



Sold to the Beret

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Category: Erotic, Romance, Billionaire Romance, Adult, New Adult

Description: Rose

I've lived a life full of all the comfort money can offer, until my stepfather decides to get me out of the way. Now my body and my future are up for auction. As powerful men bid for the chance to take my virtue, there's one in the crowd who I hope will win.

Why does he seem like a light in the darkness?

Once he's purchased me, and brought me into his home, I realize I've never felt more at peace. I don't want him to ever let me go. Can I trust my instincts—is this the one man who will never hurt me?

Damien

My search for a missing person has taken me to many dark places—but this place is the worst. There's never been a case I can't solve, so I shouldn't be surprised when I see her on that stage, her gorgeous body on display. She doesn't belong in a place like this—she deserves to be pampered, protected, worshiped. Now that I've found her, I know I must keep her safe her at all costs. I can't allow anyone to hurt her again—even myself. And even if that means protecting her from the truth about her mother. She is mine, and I'll hunt down anyone who has ever caused her pain.

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Chapter One

Damien

Somedays my job sucks.

I'm back in the goddamn auction house again, the crowd buzzing as the main event is about to begin. This time, I'm here as a buyer. It's an identity that serves my purpose for the moment. Attempting to channel the arrogance and power of the men surrounding me, I relax into my velvet chair and swirl my glass of whiskey before I take another sip.

My search was fruitless the last time I was here for reconnaissance. I paid some guard to let me search the rooms for Rose Beaumont. I saw what felt like a hundred girls and not one looked like her.

Well, something good came out of it.

I smirk as I remember Grayson and his woman. Who would have thought that big lump of a man would turn into a teddy for a woman?

A hushed chatter pulls me out of my thoughts. A quick scan around, and I see the reason for the quiet murmur. Another prominent buyer has arrived and is being pampered like the president.

My lips curl in distaste. Although my moral meter is low in comparison to an average person, I draw the line at hurting women and kids. It's how I'm wired, and why I find

the people in this place repulsive.

Motherfuckers.

It's sick enough that these vile men purchase young girls for their sick pleasure, but it's even more despicable that they're being catered to like royalty. Many of them are old, with receding hairlines and bulging stomachs. I shudder to think about the fate of the girls they purchase.

What about Grayson?my subconscious whispers.

Grayson is different. He didn't come to the auction house for the purpose of acquiring a woman, and I'm sure he would let Sophia go if she wanted. He's a man of honor. It's one of the things that brought us together.

I was taught that honor is something to be celebrated in a man. It's honor that lets you know where to draw the line and helps you hold on to a semblance of morality. Otherwise I would be just as bad as the men in this room with me.

I lean back in my seat, giving off an air of indifference. It makes me look less threatening, which is exactly what I want—for everyone to let their guard down around me. My time as a special forces soldier taught me to blend into the background and show people what they want to see. And now, as a private investigator, those lessons serve me well on the job. My primary assignment tonight is to find the missing daughter of one of my clients.

I feel a pang of guilt at the thought of the girl—Rose Beaumont. I recently found out that her mother, who was my client, has died. Since I heard the news, the urgency to find her has increased. I owe it to her mother to fulfill my vow to look for her.

And, I never leave a job unfinished. It doesn't bode well for my reputation and future

clientele.

I've thought of several places where Rose could be, but my mind keeps coming back to this chapel. Apart from the fact that my investigation points here to these underground auctions, my instincts have also been fixated on this old building in the middle of nowhere.

I never go against my gut feeling. The last time I did, I almost died. Besides, the last time I searched for Rose here, I had a feeling I hadn't searched everywhere. And since I didn't know the lay of the land, the length of my search was limited.

This time, I'm sure as hell not leaving without her. And if she's not here, I have to find a clue that will lead me to her. I'm not leaving without an answer, that's for sure.

In my space in the far corner of the room, I've blended with the background, which gives me a good view of the occupants of the room. No one can notice me unless I want to be seen and I prefer it that way.

The more I watch them, the angrier I grow. Their laughter and hushed conversations piss me off. My ears have been trained to detect the quietest of sounds, so I hear it all—business deals going down, and the excitement of purchasing a new plaything. I'm furious. Especially when I hear them talking about the girls.

I palm my Swiss Army knife in my right hand, deftly flicking it open with the ease of a man used to killing. I don't even know how I have it in my hand. I must have fished it out in my haze of anger. I continue to stare at the group of men, thinking about the different ways to end their lives. I want to gut them, or better yet slice their throats, but I'm here for a mission. It's better not to stir up trouble.

I sweep my gaze over the large room again, humming in satisfaction as my eyes land on a man in the thick of the crowd on the other side of the room.

One job done.

I make a mental note to call my regular client, Theo Kane, after getting out of here. He'd tasked me with finding out whether this man is a buyer at the auction house, and I've gotten my answer. Now I can fully focus on finding Rose Beaumont.

"Gentlemen," the auctioneer calls out, his booming voice dragging me out of my reverie. "The bidding starts in five minutes. In the meantime, make sure your purses are padded. The commodities available tonight are epitomes of innocence and purity. Delectable. Just the way you like them," he says with a wink.

A growl reverberates low in my throat. I want to punch the greedy look off his face. Instead, I tune the idiot out and lean further back in my seat, almost in a sprawl, letting my mind travel back to when Beatrice Beaumont contacted me for this job. I wanted to decline at first. I had just completed a really dangerous job and needed a break. But, there was a sort of desperation in her voice that I couldn't ignore.

And when I saw the image of Rose Beaumont, I understood her mother's pain and need to find her daughter.

My hand unconsciously slips into the pocket of my jeans and I rub my fingers softly over the picture. For some odd reason, my protective instincts had hummed to life the moment I laid my eyes on the woman. Barely twenty years old, Rose Beaumont has a youthful light in her eyes, and an innocent, carefree smile. In the photo, there was a slight twinkle in her bright blue eyes that instantly drew me in.

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My lips tug in a ghost of a smile as I let the image of her fill my mind for a moment. Something about that big, innocent smile has touched a place in my heart that I didn't even know existed. I have never felt this ferocious need to protect someone before—someone I haven't even met.

The bright lights dim, cloaking the area. I sit up, ready for the shit show to commence. White light floods the center stage, putting other areas of the room in shadows. I can still see everyone else around me, but the blinding stage lights gave the space a foreboding feel.

Right on the five-minute mark, the auctioneer appears on the stage. "Alright, gentlemen. It's time to start bidding. I'll be presenting ten items for auction tonight. That's right—ten gorgeous girls for your viewing pleasure, well-groomed and ready to go. I'll start with number one!" he shouts.

Suddenly, the air is rife with sick anticipation and greed as a tall, slim girl stumbles onto the stage. I fist my hands, banning the image of Rose from my mind as I watch the debacle.

"Bidding starts at a hundred thousand!" the auctioneer states.

I remain stiff in my seat as I listen to the barrage of bids and counterbids flying around me. The girl in question can only stare into the audience, wide-eyed in shock. I should feel pity for her, but it seems like a waste, and I'm too focused on my goal—single-minded. I'm a man of action, not reaction. That bit of emotion won't save these women, so why should I muster the feeling? If it makes me look like an unfeeling bastard, then that's what I am.

“One million!” the big-bellied man a few seats from me calls.

The hall goes silent, then the auctioneer chimes, “One million. Going once. Going twice, and...sold!”

I watch impassively as the man shakes hands with his friends and walks to the stage for the girl, then drags her back to his seat to force her to pleasure him. A sick tradition the auction house uses to ensure compliance from their buyers, and to put on a show for those who lose the bidding. I turn away as the man gropes the girl with sweaty hands, a leering grin on his face.

The whole thing fills me with fury, and the constant image of the Beaumont girl serves as my only anchor. She’s the only one that matters. No one else. If I want to get her out of here, I have to put a lid on my rage.

Still holding on to her angelic smile, I slow down my breathing, reminding myself that I’m in a delicate situation and I have to remain calm and alert.

In no time, I’m back to being detached.

“Now, on to the next item of the night,” the auctioneer announces. “Number two is a gorgeous specimen and you won’t believe it...” He lowers his voice to a dramatic stage whisper. “She is a virgin!”

