me. It's not a look that I want. I want her eyes to light up. Not look like she wants space.

"Stan, I need some time alone..."

"The fuck you do," I growl and she twitches. "What the hell happened just now?" If she thinks I'm going to allow some asshole put this much doubt in her, she's wrong. Nobody puts doubt in her. Nobody makes her feel like she's not good enough. Not while I'm around.

"Please, I just want to be on my own..."

"Tell me what to do."

"You can't do anything," she says, a little exasperated.

"I need to do something," I snarl, stabbing my hair with my fingers and a strange panic spreads in my head.

Drying her face carefully, Amber shrugs, picking up a mascara from her purse. “That man...Davidos. He represents one of the record labels, I want to sign me. But he’s the worst. Cruel. And if I mess up even a little he lets every other record label know.”

“You want me to get rid of him?”

She startles, stopping with the mascara in the air and her mouth opens in shock. A second later she gives me a wide smile. “You almost had me there, you know that? I thought you were serious.”

I am.

But judging by the look on her face I guess she doesn’t want me to do it then.

Brushing my knuckles down her spine, I murmur in her ear, “Are you going to go back out there?”

Her lip trembles, before she bites it. “I have to. I don’t want to disappoint you.”

Disappoint me? That’s what she’s worried about? Me? When I’m nothing compared to her. When I’m twisted and she’s all good?

Clasping her face in my hands, I murmur, “You could never disappoint me. Not like that. The only way you can disappoint me is when you don’t let me near you. When you pushed your hand away...” I straighten, “it hurt.” “I never want to hurt you,” she whispers and she’s all mine again. She makes me weak inside, stops my heart then starts it right up again.

“I know,” I answer because there can be no pain between us. I kiss her lids, the tip of her nose and her mouth. Her pretty, trembling mouth. “Just don’t do it again.”

Our fingers are interlocked as we walk out and Amber looks less pale. I don't want to let go, but she's about to go up on stage. She throws me a look over her shoulder as she does and I go and take my seat next to Gina and Gautier.

On stage, Amber takes her position and in the dark our eyes find each other. I know she can see me and she starts playing, never breaking our contact. And I feel her. I feel her everywhere. And I know she feels me.

Everybody else disappears. It's just me and her. It will always be only the two of us. I will never let anyone break us apart. Not even me and not even her.

"Well, well," Gina says once the concert is finished and we're all clapping, "not bad."

She was more than not bad, she was...

"Amazing," I say when Amber walks down the stage and using my frame I block both Gina and Gautier from getting to her. I wrap her up in a hug, lifting her a little off the ground and she lets out a short squeak.

"Really?" she breathes, looking up at me. "You're not just saying that?"

Gina shoves her elbow into my side, trampling all over Amber's personal space. Gautier does the same but more stiffly. Their conversation is a mix of halfhearted praise and criticism and Amber listens carefully, but her eyes keep going to me.

With my hands in my pockets, I nod at her. Wanting her to know how supported she is. How important. I'll always let her use me. She can use me as her mental crutch, her fuck toy...anything she wants.

Her lips pull into a smile and my eyes warm, my heart expanding when someone behind me says,

“Do you mind?”

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I tense, realizing it was him Amber was smiling at and for a second everything goes silent. No sound in my ears except for a buzzing and I get a metallic taste in my mouth.

“Davidos,” Gina grins pushing him over to stand next to Amber and that buzzing turns louder. “We were hoping you would be here.”

“What did you think of Amber’s performance?” Gautier asks, glancing at me and he frowns before turning his attention back to the group. “A little edgier than usual no?” Davidos answers, looking at Amber and my fists clench and my neck starts to strain.

“That’s good, right?” Amber says and she’s not looking at me anymore. Her attention, her eyes, her lips, her body are not turned my way.

It makes me want to fuck her until she screams and begs and pleads.

And it makes me want to kill him, then bury him six feet underground myself.

“Ah yes, it is very, very good,” Davidos grins, his disgusting face splitting along with his smile. That clawing in my chest starts up again. I need to get her away from him.

“Amber, let’s go get you hydrated,” I say, my voice not sounding like my own and I inhale, feeling like there’s no oxygen in this place. She looks at me in surprise, then discreetly shakes her head, turning her attention to Davidos again.

She’s not allowed to do that. I need her attention to be on me, not another man. Look at me. Look at me. Fucking, look at me!

“Amber,” I say again, tugging at my collar. She gives me a pleading glance and I’m close to just throw her over my shoulder and march right out with her, no matter how much she protests. “Please Stan...not right now.”

Three pair of eyes turn toward me and they’re perplexed.

“Who is he?” Davidos asks, pointing at me, his fingers covered in rings.

“Amber’s guard dog apparently,” Gina snorts. “Never mind about him, so about what you were saying?”

“Ah yes...” Davidos muses but I don’t hear the rest. I’m watching Amber and she’s not watching me back. First she slapped her hand away when I reached for her and now she’s standing far too close to another man.

Her eyes are interested. Like her careers is important to her. More important to her than you ever will be.

Blood starts pounding in my ears. The clawing turns brutal. Paining me.

“Of coure,” Davidos continues, “there is room for improvements.” His eyes go to Amber’s mouth. The mouth that I kiss. “But I could always help you with those...”

He reaches around her waist and...I snap.

One minute he’s standing upright and the next, I’ve grabbed him by the throat, shoved him to the ground and I pound his face with fist after fist, my knuckles whitening and his features go bloody. “You dare to touch what’s mine!” I growl, unaware of the screams, that the lights have been turned on and that nobody is talking anymore. He’s limp in my grip, too weak to even try to defend himself. The rage doesn’t diminish, it increases until I feel a trembling hand on my shoulder.

I know that touch. I live for that touch.

Whipping my head to the side, my eyes lock on Amber's and they are filled with tears. Her face is shocked, like she never expected something like this out of me.

"Stan...stop. Let him go. You can't do this..."

I straighten, still holding Davidos by his one thousand dollar shirt and my breaths are ragged. "Help me stop," I say between my teeth, "tell me you're mine."

Her mouth trembles. "I'm yours."

But it sounds like a lie.

"Let's just l...leave," she says, tugging at me but then she doesn't even wait for me, running toward the exit on her own and I follow.

Its night out, the sky starless because we're in the middle of the city. Little clouds of breath pant out of her mouth when I reach for her wrist, trying to get her to look at me. But she doesn't want to look at me and she doesn't want to hold my hand. Her head is down, her mouth tense and when she glances at me, her eyes glaze over me. Like I'm a stranger.

It doesn't have to be like this. I didn't let her down. There are other record labels. She doesn't need that fucker or his services.

"I'll just go and say goodbye to Gautier and Gina," she murmurs, walking over to them as they're about to get into their cars.