There’s a shift in the air as the second girl enters the stage. Everything fades and she’s all I see. Her steps are tentative as she walks to stand under the bright light. Every emotion I struggled to keep in check breaks free, and a shiver of awareness travels down my spine.

Fuck!

It's Rose Beaumont. I'm tempted to pull out the picture burning a hole in my pocket, but I can't take my eyes off her. And anyway, I've stared at her picture long enough to memorize every line and angle of her face. She looks older than she looks in the picture, more of a woman, with curves designed to make a man go crazy.

Her long blonde hair cascades down her shoulders, framing her angelic face. Her luscious curves are barely covered by lace lingerie that leaves almost nothing to the imagination. My possessive instincts roar to the surface. She doesn't belong in this godforsaken place, and I'm getting her the hell out of here if it's the last thing I do.

A murmur of excitement rises around me at her appearance. Rage fills me up, hot and searing, burning everything in its path. None of these assholes can have her. I will gut them and string them up if they so much as breathe in her direction.

"I can see that number two has stirred up a lot of excitement. Which is why her bidding price is starting from two hundred thousand!" the auctioneer shouts, excitement vivid in his voice.

Rose looks down immediately at the announcement. Her hands are clasped tight in front of her, forming a V-shape down to her thighs, as if she can cover her perfect breasts with her arms. I bunch my fists as the bidding starts, and my fury escalates with every bid.

I feel covert stares being thrown in my direction. I'm sure the people sitting close to me can feel the anger rolling off me in waves, but I don't care. Fuck them. I didn't ever think I would bid for a girl at an auction, but for once I welcome the idea of going against my moral code.

I'm known to get my job done by any means possible.

Who am I kidding?The need to protect her goes beyond the dictates of my job. It's a

driving force. This feeling makes no sense, but I don't care. I keep my eyes trained on her, my fingers digging deeper into my palm as I watch her flinch with every bid.

Fucking bastards. I want to kill them all for making her so scared.

"Six hundred thousand," an unfortunate buyer calls out.

I grind my teeth, putting a lid on my anger until I'm back to the aloof and devil-may-care man that strolled into the auction house.

"One million," I growl, daring anyone to challenge me.

Chapter Two

Rose

I thought my life couldn't get any worse after my stepfather sold me off to an auction house. I was wrong. Now, standing on this stage with men trying to outdo themselves in a bid to own me, it feels like the whole world is crashing down on me.

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One million dollars.

I glance in the direction of the man who spoke last, my heart rate picking up as my gaze clashes with a pair of dark, soulless eyes. Bold. Possessive. My breath hitches at the intensity of his gaze and for a moment, I forget how to breathe. Suddenly, every other person in the room fades away, except him.

“One and a half million,” another voice calls, breaking my trance.

Even then, I can't seem to look away from the dark-eyed man. Something about the way he's holding my gaze keeps me grounded. Safe.

Is that even right?

Just like every other monster here, he's here to buy girls for his sick pleasure. So why am I rooting for him, silently hoping for him to outbid everyone else? Maybe being in the auction house for so long has done something to my head.

“Two million,” he counters. His voice, although low, carries an unmistakable edge. Something dark and dangerous.

“Two and a half,” someone calls out hesitantly.

“Three million,” another says.

He remains silent, and just when I start to think he's given up on the bid, his deep voice reverberates through the room. “Ten million dollars.”

A soft gasp escapes my lips. A tense silence falls upon the room until it becomes clear no one is willing to challenge him.

“Well, we have the bid at ten million,” the auctioneer announces, his voice ringing with excitement. “And it’s going once...twice...and sold!”

My heart slams hard against my chest in time with the sound of the gavel. I stand rooted to the spot, momentarily losing awareness of time and space. I’m lost in those deep, dark eyes, drowning.

I can hear the auctioneer’s voice, dishing out instructions, but I can barely make out the words. My body is strung tight, my heart beating too fast, and the exhaustion and anxiety of the past few days are suddenly catching up with me. My vision blurs and I sway on my feet.

Suddenly, a pair of big, strong arms come around my waist, holding me steady. I raise my head and my gaze clashes with those arresting dark eyes that kept me captive throughout the bidding. I stare blankly at the man, unable to wrap my head around how he got to me so fast.

Wasn’t he just at the back of the room?

“You’re okay,” he whispers into my ear, his deep rumbling voice sending thrills across my skin. “I’ve got you.”

I let my gaze roam his face, taking in his perfectly chiseled features and ruffled dark hair. A thin scar runs across his forehead to the space above his eyelid, giving him a dangerous edge that’s terrifying yet exciting. I thought his eyes were black, but they’re a deep, soulful brown—the most beautiful shade of brown I’ve ever seen.

My God, he is beautiful. It’s an odd thought, but I can’t help it.

“Hold on tight, princess,” he says, suddenly picking me up bridal style. A shocked gasp escapes my lips even as I instinctively wrap my arms around his neck. My breath hitches as I stare into his arresting brown eyes, my heart pounding hard against my rib cage. The coldness I saw in his eyes earlier has been replaced with a gentle warmth that makes me want to drown in their beautiful brown depths.

“W-what’re you doing?” I ask, barely managing to push the words past the dryness in my throat.

“Taking you home, princess,” he answers, like it’s the most natural thing in the world.

I’m about to ask what he means by that, but the auctioneer’s voice interrupts my thought. “You can’t leave unless we confirm your satisfaction with your purchase, sir.”

The man hesitates, and his arms tighten around me. My face is so close to his I can see a muscle in his jaw twitch. He looks angry, like he wants to fight back. But then his gaze darts to the guards at the door, and I follow his glance. One of the guards has their hand rested casually on their gun, and his eyes are alert as he waits to see what happens next.

“Of course,” my brown-eyed hero says, as if that was the plan all along. He carries me off the stage and back to his seat, whispering in my ear, “I’m going to protect you, princess, I swear it. We just need to give them what they want, and then we can go home.”

His voice softens at the word “home,” and somehow I know it right there and then. This handsome stranger is my knight in shining armor. He’ll protect me no matter what. I don’t know how I know that, but I can feel it down to my bones.

I bury my face in his neck, snuggling deeper into his warmth as he sits down with me on his lap. The hall is quieter than before, and I can feel the weight of all those hungry male gazes—I know what’s expected to happen next, what they want me to do. I heard the other girls talking while we waited to be sold.

I have to please my buyer.

“What’s your name?” I ask in a bid to fill the charged silence between us.

“Damien,” he answers simply. “Damien Hart.”

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“I’m Rose,” I say, nervously worrying my lower lip like I do whenever I’m nervous.

He smiles at me reassuringly, though his eyes are soft and full of worry for me. “Just focus on me, okay? Forget about them. You don’t need to be afraid of me, Rose. I’m not going to hurt you.”

“I know,” I whisper. I believe him. I don’t know why, but I do. And when he bends to press his lips against mine, I’m filled with the sudden desire to prove that I’m okay. That I want this and I’m not afraid of him.

So I kiss him back, and when he slips his tongue into my mouth, I can’t help letting out a gasp of pleasure. As our tongues tangle together, his hand trails from my hip up my side, over the curve of my breast, to trace my nipple through the sheer fabric.

I moan at his touch, blushing at how eager I am. I can feel wetness already pooling between my thighs.

He shifts me so I’m straddling him in the seat, bringing me into the perfect position to feel the hardness of him through our clothes. I can’t help grinding against him slowly, and he groans softly, pulling our mouths apart. “You’re perfect,” he whispers in my ear, trailing his lips along my jaw, nipping at my earlobe and kissing his way down my neck.

I’ve never felt anything like this before, never wanted anything so badly. And I know I shouldn’t want this, surrounded by lecherous old men in this terrible chapel, but my body has a mind of its own.

I continue to grind against his length as he pulls down the lingerie they forced me to wear and bares my breasts to the chill air. As he takes one of my nipples into his mouth and begins to suck gently, one of his hands sneaks between my legs, easily pulling the scrap of fabric there to the side and sliding one of his fingers inside me.

He moans. “You’re so wet, princess. Is this all for me?”