They talk for a while, but they keep looking at me and they're looking at me like I'm some beast who's going to ravage an innocent angel. At one point Gautier grabs

Amber's shoulders, shaking her. Her hair flies around her delicate shoulder blades and she looks upset, like she doesn't like what he's saying.

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My fists clench. That buzzing coming back.

Amber brushes Gautier off, coming back to me and I try to catch her eyes, try to force back that connection between us but she's holding it out of my reach. She shouldn't. When she gives me what I want, it tames me.

When she doesn't, it makes me feral.

"Bye guys," she calls. "Love you G. Love you, brother."

Cut. Cut. Lifting her chin, her face is apprehensive, like I'm not her perfect Stan anymore.

Fuck, I crossed a line tonight. I messed up. Bad...

9

Amber

He's different now, he's changed. We've decided to walk the long wayhome and he reached for my hand and I didn't pull away. Maybe I should have. I don't know what happened to him tonight.

His face looked like it belonged to someone else. I saw it the first time when he ambushed me in the bathroom at the concert. Only a flicker. I told myself it was nothing.

Then it came back again with full force as he attacked Davidos. His eyes reminded me of a shark.

Dead. Predatory. Territorial.

I shiver as I walk next to him and he tenses, looking down at me. He looks watchful, like he's waiting for me to blow up or have a big reaction. But instead I'm just confused. He mistakes my shivering for me being chilly and brushes my arms with his hand.

“Better?”

Ruthless sometimes and considerate at other times. Is it any strange that he sometimes puzzles me?

“I don't know,” I murmur. “I feel like everything has changed.”

He withdraws his hand, his lips pinching and he rubs his cracked knuckles with his fingers. “Between you and me?”

It's clear that he doesn't want there to be a rift between us. No matter how big or small. His voice sounds like he has barbed wire in his throat. Like he's in pain.

I don't want him to be like that but what he did tonight freaked me out. It horrified me and I should probably put an end to our relationship, or at least put some space between us and yet my hand keeps clutching around Stan's, like I'm scared of losing him.

And I am. I don't know what's happening to me. But I know that Stan is the one responsible. He has done something to me. Gautier snarled at me to break up with Stan. His request made my head spin. A life without Stan? A life where he doesn't

look at me with those eyes of his.

That look that makes me feel like I'm the center of his universe. Like everything he feels revolves around me.

Just the thought made me panicky. Frantic. I wouldn't be able to handle Stan being gone.

"You're the most important thing in the world to me," Stan says, his voice grave. "You understand why I can't let anyone touch you?"

The trees bristle in the soft night wind and I shiver again, vaguely remembering in the back of mind that I didn't get any roses sent to me tonight from The Admirer. I return my focus to Stan and the streetlights highlight his face and everything about him looks sharper. Bigger. Vicious.

"But I don't understand." I bite my lip. "He was there representing a record label. And all he did was place his hand on my back..."

"He stroked you," Stan says between his teeth, not hearing me. "Like you're his animal and not mine."

"It was just a friendly touch. And you beat him up for it." A slight sneer grazes his mouth and he stretches his neck from side to side from tension. "I know. I held back. I wanted to kill him."

Gasping, my eyes turn shimmery as I look up at Stan and despite me being in heels, he's so tall that I have to crank my head. He's always so patient with me, patient with everything and I have no idea where this sudden aggression is coming from.

"I don't believe you. You're not like that."

“Wrong. I am exactly like that. If not worse.”

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The words come out fast. Sharp. Like they're truthful. Anger flares in me and I jerk my hand back, causing Stan to whirl around so fast that I don't even have a chance to blink.

"What is it?" he asks, his eyes tightening. "Don't you want to hold my hand anymore, unless I'm your perfect, well trained little Stan?"

Gasping, I look at him with wide eyes. Perfect? Is that what he thinks I want from him? Wrapping my arms around me, I murmur, "It's the heels. They're hurting me."

That fervent expression on his face disappears and his eyes turn tender. He takes a step closer to me, then lifts me up on his back, his hands under my knees, my chin resting on his shoulder. He smells so good. Familiar and exotic to me at the same time. We mold ourselves around each other as always. Fitting perfectly even after a heated argument, like our bodies know better than we do that we shouldn't let anything come between us.

"Aren't I heavy?" I whisper and his lips pull to the side, making him look charming. But I think I've learned by now that some Prince Charming's don't always have a dragon to slay on the outside. Sometimes that dragon is on the inside.

"Even if you were, I'd still carry you."

Of course he would respond that way. Typical Stan to never make me feel bad about myself. And he's carrying me like I'm light as a breeze, even though we're moving up a steep street. Another man would have at least grunted by now. But not Stan.

“Is there anything you wouldn’t do for me?”

His grip around me tightens, like he isn’t too happy about where this conversation is going.

“Let you go.”

His answer sounds like it’s been formed in steel and fire. I swallow.

“You would if I asked you to.” Underneath me, I feel him tense like he isn’t so sure of that and he slightly turns his head to the side, raising a brow in question.

“Would I?”

“I think you would,” I say, my voice suddenly trembling. “It’s not like you would drag me down to the basement and chain me there.”

Silence.

“Stan?” I say, tugging at him a little but I can’t see his face.

“What is it?”

“Did you hear what I said? You’re supposed to protest.” Vehemently so.

“Why are you asking me that stuff? Do you expect me to hurt you just because you saw me throw a simple punch?”

“Simple? You practically busted his whole face. And why can’t you just answer me?”

“I don’t like stupid questions.”

I twitch in annoyance at his uncompromising ways. “Put me down now.”

“Quiet.”

Sighing in exasperation, I place my chin on his shoulder again and he gives my leg a squeeze. He thinks the conversation is over. It's not. I'm not letting him get away with it this easily. He doesn't put me down until we're standing on the porch and we walk into our dark house.

I turn on the switch and light flares. Getting out of my shoes and hanging up my satin coat, I creep over the carpet when I feel Stan's hands around my waist.

His mouth is on my neck in an instance. “He touched you,” he murmurs heatedly, “I keep seeing him doing it over and over in my head. Inhaling you, putting his filthy hands on you...”

My pulse starts beating as always when my body feels him tracing it.

“Don't torture yourself.” Our mouths meet, causing lust to prickle me from top to bottom. “It's not worth it.”

“If he'd put a wedge between us I would have to walk straight out of that door and do something about it.”

My eyes flare in amazement. “T...there's no wedge.”

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“Good,” he rasps, “good for him.”

“But...” I say, wiggling out of his arms and it’s not the easiest thing in the world, “we still have to talk.”

“I can think of other things I want to do right now, other than talk.” He reaches for me, about to snatch me back to his chest but I jump out of his way.

“Let’s go sit in the living room,” I say and his eyes darken like he doesn’t want to do this. I pounce down on the couch but he doesn’t join me. He doesn’t even lean against the doorway.

Doesn’t even pretend to be relaxed, but stands as if on guard with his legs wide apart and his broad shouldered frame taking up much of the space.

“What happened tonight....” I try to find the right words, but then I just end up blurting, “I didn’t like it.”

He crosses his strong arms. “Noted.”

Inhaling, I cross my legs. “I need to know that you won’t do it again. That you won’t hurt someone just because they touch me, or stand too close to me. And you won’t, right?”

“I will. If they try to lay claim on you, then they only have themselves to blame.”

My mouth drops and I gawk. “He came from a record label!”

“Don’t care if he descended down from heaven itself. He touched you.”

He’s not budging. His mind is made up. Then Stan’s eyes narrow. “Why do you care so much about Davidos?”

I jerk. “What?” “Do you have feelings for him?” Stan walks over to me, gently clasping my chin. “Do you? Do you daydream about Davidos signing you, making you a star and you then eagerly giving your body to him when he wants something in return?”

The thought alone is revolting and makes my stomach turn. Why would Stan even think that? There’s nobody for me but him.

Shaking my head I murmur, “I only have feelings for you.”

That seems to compose him. An angelic smile graces his face and it almost makes me gasp. He’s almost too bright to look at like this. Pure goodness shines out of his eyes. Tenderness. Love.

I swallow. Underneath all his flaws, there’s so much light in him. Light that I sometimes feel like I’m the only who can see it. Like I’m the only one he shows it to.

“You need to know that,” I add. “I only want you.”

He closes those eyes, his mouth moving in a lopsided smile that makes me feel like he’s a wild creature who’s just rolled over to show me his underbelly. He’s not like this around other people, he’s only vulnerable with me.

“There’s something I want to ask you,” I say as he opens his eyes and removes his hand from my face. “Ask me anything.”

I'm not so sure he will like this and I grab a pillow, hugging it.

"Gina was pretty worried about what happened tonight," I say slowly. "Hysterical almost. She begged me to sleep over at her house and I'm thinking I should, just to calm her down..."

I trail off when Stan freezes and I inspect him a little closer. He's not blinking and it seems as if time has stopped. I'm not even sure his heart is still beating. He doesn't even act like he has a pulse anymore and it worries me.

"Stan?"

His mouth moves but his eyes are still immovable. "You said there wasn't a wedge."

The energy around him is rancorous, making my body quake. I take his hand but it doesn't seem to help. He's definitely not taking this well, making me regret I even said anything in the first place.

"There isn't. It's just over the night, I'd be back in the morning."

The words do nothing to assure him and the skin over his handsome features tightens, his mouth moving in a scorn.

"In a house without me? In a house where Gina's husband lives?" Lifting his head, his face moves in a grimace, the veins on his neck protruding and he looks like he's in deep agony.

"What is going on with you?" I say. I ask that because he's gone ashen in the face, his whole body trembling painstakingly.

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“Is this your way of trying to escape me. Because I fucked up? Because I made a mistake? Because you can’t handle anything else than a white knight in a shining armor?”

“What...no...ah!” I let out a choked shriek when a deep convulsion goes through his body, his eyes glazing over. “Stan, please sit down.” He allows me to pull him down and I move to the floor, crouching by his legs.

His fists are clenching on his knees, his skin is clammy to my touch and the shaking in his body increases so much, that it’s freaking me out.

“Stan,” I say, turning teary, “please I’m not trying to escape you. Don’t do this to yourself.”

But it’s like he can’t control it, his body seeming to shoot with too much adrenaline and I raise my hand, stroking his jawline. His reaction is so strong that it takes him a while to realize that I’m touching him.

“I’m all yours. Always. I’ll always be yours.” I lick my lips. “No matter what.” “No matter what?” he asks with a clenched teeth and I nod frantically. “Even when it’s not picture-perfect?”

Swallowing I nod again, stroking his arm, waiting for his tremors to disappear and when they finally do, I draw a sigh of relief. His reaction was so powerful. I’ve never seen anything like it. It looked like he was being torn up from the inside.

My heart breaks for him. Is that how intensely he feels about me? On that level?

“I don’t want you to be against me,” he says in a raspy voice, his eyes carefully going to mine. “Or us.”

“I’m not against you,” I whisper, “or us.”

He nods brushing his hair away from his face, inhaling deeply and tries a smile but it comes out crooked. “I should probably go have a shower. Cool down.”

“Okay,” I murmur, my mind spinning and I feel a little raw. His reaction seems to have been burned into my mind and my heart doesn’t feel like it’s my heart anymore.

It’s his. Every part of it and I already know it might be a dangerous thing to hand it over to someone like Stan. But I can’t help it. It’s already too late.

10

Stanmore

I don’t go and shower like I said I would. I don’t even move all the way up the staircase, instead I stay in the shadows, watching Amber. Do I trust her? Yes. Do I trust her completely? Not just yet.

But I will once I know that I fully have her. Once I know that there are no walls between us.

My eyes tighten when she twitchingly looks around and I expect her to reach for her phone, call that irritating manager of hers. Or her brother dearest. But she doesn’t. Instead she hooks her fingers into her cleavage and takes off her gown, standing only in a satiny slip that came with the dress. Watching her like this when she doesn’t know, makes me grind my jaw because it would be so easy for me to prowl over to her, grab her by the waist and bend her over and wait for that look in her eyes that

says she wants this as much as I do.

But right now I'm not sure if she would want it. Not when it looks like she's about to run for the hills. In agitation I rub my hand over my face, still smelling her on my skin.

Fuck, all mine. Don't do what I think you're doing.

It's my fault she wants to put some space between us. I shouldn't have punched that fucker right in front of everyone. I should have waited, done it in private. Amber didn't have to see that. I shouldn't have let her see it.

My heart starts pounding as she walks to the foyer, pushing her feet into a pair of old sneakers and puts on a jacket. I knew it. I knew she'd try to leave. But I'm not going to let her.

I take the backdoor, circling the house and she's just walking down the few steps of the porch when I show up in the front garden. Amber doesn't notice me at first, keeping her gaze down and it's not until she almost bumps into me, that she lifts her head up and lets out a gasp, that I don't like hearing from her.

I scared her. I don't want to scare her. "Stan!" she says with wide eyes and if I close my own and focus, I can hear her heart beating. "What are you doing out here?"

She sounds like she didn't expect me, like she actually expected me to let her out of my sight, before knowing whether she's truly surrendered. Maybe she confused me for a normal man.

"Frustrated that you got caught?" I bore my gaze into hers. "You weren't supposed to leave."

She twitches and her hair flays in every direction in the wind, carrying with it that sweet, spicy smell that's all her and she's so beautiful that nobody can blame me for wanting to keep to her.

"I wasn't going to," she says firmly and to my surprise she sounds like she's telling the truth. "I went out for some fresh air, that's all."

When I don't answer and my eyes narrow in on her, she adds, "Promise." She licks her lips, sounding pleading, "Stan, look I'm even wearing your jacket."