“Yes,” I gasp. “Please.” I don’t even know what I’m begging for, but I instinctively know that whatever it is, he can give it to me. I’m whimpering now with need, my legs trembling as his finger slides through my wetness, dipping in and out of my pussy, then circling around my clit.

Some chatter is starting to resume in the crowd as they prepare for the next girl to come out on stage. A sharp laugh from a man in conversation a few yards away threatens to steal my attention, making me self-conscious, and Damien sharply pulls my face back around to him.

“Eyes on me,” he says sharply. “There’s no one else here—understand?”

I nod, kissing him firmly. “I understand.”

His length is straining even harder against his pants, and I suddenly realize I’m not exactly holding up my end of the deal. I need to please him too.

And I want to please him.

Though I’ve never done this before, and my hands are shaking, I reach for the zipper of his pants. Realizing what I’m doing, his hand between my legs stills. “Are you sure, princess?” he asks me.

“Yes,” I whisper. “Please let me touch you too.”

Though there's something like guilt in his eyes, he quickly helps me remove his hard length. As soon as my hand is wrapped around him and stroking tentatively, he resumes the movement of his finger inside me, building up that pleasure, making me feel things I didn't know I could.

With his other hand, he pulls my face to his and takes my mouth again. We're kissing, our tongues tangled together, and I'm riding his hand as his skilled fingers pull pleasure from my body.

I clumsily move my hand up and down his length in time with my own movements. He's so hard, even more than I expected, yet his skin is soft beneath my touch. His hips are rising to meet each downward stroke of my hand, and his thumb is now circling my clit as his finger glides in and out of my entrance.

"Come for me, princess."

As if I've been waiting for his permission, my pleasure reaches its peak. I gasp, letting out a moan that he captures with another kiss, and my body shudders, tightening around his finger.

"So fucking tight," he groans against my mouth as he shudders his release too, his first spurt of seed serving to slick the surface of his cock as I stroke him through his orgasm. I'm in awe that I was able to make him feel even a little bit of the pleasure he brought to me.

We're both breathing heavily and staring into each other's eyes for a long moment. Smiling softly at me, Damien tucks himself back into his pants, gently wiping my hand off on his boxers, and adjusts my lingerie so that when we enter the crowds again I'll be somewhat covered.

"Let's go home," he says.

I nod into his shoulder, trying to conceal my blushing face. I can't believe I did that! And in front of all these people! A sliver of pride is mixed in with all the other emotions I'm feeling—a little bit of lingering fear, but also relief, longing, and exhaustion.

He carries me all the way to his car, a sleek black Mercedes, gently placing me on the passenger seat like I'm some delicate glassware. Then he starts to unbutton his shirt, his eyes never leaving mine.

“W-what are you doing?” I stutter, my eyes widening as I watch him.

“It's alright, princess. It's just to cover you up,” he says, his lips tilting slightly in an amused smirk.

He pulls off his shirt, revealing a tight white T-shirt underneath. My throat goes dry at the sight of his huge muscular arms covered in intricate tribal tattoos. I stare at them in fascination as he puts the shirt over me and urges my arms into the sleeves. He's bending over me as he buttons the shirt, so close I can barely breathe. Or think. His dark, masculine scent teases my senses, his warm breath caressing my skin, setting my skin on fire.

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He pushes the door closed and walks around to the driver's side. I watch him settle in his seat and start the car, his face an unreadable mask.

He glances at my face, his gaze lingering on my lips. "Try to get some sleep, Rose. It's a long way home."

Home. He keeps saying that and I want to ask him what home he means—the same one where my evil stepfather resides, or a new home. I have no idea what awaits me.

I try to sleep like he advised, but the farther we get from the auction house, the harder my reality sets in. In the past few days, I've tried not to think about the state my mom would be in after not seeing me for days. I told myself it was useless worrying when I didn't know my fate. Now that I'm out, I'm torn between wanting to go back home, or staying away like Jared wanted.

He probably told her some ridiculous lie that explains my disappearance. She's too weak to fight him. Jared knows that and is taking full advantage of it.

I bite down on my lip as a familiar burning sensation flares in my chest. I recognize the emotion—it's a feeling I've refused to acknowledge since my mom married Jared Fields. Rage. A vicious rage that threatens to consume me if I let it. I want to lash out at my mom for her choice, at myself for letting Jared walk all over me, and at the universe for being so unfair...but acknowledging this anger is what would hurt my mom the most. I can't do that to her...not when she's sick, and fighting for her life.

I should probably think about something else. Like the hot stranger sitting next to me.

I glance discreetly at Damien. Even from the side, there's a rawness to him, a primitive edge that makes my heart skip a beat. His sharp jawline and angular cheekbones seem chiseled from granite, giving him an untamed appearance that's both intimidating and irresistibly attractive. My gaze slides down to his full, firm lips and I feel an ache at my core, an echo of my earlier orgasm. I find myself wanting to run my finger over the soft flesh of his lips, to taste him again...

Oh, Rose...what are you thinking?

"Are you alright?" His deep voice cuts into my thoughts, like a splash of cold water on my face. I look up in time to catch a fleeting emotion in his eyes. Worry? I can't tell because his expression quickly goes back to being blank. I nod quickly in answer.

"We're here," Damien says quietly, pulling into the parking garage of a tall, luxurious apartment building. He parks the car and comes around to the passenger side to open the door.

"Thank you," I murmur, and just as I try to get out, he picks me up, his strong arms pressing me firmly against his body.

"I can walk, you know?" I say, unsure whether to be amused or annoyed.

"I know," he answers seriously. "But you're barely holding yourself up in those heels."

My cheeks burn with embarrassment. He must have noticed me struggling to walk on that stage. Damien strides toward the elevator, effortlessly juggling me in his arms as he enters and pushes the button for the penthouse, scanning his card.

"Where are we?" I ask, clearing my throat nervously.

“Home.”

I want to ask why he brought me to his apartment and what he plans to do with me. I want to ask him why he has such a strange effect on me, and why I can barely think beyond the feel of his arms around me.

What is this feeling?

But I forget all my questions for a moment when the elevator doors open again and we enter the nicest apartment I’ve ever seen. We’re surrounded by floor-to-ceiling windows, invitingly soft furniture, and abstract art in natural, earthy tones.

“What happens next?” I ask once we’re inside and Damien sets me down.

He shrugs, his expression frustratingly unreadable. “Whatever you want, princess.”

“And if I want to go home?” I say, folding my arms over my chest.

“I can’t let you go,” he says simply.

“Why not?” I ask, angling my head to hold his gaze.

“Because you’re mine now.”

My heart skips a beat. Not at the words, but at the finality with which he said them, the unabashed possessiveness in his deep brown eyes. A chill of awareness runs down my spine, and suddenly I want to give in to this crazy attraction swirling between us.

Maybe he can make the awful memories of the past few days disappear. Just for tonight.

I step closer, spurred by a sudden surge of courage and lust. I wrap my arms around his neck, rising on my tiptoes until my lips are mere inches from him. “Kiss me then.”

His eyes flare with something dark, but it disappears quickly before I can tell what it is, quickly replaced by a mask of coolness that I’m quickly growing accustomed to.

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“I’m not going to stop at a kiss, Rose,” he says quietly. “And I’m not going to stop at just what we did at the chapel either.” His eyes burn into mine with an intensity that makes me hot all over.

“I know. I want all of it.”

He remains quiet for a long time, his eyes boring intensely into mine. And just when I start to think I’m about to be rejected, he grabs my waist and pulls me close, slowly lowering his mouth to mine.

Chapter Three

Damien

I shouldn’t have said that. And I shouldn’t be doing this.

I told her that she belongs to me. But that was never what this was supposed to be. I meant to free her, but here I am telling her she can’t leave.

Rose Beaumont is my client, and I never mix business with pleasure. I shouldn’t give in to this crazy lust that’s hooked me since the moment I laid eyes on her on that damn stage, but I can’t help myself. I want her, no—I crave her with a vigor that’s beyond my control. I thought after what happened at the chapel, I’d be sated, but no. Now I just want more of her. All of her.

When I told her she belongs to me, I expected her to be afraid, but instead she asked me to kiss her. What else can I do when she offers herself to me? There’s only so

much temptation a man can take.

Her lips beneath mine are soft, yielding. She presses her body closer to mine, a soft moan escaping her throat as I slip my tongue into her mouth. Goddammit, I fucking want more.

I kiss her harder, gently pushing her against the wall. I urge her legs up until they're firmly wrapped around my waist and her heels are digging into my ass, lodging my hard length against her crotch. My body urges me to take her hard and fast against the wall, but now that we're free from prying eyes, I want to go slow, to cherish her like she deserves. She's so small and feels so delicate in my arms that I want to worship her and lick the whole of her body. She gyrates slowly against my dick, moaning softly as I deepen the kiss, taking over her mouth.

Her dainty fingers move feverishly over my shoulders and arms, sending electric currents down to my cock. Her soft moans turn into lingering whimpers as I softly trail my lips to the soft arch of her neck, dropping nips and licks on the way. I close my lips over the erratic pulse of her neck and slowly suckle on it.

"D-Damien," she says in a breathy moan, arching her neck and pressing her sex tightly to me.

She's so responsive, it gives me a heady feeling. I gently grab her thighs, stopping her hip movements and chuckling softly at her impatience. "Not yet, princess," I whisper gruffly against her ear.

With my hands holding tight to her hips, I move away from the wall, enjoying the sound of her moans as I blow warm air against the soft spot behind her ears and lightly close my lips on the flesh. Once in my room, I climb onto the king-size bed, slowly lowering her and taking back her lips in a sweet, deep kiss as I slip my hands beneath the loose shirt. I lightly graze my fingers over her hard nipples, teasing out a

breathy moan.

I break the kiss with a final lick and slowly peel the shirt over her head. Then I undo the lacy lingerie, baring her perfectly sculpted body. I watch her pleasure-filled eyes follow me as I undress too, removing all of my clothes. At the sight of my hard dick, her eyes widen and I see a slight hesitation. My heart trips at the look. What has brought it on? I don't ever want to cause her pain. I don't know why I feel this so vehemently, but the thought of Rose in discomfort makes me want to do damage.

“What's wrong, princess?” I ask gently, my voice coming out gruff. I place my knee on the edge of the bed, trying to give her a bit of space and make her feel safe. “It's all right, princess. Talk to me. If you don't want this, it's your decision. I?”

“No!” she gasps. Then she blushes in a dark red shade as if embarrassed by her soft outburst, and shifts her gaze.

I wait for her to continue. The words I said are true. If she truly isn't ready, I'll back off and go jerk off in the shower. Even now, her sweet gaze and innocence turns me on like no other, and I can still see arousal firmly lodged in her eyes.

“It's just that...it was dark in the chapel, so I couldn't see you as well. And you're so big. I want this, I want to feel you inside me, but I—I haven't done this before,” she answers in a shy, hesitant tone.

A warm feeling builds in my chest at her shy confession, and on the tail end of it is a wave of need and possessiveness.

This beautiful, delicate woman is all mine.

“Fuck, princess,” I groan out.

My gaze caresses her body, from the flare of her hips to her slim waist, pert breasts that fill my hands perfectly, and her glorious hair, and I can't stop the deep groan that leaves my lips. Knowing that she's untouched, that I was the first one to feel her walls clench around me in pleasure, and I will be the first to feel her warmth around my cock, causes me to grow harder than imaginable and I watch her eyes widen in surprise.

"You're perfect," I say in a deep, growly tone. "I'm fucking glad to hear that I'll be the first, and I promise not to hurt you, princess." I groan softly in satisfaction at the flare of want in her blue eyes.

My gaze travels down her body, and my need ramps higher at the sight of her thoroughly kissed lips, puckered nipples, and glistening sex. Slowly, I bend over her, kissing and licking my way up her thighs, leaving goose bumps in my path and reigniting her desire. I stop at her parted thighs, unable to resist the feminine scent of her, her glistening slit beckoning to me. I part her swollen folds, feasting my eyes and taking in her soaking wet sex and puckered clit.

I blow gently over it and her body jerks in response. "Damien!"

She trembles in my arms and sinks her hand into my hair, gripping tight as I blow warm air over her exposed flesh again. I watch in amazement as her hips buck and she gets even wetter. "So fucking responsive," I rasp, and I continue to tease her engorged clit with warm air, wondering if she could come just by the stimulation alone. Her whimpers and mewls turn into soft pleas as she undulates her hips, waiting for relief.

"P-please," she begs brokenly, heightening the strung tension inside me.

"It's alright, princess. Does it ache?" I ask in a guttural tone, still teasing her sopping wet pussy.

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“Y-yes,” she answers, jerking softly as I slowly circle my tongue around her swollen clit, teasing out a loud whimper.

“Let me ease your ache, princess,” I whisper, and I close my lips over her engorged clit, sucking hard.

“Argh!” She buckles hard under me, her fingers gripping my hair tight. Her trembles and loud moans of pleasure wash over me with every lick, every suck, and every bite, sinking into my skin and adding to the pent-up need inside me. I slowly sink my finger into her slippery sex, giving it one and then two strokes, and she detonates into my mouth, bucking and trembling as she comes.

The need to drive into her is riding me hard, but I want to wring out every single moan of pleasure from her beautiful lips. So I push away the urge to press my aching dick between her slippery thighs. Instead, I trail my lips up her trembling stomach to her cleavage, her hands falling to my shoulders.

Arranging myself between her thighs, I gently close my lips over a tight, hard nub, slowly circling it with my tongue while I graze my thumb over the other. She arches her back and then gasps softly as if her response surprised her. I chuckle softly, trapping a hard nipple between my tongue and the roof of my mouth, sucking hard and strumming on the other.

Her soft, breathy moans gradually morph into an incessant whimper of need as she surrenders to my assault. I nip and suck, alternating between the two breasts, and soon enough, her fingers bunch into the hair at my nape and she’s grinding against my cock.

The need to get inside of her beats at me with unrivaled hunger. I settle my hard cock against her wet pussy and slowly grind against it while I take her lips in a deep kiss, swallowing her throaty moans. I'm filled with the sudden need to gaze into her eyes as I penetrate her, and I gently dislodge my lips, gazing into blue eyes dark with unbridled desire.

"It's going to hurt a bit. I'm sorry, princess," I say in a gentle tone. She nods fervently.

I place my forehead over hers, not taking my eyes off her for a second as I slowly slide my stiff cock over her slippery entrance.

"Don't look away," I command softly as she closes her eyes in ecstasy.

She obeys instantly, and I'm back to staring into her need-filled eyes, hoping to worm my way into the deep recesses of her heart as she did mine. When her whimpers change into loud, throaty moans, I slowly penetrate her slippery sex, then withdraw, gritting hard against the rising fire of desire burning me up.

The movement of my hips is slowly turning me into a mindless beast, but I want to ease her into it.

"Damien!" At her loud plea, I push deep and hard, her warm sheath welcoming and clamping hard on me in response. I pause, allowing her to get used to the intrusion while I fight the need to sate the roaring furnace inside me.

A tear rolls down her cheek and my heart tightens in pain. "I'm sorry, princess," I say, leaning down to lick it off.

"It's alright. I'm fine," she says softly, looking at me with a trusting gaze that pulls me in like a moth to flame.

I move, thrusting softly, and she gasps in response. My hands intertwine with hers and I move them above our heads, thrusting deeper, basking in her moans. I can't take my eyes off her. This feeling is different. The need to possess her and take care of her fills me, building the heights of my desire. My strokes turn fervent and deep as the walls of her sex clamp tighter, stoking the burning flames threatening to devour me. I give one last thrust and Rose shouts, "Oh God!"

Her walls clamp hard and tight as she convulses, coming hard and pushing me to orgasm too. I groan loudly, jerking hard and coming deep inside her.

I slump to the side, pulling her with me. When I'm able to catch my breath, I tilt her face upward. "Are you okay?" I ask gruffly, and she nods shyly, her cheeks turning a bright pink. My mouth curves into a smile and I can't help pressing a soft kiss on her forehead.

I tighten my arms around her and we lie there together for a moment until our breaths slow. I gently stroke my hand up and down her back, and she hums softly.