Didn't notice that. But she is wearing the cognac colored leather one. It swallows her, like a little armor on her pretty frame.

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“It looks good on you, all mine. But you’re right...” my eyes flare, “that is my jacket and I want it back.” Reaching forward with my hands, I gently pull it off her bare shoulders and she quivers in the cold, her nipples hardening underneath the flimsy material. Her breasts are perky. Perfectly rounded and bigger than I thought.

“You should go back inside. Don’t want you to catch a cold,” I rasp and she nods, turning around. The back of her slip has slid in between her ass cheeks, making my tongue envy it and she walks over the grass with me practically breathing down her neck.

We don’t stop; I push her without pushing her up the staircase to her bedroom. I want her first time with me to be in a familiar place. I want her to enjoy this.

With my mouth against her ear, I rasp, “If you’re going to leave this house again, then you’re going to leave it, feeling me between your pretty legs.”

She doesn’t protest only inhales, deciding to be compliant, knowing I’ll break down any resistance anyway and she opens the door.

Her breaths are rapid and she’s flushed. And anxious. Like she knows I don’t belong in a pretty room such as hers. Like she knows I belong down in a dark basement where all monsters lurk.

And yet she looks like she wants me, her eyes glimmering and she’s rubbing her thighs together, making me want to open my mouth and swallow her. Just once.

I don’t know how many times I fantasized about this back in those days when she

didn't know me. I would crack a bottle open, then pace my apartment back and forth, imagining her in my arms.

She's the prettiest thing a man could ask for. The streetlights shine on her skin, on that thick, lush hair. My fists clench, my short nails digging into my palm.

"Need to strip you, all mine. Need you as bare as the lucky day you were born."

Her tongue flicks out and she licks those petal looking lips. "What are you going to do to me?"

"Love you. Adore you." My hands go to her slip. "Think you can take my love? Take me into you whenever I need you to?"

She nods with blushing cheeks, before abruptly stopping. "What if I c...cant?" she asks, suddenly worried and I palm her hair.

She's told me she's never been with a man and when she said it she looked ashamed, having no idea it was the best gift she could have given me.

"Try," I say against her collarbone, licking her smooth skin, "for me." "I'll t...try."

Hooking her straps with my fingers, I remove the barely there garment from her until she's standing in only a thong. Her breasts are a perfect size, the peaks a little too big and I don't know how I'll ever be able to separate my mouth from them.

Palming them I groan at the plushy texture, my eyes rolling back in my head. I need to suck on those virgin tits and I put my lips on one, making her twitch and a damp smell spreads in the air and my lips curve.

She's getting wet. Ready to accept my thick length into that slippery, tight hole of

hers. Reaching down, I tug at her thong, teasing and ripping at it, looking for that sloppy sound.

And there it is. Slapping in the room and I tug her panties down, cursing inwardly at how beautiful she is. Her thick, smooth slit as untouched as freshly fallen snow and I rub my hand over my mouth, needing to taste her.

“Stan,” Amber whimpers, “I need you...” she bites her lip, her cheeks flushing when a trail of arousal runs down her shapely thigh. I use my tongue to clean her up, making my way to her entrance.

When I find the spot, she cries out. Such an innocent, defenseless sound and I clamp down on her hips, rotating her upwards, making sure my tongue hits the roof of her silkiness and her heels lift off the ground. She’s panting, twisting and twitching like a little prey that just doesn’t know how to stay still. I need her stunned and I eat her out, until the pulses on my tongue become frantic. Hard. Pretty, little slaps that smell of purity.

Soon that smell will be replaced with my own. I need her dirty. I need her dark. It’s the only way we’ll be able to make this work. I force an orgasm out of her, then another, making sure to gently hold her clit between my lips but the way she comes is still too intense, overthrowing that musical, little body.

The way she twitches once again reminds me of a small thing that’s just been caught. And that just doesn’t know when to give up. She should. It’s over for us. I have her. I’ve seen her like nobody else has seen her, touched her where nobody touches her.

She’s mine.

She doesn’t understand. Yet. She’s still looking at me with dreamy eyes, a sweet smile, having no idea just how deep my feelings about her go. The clawing in my

chest comes back, but I push it away.

That side of me can't come out now. Don't want those eyes to widen in terror.

Cupping her, I lay her down on the bed, pushing her up against the pillows and she's so intoxicated on her orgasm that her legs fall open and I hiss at the unraveling of her shameless femininity.

It hurts my heart. To see her like this. To be able to have her like this. Makes my skin feel like it's made out of glass, as if I'll break any second now.

Tugging at the hem of my shirt, I pull it over my back and Amber's hooded eyes flare with interest and she licks her lips, like she has a healthy appetite for me.

"Touch yourself while I undress," I say and she lifts her hand, but then hesitates. My eyes heat up in reprimand, making her gasp and when I buckle with my belt, pulling my slacks farther down, revealing the first line of hair, her hand flies to where I want it.

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With an open mouth, she slides her fingers through her warmth and when my shaft juts, she lets out a loud whimper, sinking down the frilly pillows, her hips undulating, her whole body reacting to what it's going to have to take.

Her hand trembles when I take it away and replace it with my own bigger one and relief floods her eyes. She's so ready for this, she doesn't even make an effort to scram, instead she lets me guide her anyway that I want her, pin her to the bed and she arches, displaying her sumptuous tits. They shake when I push into her, her eyes widening in surprise, a look as if she's drifting between discomfort and frenzy, leaking over her face. This is what I've wanted for so long. I've obsessed over this. Craved this until I thought I was going to lose my mind.

"Fuck," I curse as she snaps violently all around me, "so motherfucking tight, you're going to break my cock in half."

"Stan, don't hold back," she stutters to my surprise, "I know you want more, I know what this means to you. I can see it in your e...eyes."

"You might hate it," I warn between my teeth and that secret glimmer in her eyes flares, telling me she might love it and it tugs at my self-control. Taking her thighs in my hands, I strike her in a wide stretch, so hard pressed, I know she feels the burn and she lets out a trembling moan.

"Hate it yet? Tell me how much you hate it."

"L..love it..."

With my emotions building up to a storm in me, I start eating her mouth, sucking on her tongue, my cock spanking that little tease withering under me. The one I've been thirsting for, for months. My whole life without even knowing it.

I have her shut in by my body, our skins chafing, her mouth turning just as savage against mine. Her sex is hot, hot, hot. Her little pussy is not going anywhere. I own it now, determined to treat it however I want for the rest of my life.

"Come," I instruct as I'm about to do the same. "Come for me."

"Stan," she groans powerlessly, trying to fight against the urge to collapse and it makes me frenzied.

"Do it now!"

She erupts, yelling my name, making everything blacken before my eyes and I gasp for air and I hold her tightly, until the last convulsions pass.