"That was so much better than I imagined it would be," she says.

I grin down at her. "Good," I say simply. "You deserve to feel good all the time, princess."

She reaches up to press a soft kiss to my mouth. "Thank you."

I return the kiss more forcefully, slipping my tongue into her mouth, and soon our breaths are coming faster again. Reluctantly, I pull away, chuckling.

"We need to get cleaned up," I say, and then I rise off the bed, lifting her in my arms.

Once in the shower, she slides down my body, stroking my arousal. My mind fills up

with the image of driving into her from behind, and my cock stirs, hardening under the barrage of my thoughts. I watch Rose's eyes dilate with want at the sight of my dick.

Oh fuck.

I want to sink my aching cock into her again, but I know she'll be sore from our previous lovemaking. Still, our eyes tell tales of our thoughts, heightening the sexual tension between us as I turn on the shower tap. Warm water cascades down, washing over us and creating a cocoon of steam around us. I follow beads of water down Rose's skin and I can't resist swiping my tongue over the one perching just above her tight, pink areola.

She moans softly, arching her chest into my mouth. Let me indulge, just a bit.

I lap gently over the tight nub, moving from one to the other before drawing it deep into my mouth. Rose's soft gasps turn into loud whimpers and I can't resist slipping my hands down her quivering stomach to her wet sex. Her hands grip my shoulders as I slowly rub my thumb over her tight clit while I continue to lap over her breasts.

Her whimpers turn into loud, throaty moans that create tingles of heat in my jutting cock. I know I have to stop, but I can't help it.

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Just one more time.

I shift my lips to hers, kissing deep and hard, heady and possessive. I release her lips and turn her back to me, grabbing her waist and slowly rubbing my stiff cock between her legs, against her clit, taking in her quivering body and whimpering moans.

“Fuck, princess. We can’t—you’ll be sore tomorrow,” I warn, stroking my hard cock rhythmically over her clit.

“Please, Damien. I w-want it,” she says softly, arching her back to push on my cock.

I move a bit out of reach, still stroking her aching sex. “What do you want?” I growl softly.

“I want you,” she breathes out.

“Good girl,” I say, and then I slam home.

“Damien!” she screams, grasping on to the edge of the shower cubicle.

Her loud moans spur me on and soon I’m slamming deep and hard inside her, hitting a deeper bundle of nerves. The tingles turn into warm heat that sinks down to my balls, driving my thrusts into powerful strokes. Rose stiffens, then starts to quiver and babble as she orgasms. Her hot sheath tightens hard on my cock and my release is a roaring flame that burns everything in its path. I grunt aloud, shooting jets of cum into her until I’m spent and slumped against Rose, holding her up by the waist.

“That was beautiful, princess,” I whisper against her ear, and my cock jerks inside her at her slight shiver.

Fuck.It’s going to be a long, long night.

Chapter Four

Rose

It takes everything in me to crawl out of bed, away from the warmth and safety that is Damien. But, I need to be away from him to clear the thoughts churning in my head. I pick up his discarded shirt from last night and put it on.

I inhale the scent on the sleeve, unable to resist the urge. Images of our lovemaking play in my mind, heightened by the raw and manly scent of him, leaving me almost breathless. It smells of pine and leather, just like Damien. I turn to look at him. Even in sleep, with his features relaxed, he looks like a man used to fighting demons. Deliciouslydangerous.

Fighting the urge to trail my fingers across his handsome face and over his tempting lips, I quietly tiptoe out of the large bedroom, closing the door gently behind me.

The hallway leads me back to the huge living area. Once in the bright room, I stop and look around in surprise. It’s even homier than I remembered from last night. The walls are painted a pale cream and lined with beautiful art. I walk over to the large floor to ceiling windows, a smile tugging at my lip as the sight of the gorgeous flowers growing in pots on the large deck area.

Mom used to love growing flowers.

My chest tightens at the thought of my mom. She used to be so vibrant, so full of life.

But then Dad died and everything went downhill.

She married Jared, her biggest mistake. I never liked him from the beginning. Not even when he pretended to play the role of the great stepfather in those first few years. I thought there was always something slimy about him.

And I was right.

He started pulling me away from things that brought me joy—school, my friends—and speaking to me more harshly, controlling what I could wear or when I could go out. Mom was too busy with work to notice any of it, and then she got diagnosed with lung cancer.

She left the company in Jared's care, and the bastard thought he could mess with everything my parents had worked hard to build. The night I found out he was moving the company's funds into an offshore account, I confronted him and threatened to expose him.

He slapped me hard on the cheek and dragged me roughly to his car, all the while ranting about how he's had enough of me. That night, he drove me to an isolated building in the middle of nowhere and handed me off. I later learned from one of the girls in captivity that I had been sold to an auction house. By my own stepfather.

Thinking about the events that led up to this moment makes me want to curl into a ball and cry. But as much as I hated it, I can't help but make an exception of last night with Damien. It was wonderful. No, it was the best experience of my life. I never imagined my first time to be so...explosive.

There's something about the man that makes me want to throw every bit of common sense into the wind. It's inexplicable.

I shouldn't want him so badly. Not when he bought me at an auction. I know nothing about who he is or what he does for a living. Why do I feel so comfortable in his space? Why do I feel so safe in his arms? Why is my heart beating so fast just from the thought of him? Why do I miss him so badly even when he's just a few feet away from me?

What is this feeling?

Whatever it is, it isn't normal.

But then again, nothing about my life has been normal or conventional. To the outside world, I'm a privileged princess, the only child of Cade and Beatrice Beaumont, heiress to the Beaumont clothing empire.

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But that image of me couldn't be more wrong. What I really am is a pathetic little girl who allowed a bastard to walk all over her.

So what does it matter if I fall for a sexy hot stranger I've only known for a few hours? That only adds to my quirks.

I'd rather stay with Damien than go back to living in the same house with Jared.

But what about my mom?

The last time I saw her was right before I confronted Jared. She'd been asleep when I went into her room, her breathing forced and ragged.

My chest closes up painfully as the image fills my mind.

Can I stay here with Damien when I know she's somewhere else, waiting on me?

Suddenly, I'm enclosed in a pair of familiar strong arms. I close my eyes, instantly feeling safe in his embrace. Tension eases from my shoulders and I sigh softly as Damien pulls me closer, leaning back against the hard planes of his chest.

"Morning, princess," he says gruffly against my ear, his voice husky from sleep. He presses his lips gently to the side of my neck.

Arousal stirs inside me and my sex spasms in response. "Good morning," I reply, turning around in his arms to smile into his handsome face. "I didn't want to wake you."

“I wouldn’t have minded,” he says, his lips tugging upward in a smile that melts my heart. “What’s wrong? You seemed deep in thought minutes ago.”

“I was thinking about you,” I reply with a playful smile. It’s partially true, but I would rather he doesn’t know the extent of my feelings for him. It’s too much, too soon.

Damien chuckles and shakes his head. “As much as I’d be flattered to think that’s true, it’s not really, is it?”

I let out a resigned sigh, shrugging hesitantly. “I don’t know...I was just thinking about home.”

His expression falters. “Princess, I know I said that you belong to me now, but I need you to know that while I want that more than anything, I also won’t force you to stay here.”

I slide my hand up his firm chest. “I like it here, with you,” I assure him. “I know I should go back home, but I’m not sure I can. I miss my mother, but my stepfather—well, he’s the one who sold me to that place.”

I explain how my stepfather is in control of the business owned by my parents—the Beaumont’s—and how I found out he was stealing money from the company. “I can’t imagine what he would do if I go back,” I say with another soft sigh.

Damien doesn’t seem surprised by anything I’m telling him, and I don’t miss the dangerous glint in his eyes at the mention of my stepfather.

His arms tighten around me. “I don’t want you going anywhere near that man, princess.”

“But my mom is sick, and I’m worried she’ll be upset about my disappearance.”

“How about you don’t worry about any of that right now,” Damien says, tugging me closer. “You’ve been through so much already.” He kisses the side of my lips. Then he lowers his mouth to my neck, grazing his lips over the sensitive skin there.

Desire clouds my mind and my sex clenches with need. “Oh...” I breathe as my mind blanks out.

Chapter Five

Damien

I’m an asshole.

Or at least I’m making an asshole move by keeping Rose in the dark.

For now.

When I woke without her in my arms, my mind went on a rampage, thinking she had left me. For a mini-second, I panicked, and then I forced my mind back to its rational state. I climbed off the bed and quickly threw on some shorts, and then I went in search of her.

The tension that had tightened my chest eased when I saw her standing in front of the glass panes that served as a wall for half of the living room. A dangerous feeling spread through me at the sight of her. Excitement? This slip of a woman is practically controlling my heart and sanity, and she has no idea.

She also has no idea that her mother is dead.

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How do I break such devastating news to her after everything she's been through? Maybe I'm an asshole, but I'll break the news to her when the time is right.

And when would that be?

I close my eyes at the thought. In a few days. I'll tell her very soon. I just can't watch the most precious person in my life break down emotionally. Hell, I can't believe I'm turning soft for this woman I barely know.

I turn her around, taking her lips in mine, trapping her moan in my mouth. Lifting her in my arms, I delight in how easily she molds her body to mine, wrapping her legs around my hips. I walk to the couch with her in my arms, reveling in the strokes of our tongues. It's a sensual movement and clash of teeth and lips, sending jolts of current to my cock.

I kneel on the soft cushion and gently press her back into the couch. Letting go of her lips, I gently push the silk shirt she's wearing above her chest, baring her delectable body.

"Are you sore from last night?" I rasp hoarsely.

"A little," Rose responds breathily, her chest heaving and her nipples tightening before my gaze.

"Sorry about that, princess. Let me make it up to you," I say gruffly. I nip her lightly on her tight nipple, then suck it deep.

Rose whimpers as I feast on them, then I slowly lick and kiss down to her weeping sex. I part her swollen folds, baring her hard red nub to my gaze. “Magnificent,” I whisper against it, and I watch her hips reach for my mouth.

I close my lips over her clit, starting slowly and savoring the taste. Rose’s loud mewls wash over me as I suck and tease and nip at her quivering flesh, taking my time. Her cries of pleasure go higher with every deep suck, and I push two fingers inside her, feeling the walls of her pussy. I stroke deep and fast, once, twice, and then she snaps.

“Oh, Damien!” she moans aloud, and wetness trickles out of her tight passage.

I continue my assault, even as she comes, stroking my fingers slowly at first, then deep and fast while I suck and lap at her throbbing clit. Her moans turn throaty, shooting straight to my stiff length. When her moans become louder, I reach up to twist and roll her nipples while sucking long and hard on her clit. Her body convulses a second time, and her legs tremble as she lets go.

I close my mouth over her weeping sex, still lavishing attention on her pussy. Her body jerks and trembles with my strokes and licks. “Damien, please,” she pleads, her hips bucking to meet my mouth.

“One more, princess,” I say against her sensitive core, stroking deeper into the warm sheath. I fight the urge to drop my shorts and drive my aching cock into her tight flesh, but I keep reminding myself that she’s sore, and I console myself with pleasing her. I can get my release another time. I curve my fingers, stroking over a bundle of nerves, and I blow warm air over her engorged nub before drawing it deep in my mouth.

“Argh!” Her shout of release reverberates through the room and her warm flesh clamps hard on my thrusting fingers as I wring out the last of her whimpers and moans. My stomach spasms painfully as my aching cock begs for relief at the sight of

her sated expression when I finally raise my head from between her thighs. I crawl up until my face is above hers and I slowly kiss her, letting her taste herself on my tongue and sating a deeper need for connection inside me.

When we start to long for air, I slowly release her lips and shift our positions until I have my back on the couch and she's splayed on my body, her head on my chest. I stroke my fingers through her soft, beautiful locks, basking in the moment.

"You are exquisite," I say hoarsely. I know I'm falling in love with her, but it's too fast. I don't want to spook her. Instead, I'll show her how precious and important she is to me with my mouth and body.

"Thank you," she whispers with a soft smile. "What about you?"

My dick jerks at her question, but I refuse to give in. "It's alright, princess. Don't worry about me," I assure her gruffly.

Her cheeks redden in embarrassment as she says, "No, I don't mean...I mean doing what you just did to me."

Arousal flares up, igniting the static need inside me. "Are you sure?"

She nods, and I see a spark of excitement in her bright blue eyes at the thought of sucking me off. "Yes," she answers, and she lifts off my chest to stand.

I sit upright with anticipation swimming inside me, picking up a throw pillow and placing it on the floor before me. "On your knees, princess," I order softly, my voice coming out in a growl.

Her eyes dilate in response, and she obeys. I pull down my shorts and my stiff cock springs up, already wet at the tip. I'm sensitive and ready to combust just from eating

Rose's pussy, so I clamp hard on my jaw, hoping to hold on for a little longer before letting loose.

Rose stares at my jutting cock in fascination and licks her lips when a bead of precum oozes out. She reaches out and tentatively grabs the base of my cock, and I stiffen and jerk slightly at the warmth of her palms. Then she slowly moves her hand and I swallow a groan. Fuck me.

"Suck on my dick, princess," I order, watching her tongue swipe over my sensitive cock slit. I grunt out, "Fuck."

My response boosts her confidence, and she slowly closes her mouth over my cock and sucks me hard like a vacuum. I jerk again and buck my hips as she sucks me deeper into her warm mouth. The heat of it sends tingling sensations to my aching balls.

"Take me deeper, baby," I urge fervently, groaning deep as she sucks me deeper until my cock hits the roof of her mouth. She bobs her head gently, taking me deeper with every stroke.

"Relax your throat, princess...yes, that's it..." I hiss gently.

She swallows me down until my length is touching the base of her throat. My need to orgasm is an overwhelming sensation at the base of my cock, like a river ready to overflow its bank. She sucks me harder, her mouth a suction that detonates the tension in my balls. I'm unable to hold back any longer, and loud grunts and groans leave my lips as I shoot my release down her throat.

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Rose lets go of my dick and I pull her up until she's sitting astride me and my hands cup her hips. "That was glorious, princess. Thank you," I say simply, smiling at her shy blush.

Her stomach takes the moment to growl, and I wince, berating myself for not feeding her. Rose snorts and laughs, and I can't help but smile in response.

"Sorry about that," she says, "I used to be able to hold my hunger for longer periods of time."

I frown at her words, growing angry as the meaning becomes clearer. "Do you mean at the auction house?" I ask, feeling the sudden urge to go back to that fucking madhouse and raze it to the ground.

Her eyes widen in realization and then she smiles. She's blissfully unaware of how close I am to detonating. "No. I mean my stepfather. He liked to starve me as punishment, and then I got used to not eating," she says, shrugging as if it means nothing.

The tension inside me grows taut until my body physically stiffens, alerting her to the raging predator within. Her stepfather is a dead man if I have anything to do with it. "You mean to tell me that motherfucker starved you in your ownhouse? He's fucking dead," I say quietly, clenching my jaw to contain the rage tearing through me.

"No. I don't want you to get involved with him," she pleads. "It was a long time ago and I don't care about it anymore now that I'm here with you. Please tell me you'll let it go." She runs her hand over my shoulders and back, then down to my chest, trying

to appease me.

And it's working. My rage slowly eases under her soft caress. "Alright, princess. I'll do as you wish. But, that fucker better stay away from you from now on," I warn.

I stand from the couch, carrying her with me. "Let's wash up and get you fed, princess," I murmur, nibbling on her lower lip.

Chapter Six

Rose

The mouthwatering scent of bacon and toast wafts into my nostrils, pulling me awake. My hands instinctively roam over to my side as I slowly blink my eyes open, but I come up empty. From the coolness of the sheets, it seems Damien has been out of the bed for a while.

Happiness blooms inside me at the thought of him. The more time I spend with him, the more my feelings for him grow. He seems so different from the man I met a few days ago...

Outwardly, he appears tough as nails, but with me he's soft and sensitive. It's as if he's not used to being this way, and it's thrilling. I enjoy being around him. I don't have to hide my true thoughts or nature. I feel truly alive, and I haven't felt that way since I was younger and my dad was still alive. It's like I've finally received a reward for all the hardships I went through.