Looking down at her, my heart flips when I see what's looking up at me with barren eyes and a swollen mouth. It's not just a girl anymore. But a sweet, dark mess. My lips twitch, because now...

We're the same.

11

Amber

He looks different when he sleeps. Unguarded. He's too big for my bed, his limbs splaying, mouth half open and his lids flutter. He truly is gorgeous. His shaft is jutting against the sheets, lengthy and thick and aggressive even in his sleep.

Like this he could be mistaken for any other regular man. A common one but he's not common. The way he speaks and acts isn't common. The way he used my body last night wasn't common either, the way he squeezes out every little, last drop from me.

I'm still tender between my legs and my stomach flip flops with heat. I've never met a man who can compare to him and it makes me want to be pinned down forever by him and have his baby.

Stan knows I'm on the pill but and when I told him, he looked relieved. I frown at that. Doesn't he want to have a family? Not even with me? He must want that. He hasn't told me he loves me but he acts like he does.

Wouldn't he then want a symbol of his adulation for me?

Shrugging myself, I get up and wrap a robe around me, while letting Stan sleep. Down in the kitchen, I sigh when I notice that the letter box is still on the table. I forgot to put it away and I glance at one of the letters.

The Admirer.

As strange as it sounds, The Admirer was the only one who believed in me before Stan came along. And I'll always be grateful for that but maybe it's time to move on.

It feels a little cheaty to still have those letters lying around now that I have Stan. And considering how possessive Stan is , he probably won't want me to keep them...

"Reading those again?" a depraved voice rasps behind me and I turn around, only to see Stan standing in the middle of the kitchen, with nothing but a pair of briefs on and I swallow, smiling a little.

Flushing because now he probably thinks that I have hubris, I answer, "I thought you

were asleep.” The morning sunshines on him, highlighting him, stressing the sharpness of his cheekbones, the slight fullness of his lower lip. In a light like this one it’s hard to remember how he has another side to. A side that I have learned to...

Love.

“I was,” he answers, his eyes stirring, “but then you left my bed because you can’t get enough of the attention can you?”

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My cheeks heat and I wrap my robe tighter around me. “What...?”

He stalks over to me, his eyes triumphant. “You like the power you have? You like being obsessed over to the point of driving a man to insanity don’t you, dirty, filthy little girl?”

Gasping I whisper, “I’m only dirty for you Stan. I’m only your filthy, dirty little girl.”

“That’s the kind of things I like coming out of your mouth, all mine,” he rasps. “Because I sure as fuck haven’t corrupted you for anyone else but me.”

I moan into his mouth when he kisses me and he tastes of mint toothpaste and his shaft digs into my stomach and waves of lava hot flames spread through my body. Driving a man to insanity...

Is that what I have done to him? And maybe...he’s done the same to me.

“Don’t ever leave me, Stan,” I whisper against his mouth and his lips tense. He pulls away, looking horrified, then perplexed like what I’m saying is absurd. “I want you so much.”

He strokes my hair, my face, a little too roughly and he’s almost pawing me like he can’t control his movements when he hears those kinds of words out of my lips. They gratify him.

“Would you do anything for me?” he asks and I nod frantically. “Even give things up?”

“Yes, anything for you.”

“Ripping my useless heart out when talking like that,” he groans, running his hand over my body, his tongue probing mine, making my head spin like a rollercoaster. We’re about to take things further when my stomach whines in protest and Stan chuckles.

“Can’t have you hungry,” he says with warm eyes, “I wanted to wake up earlier and make you breakfast but you beat me to it.”

“It’s not too late. You could still make it,” I purr teasingly, looking at him underneath my lashes and he grins, roughing up my bedhead even worse. He makes me feel cared for like I’m made out of precious jewels, he can’t afford to lose. Looking at the possessive intent on his face, I pity the man who would try to steal me from him.

Not that anyone will be able to. Stan has etched himself into my very core and I know I’ve done the same for him.

“The usual?” Stan asks and I bite my lip, nodding and he turns, taking out milk and I’m wondering whether I should just give up and have him for breakfast instead when I hear my phone buzzing out in the hallway.

I forgot to take it out of my purse yesterday and I fish it out, answering quickly after noticing that there’s been several missed calls.

“Hey big brother,” I murmur, walking out into the kitchen again and Stan throws a look over his shoulder and I mouth, “It’s Gautier.” Stan’s eyes narrow.

“Amber I’ve been trying to call you several times this morning, why haven’t you answered?”

Because I was knocked out after losing my virginity last night.

“It’s Saturday. I slept in,” I murmur, leaning over the table as I admire Stan’s muscular back. His shoulders are wide, his skin smooth and tanned but there’s a crescent shaped, ugly scar on his shoulder blade, going down to his ribs. My fingers danced over that scar yesterday. He said it came from an old knife fight. It made me feel furious that someone had dared to hurt him. I told him so and he laughed and shut me up with a thousand kisses and counted each one out loud.

There’s something kinky and forbidden about us, but sometimes it’s also deliciously sweet.

“You shouldn’t have,” Gautier continues. “You need to get out of your house. Now.”

Fingering the fan letters, I raise my brows. “What? Why?”

“Is Stanmore with you?”

“Yes...”

Stan glances at me and I give him a pale smile.

“Then get out. I’ve found out some things about him and I don’t want him anywhere near you.”

“Not you too. I’d expect this from Gina but not...”

“Let me speak,” he says in his usual arrogant tone and I sigh. “After what happened yesterday, I got concerned and looked him up and let me tell you it’s not easy finding things about him but I have this friend...” “Just tell me what it is,” I say softly, shaking my head at my brother’s sudden overprotectiveness.

“Did you know that Stanmore’s mother was Jaqueline Du Caron?” he says and my eyes flare. I’d known she was a cellist. Not that she’d been one of the most celebrated cellists in the world. And Stan’s her son...

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“N...no,” I say and Stan turns around, grabbing a glass out of the cupboard and gives me a cautionary glance before filling it with water.

“And did you know he’s been in and out of juvenile since he was thirteen? That he was supposed to go to prison for years after he organized one of the biggest bank robberies in the country when he was twenty? But do you know what the sneaky bastard did?”

My hands start shaking at all this new information. “N...no.”

“He represented himself in court and managed to get such a mild punishment it’s laughable.” Gautier lets out a furious/impressed curse. “I knew he was trouble from the moment I saw him. Amber don’t you get it? He’s not a guy who came down from Colorado because he got a new job. Why would a thirty year old, financially stable man need to share a house?”

My brother’s words come out like a rushing waterfall, making me dizzy and for a second black spots dance before my eyes. Inhaling, Gautier blurts, “He’s there because of you. Because he wants you. You need to get out...”

I tense, my eyes slowly going to Stan as he’s drinking out of the glass and I watch the water run down his throat. He puts the glass down. Firmly. His eyes go to mine and they’re hard. His mouth voracious.