My stomach rumbles, and the sensation snaps me out of my daydream. I roll out of the bed and make a beeline for Damien's closet. Yesterday, he told me to wear his clothes until mine are delivered. I pull out a pair of his shorts and a sweatshirt, smiling as I remember how we spent the rest of the day yesterday.

After we ordered breakfast and filled our stomachs, Damien gave me a tour of the huge apartment, and then he suggested we go out for lunch. I pointed out that I had nothing to wear and he pulled out his phone with a cheeky smile. We spent hours shopping online, Damien suggesting ridiculously scandalous lingerie while I laughed and blushed like a schoolgirl. Somehow, we ended up tangled in each other's arms, kissing like our lives depended on it, plans for lunch long forgotten.

I moan softly at the ache building up in my core at the memories. I dress quickly, resisting the urge to stay in the closet and just drown in the amazing scent of him. My heart bubbles with excitement as I hurry down the long hallway.

At this point, I don't care what our relationship is, I'm just going to go with my heart.

Strong, mouthwatering scents pull me along until I'm standing at the entrance to the kitchen, watching Damien whisk some eggs in a bowl.

He turns just in time to see me and smiles softly. "Good morning, princess," he says, gently setting the bowl on the kitchen island to walk toward me.

I take in his wide, welcoming smile and ruggedly handsome features. There's an innate rawness and intensity in his gait. It reminds me of a dangerous panther stalking its prey. My sex clenches at the thought and I shiver slightly at the idea of being his prey. I don't mind it at all.

"Good morning," I breathe out, smiling softly as he stops in front of me.

He cups my cheek and presses a lingering kiss on my forehead. "I'm making us breakfast. Come," he orders in a low tone, pulling me along. His touch is gentle yet firm. Once at the kitchen island, he gently lifts me and places me on the counter, his hands grazing the sensitive flesh under my breasts.

I inhale softly at the contact and his dark gaze traps mine as he slowly closes the space between us. My stomach rumbles again, breaking the moment, and he winces and shakes his head.

“I can’t seem to control myself around you. Sorry about that, princess.” He presses a chaste kiss to the corner of my lips, then returns to making breakfast.

“Me too,” I say shyly.

“Do you want some coffee before breakfast is done?” he asks.

“Yes, please.”

I watch him pour me a cup and add some milk and sugar. “I was going to wake you up once I’m done cooking,” he says as he offers me the mug.

“I’m glad I woke earlier then, because I like what I see,” I tease, then take a sip of the coffee, moaning softly at the rich, creamy taste.

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Just the way I like it.

My gaze returns to Damien as he deftly chops veggies. To his left is a platter of toast and bacon, perfectly cooked and inviting. I watch him silently for a while, taking in the steady movements of his hands and the way his muscles bulge sexily. He should look out of place here, but he doesn't, as if he's done this many times.

"I can't believe you know how to cook," I blurt, unable to hold in my thoughts.

Damien looks up and chuckles at my shocked expression. "Why do you say that, princess?" he asks.

I put down my coffee and shrug. "You just don't seem like the type," I reply, then giggle as he grabs his chest in mock shock.

"Shots fired, baby," he gasps, coming to stand between my legs, grabbing my waist. "What do you think a man who cooks looks like?" he asks with an arched brow and a wide grin.

I giggle softly and pointedly eye him. "I don't know, but not like you."

Damien laughs and hugs me close, leaning in to seize my lips in a slow, lingering kiss that ends as quickly as it started. He places a firm kiss at the corner of my mouth before letting go, leaving me a needy mess. My gaze follows him as he washes the pan and heats it up. His muscles strain and flex beneath his rolled-up sleeves, heightening the growing need inside me.

“I’ll have you know that I’ve been cooking since I could remember,” he says, then looks up to hold my gaze before he turns back to frying the eggs. “I had a pretty normal childhood. My parents loved each other and were the best parents any child could ask for. My dad was in the army for most of his life, until he died in the war.”

My arousal dies down at his words. “Oh, Damien. I’m so sorry,” I exclaim softly, feeling a wave of sympathy at his loss.

“Thank you, princess,” he replies. “It was a long time ago. My mom and Tessa, my older sister, enjoy cooking. They taught me after we lost my dad and I needed to help my sister whenever mom was at work. Then it became a family tradition to cook together on weekends until I turned eighteen and joined the army. After I left the army and got my license as a private investigator, I haven’t cooked for anyone else except my mom and sister, until now,” he says simply.

I smile at him, feeling special, but I can’t help the pang of loss I feel at the difference in our backgrounds. “What about your mom and sister? Do they live close?” I ask, hoping to shift attention away from sad thoughts.

Damien looks up after pouring out the scrambled eggs from the pan. He shoots me a soft smile and I swoon inwardly at the way it transforms his face. “They live in Chicago. Tessa is married with two boys, and my mom enjoys being a grandma,” he says absentmindedly as he plates our food.

“What about you? Tell me about your childhood.”

I stiffen slightly at the question, and Damien looks up just in time to see my unease. He closes the space between us and settles his hands on my waist. “Are you okay? If you don’t want to talk about it, we can talk about something else,” he assures, soothingly rubbing his hands on my sides.

His concern pushes away the depressing thoughts that invade my mind. He makes it hard for me to wallow in my memories. “No. I’m fine. I was just taken aback by the question. I’m okay. Please go ahead with breakfast,” I urge.

“Okay, baby. Just know that you don’t have to say anything,” he says, and goes back to plating the food.

“I know,” I reply, then sigh softly. “I was just a bit sad hearing how wonderful it was for you growing up. My childhood was kind of the opposite. My parents loved each other too, but I think they loved growing their fortune more. I remember waiting up with my nanny for my parents to come back from work. Sometimes I got to see them, but most times I would fall asleep before they could arrive. They weren’t bad parents, they were just...busy.”

I bite my lip, my heart hurting at the memories. “When I turned six, Daddy traveled for a meeting and his plane crashed. He died, and it felt like my mom just...withered. She threw herself into work, and hardly had time for me. When my mom met Jared, I could tell he made her happier...at first. I remember when she introduced me to him and he asked me if he could marry my mom.”

I chuckle in disbelief at the thought and turn to look at Damien, whose attention hasn’t wavered from mine. Anger and irritation swirl in his dark, intense gaze and for some reason, it grounds me. “I knew something was wrong about him, but I didn’t want to disappoint my mom. Maybe I should have said something.”

Damien shifts closer until his warmth cloaks me, reminding me that Jared could never find me. “You were a kid, princess. It wasn’t your decision to make anyway,” he says gruffly, his gaze tender and immovable.

“You’re right, it wasn’t. Still, I wonder if my mom would have married him if I’d rejected him. I don’t think I could have, though. Seeing my mom happy and knowing

he was the reason was enough for me to accept him.”

I tell Damien how Jared gradually made me feel unsafe in my home, turning me into a shell of myself. And I watch the growing anger and cold rage in his eyes at every word.

When I’m done, he closes his eyes and inhales deeply until the bulk of his rage subsides. Then he opens his eyes and meets my gaze. “You know, that asshole could be dead by morning,” he says, his voice a soft, menacing growl. “You only have to say the word.”

I sigh, allowing a sad smile. “I don’t want him dead.”

Damien leans over, touches his forehead to mine, and holds my waist. “You’re awfully kind, princess,” he says, and his warm breath fans over my lips. “But I’m not sure I can extend such grace.”

I frown. I’ve always known Damien isn’t a simple person, given the circumstances of how we met, but still I don’t want him involved with Jared. So, I close my mouth over his in a distractingly slow, deep kiss. I release his lips and whisper, “Let’s eat breakfast before it gets cold.”

Damien scoffs, blinking at me like I’ve suddenly grown a second head. “You expect me to eat afterthat?” he growls.

“Then I’ll eat for us both,” I tease, giving in to the urge to kiss his brows.

Damien chuckles and the sound fills me with warmth. I watch his eyes crinkle at the corners, and I can’t help but grin in response. He lifts me in his arms effortlessly, and I’m so used to his caveman ways that I melt into his arms, hugging him close. Then he takes a few steps, pulls out a kitchen chair, and sits down, placing me gently in his

lap.