“Hang up,” he says in a callous voice and I drop the phone, my jaw slacking.

“Stan...” I say carefully, my heart starting to thrash in my chest as he turns his body

toward me and I lick my lips. In my periphery, I see the letters, the ones written by hand with a red pen.

Those words. So explosive with pain and longing. Obsession.

“You wrote the letters, didn’t you?” I slowly start backing away and he doesn’t blink when he looks at me. “You sent the roses...”

Swallowing I add, “You spied on me in the woods.” He was the one who made me feel chased and then when I ran into him he made me feel like I had been running to him all along.

He doesn’t deny it, prowling over to me with a frozen expression as I keep backing away until I hit a wall and I let out a whimper. The sound makes his eyes flare. “Don’t look at me like that,” he says in a voice filled with agony. “You don’t know what it does to me.” He raises his hand to brush my hair but I flinch and he drops it, his fist clenching. “Don’t be scared.”

His words are strained. Despairing. He sounds like a man who loves me so much that my heart does such a fast pump that it hurts.

I shake my head, trying to ignore the spikes of adrenaline. “B...but you orchestrated all of this, just so you could get close to me.”

“And I’d do it all again. It was worth it. It was all worth it.” His face distorts in torment and jealousy. He gives me my phone. “Go ahead, all mine. Call the cops on me. Tell them about the screwed up guy living in your basement and how much he frightens you and disgusts you and makes you cry bitter tears because you let him fuck you.”

My head spins. All I can think about is Stan behind bars. The sheer thought fills me

with so much dread that it feels like being slashed by my knees. I push his hand away, the slight touch making a thrill rush through my veins.

He looks surprised and he quickly drops the phone as if expecting me to change my mind. But I won't. I can't.

"If you want to run, then I'll let you go even if it will kill me. I'll always wait for you in the background, hoping that one day you'll come back to me. But if you stay..." his eyes turn black, "your life will be in my hands." Give myself over to him like that? Completely.

He touches my lips with his fingertips and this time I don't flinch. This time I melt. How can I ever say no to him? I know there's good in him, I can see it, feel it and it's what I choose to focus on.

"I love you," he gravels, his jet black eyes turning sharp with emotions, "I love you so much it turns me inside out."

I know better than to deny it because I know it's not a lie. Inhaling as it feels like I can't get air from how hard my pulse is beating, I shove a little at Stan but he doesn't budge. His features stern with displeasure until I give him a pleading glance and he reluctantly moves.

"Where are you going?" he says in a low voice but his words drift when I open the door to the basement and I throw a look over my shoulder, my eyes telling him to follow.

With a somber look on his face like he thinks I've lost any sense for selfpreservation, he follows and once we're down in the basement, I shiver when the door closes behind us.

“Lock it,” I breathe and Stan raises his brows, hesitating but then something flips in his gaze and he locks it. Once he told me I was fearless. I don’t know if it’s that true but I know one thing for sure and that is...“Maybe this is wrong of me,” I whisper, “but I don’t care. I need you; I want you because I can never want anyone else...”

He’s ruined me for the rest of the world. And he knows it.

He lets out strange sound, low and primitive, deep inside of his chest and his hands cup my face. They’re cold but I know his heart is the only warm thing, I can be too close to without getting burned.

Tugging at the rope around my robe, I let it pool down my feet and I’m a little ashamed that I’m so aroused. But my body is ready for him. My heart is ready for him.

I know who he is now.

And I’m going to embrace it.

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Stanmore

It's what I've wanted for so long. This. Me and her and no walls between us. Just the honest truth, no matter how crooked it is. My heart is thrashing in my chest, my skin feeling too tight and uncomfortable for my body.

She didn't run away. She didn't scream. She didn't pound me with her fists and yelled that she hated me. I thought she would. I thought she at least would demand to know how I could do this to her.

I thought she would tell me that I tricked her. That I'm not the man she thought I was.

That she thought that I was her hero and then I turned out to be the opposite of one. But those kinds of accusations don't seem to be simmering in her mind. She still looks at me, like she's addicted to my gaze, her chest rising and falling in deep breaths and she has goosebumps on her arms.

They spike, looking like frost on her warm skin.

When I stroke them with my knuckles, she leans into my touch as always. A trapped, little creature who doesn't seek to be let out of her trap. She knows she's safe there. She knows the hunter who she belongs to.

And most importantly she knows that I didn't do what I did out of malice. I did it because I had no choice, because she awoke something in me that I thought was too offensive, too undesirable, too detrimental to ever be let up to the surface.

With Amber I had no choice, she pushed those buttons easily. Carelessly. Her fingers moving over them instinctually, playing with me even when she had no idea who she was playing with.

She didn't know just how deep my love for her goes. Now she does. And she's still here.

Fully bare right in front of someone like me, as if she underneath all that softness has got some steel. People say nothing in this world is perfect but they're wrong. I've found the one thing that is and it's her.

And I'm going to have her and keep her no matter how selfish that might make me. When I cross my arms, her gaze goes to my pectorals and her expression turns sultry. She responds to me. Always. And I shamelessly use it against her for my own benefit.

She loves it when I'm buried in her, gripping my name over and over last night. All of that is going to serve me, because the more she responds to me, the better. I want her as hooked on me as I am on her.

"You think you know what you're doing?" I say in a low voice and her eyes dart, her lips pulling to the side in a half-smile. It's coquettish and girly and made for solely me.

I've always hated seeing her smile at someone else. Not just out of my usual jealousy but because I treasure each one, never taking them for granted.

"No, but I know what I want." Her own tone is steady, but there's a slight trembling in the background. I don't let it get to me. It's only natural that she's still a little adverse. The pulse on the hollow of her throat jitters and I grind my jaw.

"Are you sure?" I rasp. "There can be no going back."

There's only a certain amount of chances that I can give her. Every time I give her an opportunity to express her doubts, it feels like I'm being burned alive. I've known men who don't even blink when their women threaten to leave them. If Amber did that to me, it would be a threat to my whole existence. There is nothing worse I can think of than be forced to roam this world without her.

Amber jerks her chin. "So you've said. But I'm not afraid of this." Her eyes flicker with determination. "Or you for that matter."

Many people have been. Many people still are, but not her. Because she's always going to get the best of me. All my devotion. All my worship.

My chest aches from her bravery. "That so?"

She nods firmly as if she's ready to accept any challenge. "Yes."

"You know what it means to give yourself to me fully?" I say, my voice slow because I know that this is going to be difficult. "It's not to be taken lightly. You know what it means to be all mine?"

"Y...yes." Slight hesitation crosses her face. "That I belong to you."

A muscle ticks in my jaw. "Means I won't be able to share you."

She flinches. "I understand..."

"With anyone," I say with hard possession in my voice. At first it looks like she doesn't get it and she rubs her arms with her hands as if suddenly cold, before it dawns on her. "Oh..." Amber gasps, putting a hand over her mouth and her brows curve over her eyes before she slowly drops her hand. "You don't want any kids."

My throat strangles at her disappointment and from looking at her youthful, fertile body being so ready. So perfect...it cuts me. But it cuts me more having to share her.

“I can’t do it,” I say, the thought alone making me break out into cold sweat. “Do you understand?”

She bites her lip, looking at me hopefully. “M...maybe...?”

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“No maybes,” I interrupt, my muscles straining and she winces and I know I have that look in my eyes. But then she straightens, throwing her hair over her shoulder and she nods.

A silent agreement.

And it makes the tense muscles in my body loosen and I clasp my mouth over hers, tasting her to see if she told me the truth. Judging by the way, she ferociously kisses me back, I think she did.

Perfect, perfect girl.

Impious girl.

She's too lovely to be taken in a basement. The lights in here too bright, the pipes drumming with the sound of water but she wants it, crawling up on my hard mattress like she's in heat. Looking at her entrance, I can tell she's ready and I lick my lips, taking off my briefs and grip my shaft.

It's barely out in the air, before she takes over and I let out a hiss, my eyes flaring. In her hands I'm powerless, my cock belonging to her and I groan when she wraps her lips around me. She can barely fit it, letting out a piqued sound like it's my fault I'm big.

I stroke her lovingly over the hair, a hoarse laugh coming out of my throat but I choke on it when she pushes me farther inside and my body shoots tight as an arrow. Fuck, what is she doing...?

I react fiercely, perspiration starting to slide down my back and I squeeze my eyes, clenching my fists. This is torture. She's torturing me. Ruthlessly. Her nails dig into my skin, her tits slapping against my thighs as she moans and kneads me with her naughty mouth.

She can give as good as she gets and her treatment makes me shudder, the release building up so hard that I try to gently push her face away but she doesn't want to. Instead she lets out a sound in her throat that sounds like a kittenish hiss.

A warning? From her? My eyes flutter from lust. She's never going to stop slowly killing me is she? Pumping me, she slides me as deep as she can inside of her throat, any moan of hers fully muzzled and her eyes tear up, crushing my heart but I'm about to come in her mouth. At the last second I withdraw, shooting ropes of white and pushing her down on the bed, I hit her bare slit with my come.

She moans, fisting the sheet and her chest is flushed, her lips trembling but that secret glimmer in her eyes is firing. She's not done with me yet and I'm still panting when she straddles me, sliding down my semi erect length, stretching herself.

"Is this what you've been dreaming about all along?" she says in a teasing voice as her hips jut forward and I go rock hard. "Poor, poor Stan torturing himself with thoughts of fucking my innocent, little pussy?"

Poor Stan? My lips pull from my teeth and I ram my pelvis upward in warning and she gasps.

"It's the truth isn't it?" she pants, then smiles. "This pussy owns you. Owns a big, bad man like you and you can't do anything about it."

I growl, squeezing her tits and sweat tickles my forehead and I fear that I'll tear her in half if she keeps going on like this. She's changed. She now know the full extent of

the control that she has over me.

And judging by the slightly merciless expression on her face, she's not going to hesitate to use it. "Feel p...powerless, Stan?" she whispers in delirium and I know what she's doing. She's milking me. Both my cock and everything else inside of me and I wrap her thick hair around my fist.

"Always, all mine," I rasps. "Always powerless when it comes to you."

Her eyes flare in excitement, her mouth opening in a moan and she starts bouncing on me, her whole body vibrating.

"Am I fucking you too h...hard?" she asks, clenching around me and my neck strains, making me snarl,

"Not nearly hard enough."

Her ass is misbehaving, pussy and mouth doing the same and I've had it, roughly grabbing her and throw her down, before mounting her. I bend my head, pulling her whole breast into my mouth, making her breathe and curse my name and her legs wrap around me, disgracefully spurring me on.

She's so slick, so eager that it feels like the seams holding my mind together are going to burst. I can never let her get away. Never. I drive into her harder, making her whimper.

The basement is sound isolated. Private. A secret holding a secret.

A secret between a depraved man and the girl who's darkness he had to pull out with his claws and teeth so that she would be able to love him. He was sick for doing so. Twisted. And he'd do it all over again in a heartbeat.

“I love you, Stan,” she moans, her hair slick against her face, her nipples soaked from my suckling, her core tender and so soft that I feel like I should ask for forgiveness for doing this to her.

“Don’t say that, unless you want me to lose all control,” I caution but her eyes flicker in protest. If she was dangerous to me before, it’s nothing compared to what she is now.

“I love you,” she says throatily with hooded eyes, then squeals when I push in more of me but she doesn’t stop. “I love you, I love you...”

She keeps giving more of herself, pulling me deeper and deeper into her, meshing us together until it feels like I’m about to snap.

Grinding my jaw, I tell her one last time, “Keep saying that and you’re going to regret it.”

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“I love you!”

Her body grows glossy and she lets out abandoned, little sounds as I keep fucking her. I don't stop not even when she starts sobbing and when she starts screaming, I put my hand over her mouth containing the screams that she makes just for me. She screams harder, the beautifully helpless sound muffled by my hand.

“Do you regret it?” I rasp between pressed teeth, even if I couldn't stop now even if I tried and she looks up at me with her trusting, big eyes. I look down at her, expecting her to protest.

But she just shakes her head and laughs.

Epilogue

Amber-Two years later

We live in one of the prettiest penthouses in town. Me and the man everyone warned me not to marry. They could all see that something was out of the ordinary with him. With us two when we're together.

I ignored their warnings, marrying Stan in the middle of February when there was nothing but ice and snow outside. Everyone looked at us as if they disapproved but it was the happiest day of my life. For our honeymoon we went to an exclusive resort in the Maldives.

A complete waste because Stan wouldn't let me leave the hotel room. We have no

inhibitions when we're together and whenever the staff would come to clean our room they'd always gasp, then tidy up as quickly as possible and run out with flushing cheeks.

In response Stan just grinned, coaxing a smile out of me too because he's a bad influence.

The worst.

An addictive influence too and even if he has me and has had me for two years, he still looks like he hungers for me. Like he'll never be able to get enough of me. Sometimes I think I'm the most adored woman in the country. Maybe even in the world.

And I know I made the right choice. Choosing to stay instead of screaming and trying to run away. Had I done that it would have been such a...loss.

My whole body hurts just thinking about it and I rarely do. Usually because I'm too busy being too wrapped up in Stan. We only have eyes for each other and we're probably the most annoying guests at parties and restaurants. At family dinners too.

My parents tolerate Stan and he tolerates them back. They're polite to each other but a little stand offish. Gautier still doesn't trust him but Stan respects that and easily brushes off any biting remark he might make.

But sometimes it's hard. Like that time during Christmas when Gautier and my sister Rischa suggested that we all go on a family vacation up in the mountains for New Year's Eve.

"Just the family," Rischa said, a little acidly. "Just the five of us."

I knew what she was thinking. That Stan just doesn't fit in with them. The way he's refined and unrefined at the same time. The way he's fully civilized one second and the next one he isn't.

But he's one more thing too. Real.

Under the table, Stan put his hand on my knee, sliding it upward, making me bite my lip and I glanced at him nervously. His whole body looked strained, his eyes staring straight ahead while his brows curved.

He didn't like the sound of that all. Neither did I.

"You don't mind do you, Stanmore?" Gautier said, pushing his glasses up his nose. "It's the gentlemanly thing to do. Give my sister some breathing room."

"She's my wife," Stan said, not blinking and showing he was serious. "And her husband is not a gentleman."

"Clearly," Rischa sniffed, slowly shaking her long, narrow face. "I don't need any breathing room," I protested, bathing in the smile that Stan gave me when I said that. "And if Stan is not coming, I'm not going either."

We can't be apart from each other. We fall asleep breathing into each other's mouths. Our bodies sometimes still joined. We're not separate, we're one.

When it comes to Gina, she's still suspicious around Stan but she deals with it better now ever since she found out that Stan had a famous mother. Other than that our life is amazing. Charmed.

There's only one thing missing...

I shake my head as I lay against the pillows, because we'd made an agreement. I promised him he was going to have all of me. And breaking that promise would be wrong, when I knew what I was agreeing to from the beginning.

Fisting the sheets, I twitch when I hear him walk through the front door. Our apartment is huge with a second floor, shiny marble floors and windows going up all the way to the ceiling.

The curtains aren't drawn and anyone could see if it hadn't been for Stan getting the windows tinted. My heart jumps from side to side, as I hear his footsteps moving up the staircase and I lick my lips. When he enters our bedroom, the strained look on his face that he always has when we've been apart disappears and he lets out a feral hiss at the sight of me. Warmth pools in my lower belly and I start panting, when he begins to remove his clothes.

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Ascending on top of me and nuzzling my face and throat, my eyes start fluttering from eagerness. I've waited all day for him. He's done the same for me.

"Too damn beautiful," he rasps, his hand going between my legs and I fall into his angelite eyes, "too perfect and too damn mine."

Lately our lovemaking has been different, his thrusts a little too deep. Desperate. When I cleave to him, he does the same, sometimes looking at me with an expression that I can't read.

When it's over and we're spent, he yanks me to his chest and chants that I'mhis, his, his.

It's like he's trying to fight something. Maybe himself.

I ask him what he wants and needs but the answer is always the same.You.Stanmore-Five years later

I did everything I could to give her the life of her dreams.She has it now. Amber's been signed by a record label and she's played both abroad and all over the country. Critics call her music,sexy, decadent poison.

She tells me it's all my doing. That I brought it out of her. And when she says it she always looks at me like I'm her hero. Like she doesn't see just how big my shadow is behind me.

But that same shadow responds to her. Responds to her touch, her smell, her laughter

alone. It's contained by her and...sometimes she does make me feel like a good man.

Because that's what she sees in me. Not to say that she doesn't like it when I bite. She does. Always eagerly wriggling her hips in my face, always moaning so loud I'm happy I sound proofed the apartment.

There are days when we don't leave, when we lock ourselves inside and fill our bedroom with the smell of frenzy and craze. We're preoccupied with each other and indifferent to almost everyone else.

A life without her would have been a nightmare. A life with her is a dream. Even as the years have passed she still has her little, claret colored nails deep in me. I'm not a man who can be owned, but that part of me that can? All hers.

Some people carve their names into stones, we carved ourselves into each other. It's intense, bordering on maddening and nothing for the faint of heart. But Amber is strong, strong enough to take me.

I knew she would be the one who could manage, the first time I saw her face on that poster. That split of a second was all it took for the fixation to start building, for me to realize that she was the one who was going to be all mine.

She was going to be the one who wasn't going to lock me out, because the way that I love her is unconventional. Instead she allowed me in, knowing that every look, every touch, every word was sincere, burning with longing.

And I can't ever get enough of her. Even when she's right next to me, I still yearn for her. And when she's a little farther apart, that yearning becomes so great that it sometimes takes over, tries to break free and I have to rein it in.

My eyes drink her in as she ferociously plays on the stage.

With coiffed hair, black dress and a pearl necklace she looks like a dark angel. Her dress has a high slit, her leg sticking out alongside the cello but if anyone dares to look too close at my wife's body, they'll see the bite marks on her inner thigh.

And yes, I do mark, her creamy, delicate skin. I do it because I'm a possessive husband.

I know it. She knows it. Anyone who comes in contact with us knows it.

When she finishes, gracefully bowing her head, applause erupt, filling the hall and she gets a standing ovation. Our threeyear old son, Mason who's sitting in my lap enthusiastically slaps his little fists together even if he doesn't know what all the fuss is about.

Smiling, I place a kiss on his baby soft head, thinking that allowing my instinct to take over and get Amber pregnant was one of the best decisions of my life. It took a couple of years before I was able to share her but the need for us to have a family won in the end.

We wait for her by the exit, in the alley and I try hard to not let my impatience get the best of me. It's been raining and Mason happily plays in one of the puddles, singing to himself.

He looks so much like me but his eyes and the gentleness in him is all Amber. My chest stirs because he and she hold my heart in their palms. Amber in her musical, delicate ones and Mason in his tiny ones.

I love my family fiercely. Unapologetically. And I'm fully aware of just how lucky I am.

If only Amber would come out... How long has she been in there? Sometimes fans greet her afterwards and we've decided that it's best that I stay away during that time

for my own sanity. And Amber's.

But when unpleasant thoughts about others standing too close to her, able to smell the scent of her skin, I brush my neck in agitation, a sneer covering my face. Pacing back and forth, with my long, black coat I probably look like a bat, lying in wait for his butterfly.

Mason notices, looking up and I force the sneer to go away, winking at him instead. He bursts out into little chuckles, blissfully unaware of the never-ending obsession his father has for his mother.

His mother who's very late...

Amber doesn't even get the chance to step out on the cobble stone street, before I have scooped her up in my arms and planted a violent kiss on her mouth. At first she protests in surprise, before giving in. She always gives in, in the end.

"What took you so long?" I rasp with curved brows and her lips pull into a smile. "Mason and I were ready to barge inside and drag you right out."

"Not Masey. Only daddy..." Mason chippers casually, making Amber laugh. She looks happy, as happy as a wife of mine should look. "I didn't take long. You just can't stand being apart from me."

"True," I growl because she's not wrong. How can I be apart from her when she's not my sun but my moon. When everything's dark, she still brings the light.

Our mouths meet, not separating until Mason tugs at our clothes. Taking his hands, we walk with him in between us down the alley and then we go home.

The End