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Breakfast is a fun affair. Damien feeds me for most of it, stealing kisses and caresses in between each bite. By the time we're done, I'm soaking wet and breathless with desire, and Damien has gone hard under his jeans.

I twist in his lap to face him, placing a kiss on his mouth. He tastes like coffee, and he kisses me back forcefully.

“Are you still hungry, princess?” His hand sliding between my legs makes his implications clear.

Nodding shyly, I gasp as his fingers slip under my panties and into the wetness between my legs.

He groans, “So wet, so ready for me.”

Within seconds, he's pulled himself out of his pants and rearranged me so I'm straddling him. Impatient, he pulls my panties to the side and aligns himself with my entrance. “I need to be inside you,” he says, looking into my eyes.

“Yes, Damien, I need you,” I whisper, sinking down onto him slowly. We both groan at the now-familiar sensation of our bodies connecting, and he begins to gently move my hips up and down, thrusting up into me from below. The feeling is incredible, and I'm soon babbling incoherently into his ear, gasping with each thrust. “Yes, please...more...oh, Damien, I—”

My pleasure is building fast, and just as I think I'm about to burst, Damien picks me up roughly and bends me over the counter, kicking my feet apart and running his hand

through the slick wetness of my pussy. “You’re so perfect, princess, and you’re all mine,” he growls in my ear.

I barely have time to anticipate his next move before he’s thrusting into me from behind, harder than ever before. Each thrust presses my breasts into the cool counter beneath me, and his grip on my hips is bruising. The way he groans in my ear as he takes me this way, so unrestrained, turns me on so much that it’s only moments before my walls are fluttering around him and I’m moaning out my release.

“Yes, Damien, I’m yours!”

He thrusts hard into me a few more times before he stills, releasing himself inside me. I’m trembling, breathless, and...I suddenly realize, I’m happier than I’ve ever been.

Damien pulls out of me gently and turns me around in his arms. Picking me up, he carries me back to the chair and sits us down, with me in his lap again. He’s kissing my neck, my mouth, my face, the top of my head, and I cuddle into the strong embrace of the man I love.

Love?

It’s probably way too soon to say it, right? But I know my feelings are undeniable.

I look up at Damien, about to tell him what’s on my heart, but I hesitate. He smiles down at me. “Something on your mind, princess?”

“I—just...I just wanted to tell you that...I don’t think I’ve ever been happier than I am right now.”

His smile grows even wider. “I’m glad, princess. I would do anything to make you happy.”

My heart feels like it could burst. “I want to stay with you,” I confess. “But...I also want to see my mom, or at least talk to her—let her know I’m okay.” I feel a rush of guilt all over again at the reminder of how long I’ve already gone without calling her.

Damien’s smile drops and he stiffens, then sighs. “Princess, I need to tell you somethi—”

A loud buzz cuts into his words. Damien grimaces and pulls out his phone, frowning down at the screen for a few seconds and then looking up at me. “I’m sorry, baby. I have to leave and see this client. It won’t take long, I promise.” He leans in to kiss me until I’m achy and moaning into his mouth.

He breaks the kiss and stands up. “Find something to do in the house. You can go to the library or the theater room. We’ll continue where we left off.” He backs away slowly, his eyes filled with reluctance.

“It’s alright, Damien. I’ll be fine,” I assure him with a smile.

He leans down for another kiss before walking toward the elevator.

Chapter Seven

Damien

Fucking Theo.

I repeat the words in my head as I drive out of the garage and into the street. Why did he have to call for a meeting when I was finally about to tell Rose about her mother?

If I’d known that telling him about the man he asked me to look for at the chapel would make him ask for a sit-down, I would’ve kept the information to myself for a

little longer. I have to see him, because I hate doing a half-assed job, so now my princess is at home all by herself, feeling guilty for not reaching out to her dead mother.

I should have told Rose about her mother the moment I took her to my place. I thought she was too delicate to take too many emotional blows, but now that I know everything about her, I think she's more than capable of dealing with the loss of her mother. She's strong. Much more than I imagined.

I think back to when she spoke about her childhood, and the fury I've pushed down comes rushing back with force. No child should go through what she went through. Losing one parent and getting a devil as replacement. Hell, at that age, I was running around the house pranking my sister and my mom, and riding my dad's back whenever he was around.

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I want to blame her mother, but I understand Beatrice's need to find companionship. That bastard played on her weakness and manipulated her. My grip tightens on the steering wheel and I imagine punching Jared Fields in the face, over and over until the bastard passes out cold in his own blood.

I'm almost tempted to drive by his place after my meeting with Theo and turn my imagination into reality. Rose would believe me if I say I had nothing to do with his assault, but I don't ever want to break her trust.

After a few minutes on the busy roads of Seattle, I arrive at my office building. Stepping out of the elevator, I give my secretary a sharp nod.

"Good morning, Mr. Hart. Mr. Kane is waiting in the boardroom," she says briskly.

"Thank you, Jane. Do I have any pending appointments?"

"None that are urgent. As per your request, I've moved appointments to next week and I've informed the respective clients," she replies calmly.

"Good. Have the clients that don't need my personal involvement transferred to Mike and Daniel until I'm back in office. And if they have too much on their plates, keep it as is until I resume work," I inform her.

"Noted, sir."

I give her a nod and walk down the corridor. Jane is the third secretary I've had since I established my PI company. The first two hadn't met my standards. They asked too

many questions, or were a little too friendly. A client recommended Jane, and she has been the perfect fit.

She asks the right questions, enough to keep the legal side of the company running, and leaves the rest to me. Besides, most of my clients with shady dealings know not to contact me through my secretary.

I push open the boardroom door to find Theo reclining on one of the seats, looking relaxed as he scrolls on his phone. Theo Kane is built like a linebacker, and I debate taunting him into a brawl to ease the violent rage still coursing through me.

Instead, I settle for a good old jibe. It's not that I can't hold my own with him, but I'd rather finish quickly here and go back to Rose.

“What the fuck do you want, asshole?” I grunt out.

He snaps his head up and smiles slowly at the frustration on my face. “Well, hello to you too,” he replies, straightening in his seat.

“Fuck off,” I growl, then smile reluctantly at his explosive laughter.

Theo is one of my favorite clients, and it's not his fault I'm frustrated. I should be more cordial. I stride deeper into the room and take the seat opposite him, the huge boardroom table between us.

“To what do I owe the pleasure of your presence?” I say in a dry tone.

Theo raises his brows. “More information? I'm glad you found him, but you didn't elaborate in the text so I had to call for a meeting.”

“You could have asked through text, or even a call—we wouldn't have needed to

meet,” I drawl.

“I could’ve, but then I wouldn’t have the pleasure of seeing your pretty face,” he taunts.

“Theo,” I growl.

He grins nonchalantly, then schools his features back to the hard-faced fucker I know him to be. “Okay, I’ll get straight to the point. I have another job for you, and it’s urgent. I have this friend that...”

My mind is back on Rose—I can’t help it. I think about her gorgeous blue eyes and how they twinkle when she smiles. I want to see her smile at me for the rest of my life. The thought of forever with her settles into me like a second skin.

I’ve never been averse to the concept of love or being in love. I’m not a jaded man who fears giving himself to a woman. I just always thought that love wasn’t for me. I find it hard to let people into my life, other than my family. I prefer to keep people at arm’s length and interact with them on a less personal level.

But all of that went to shit on the day I met Rose. She saw the cold, detached man and still wanted me. I know I can’t ever let her go.

My parents loved each other openly, and I was raised in that love. So, I’ve seen an example of what a loving relationship looks like and I think I might... No, I have found it with Rose. I’m completely in love with her, and the admission fills me with happiness.

I need to tell Rose...

And I hope she feels the same way for me. If she’s not there yet, I’ll just have to keep

showing her how much she means to me. How her happiness means more to me than anything in the world. How I'll make sure she never feels unsafe again. And how I'll raze the world down if she demands it.

But firstly, I need to come clean about her mother. She needs to know that her mother loved her and looked for her until the very end of her life. And I only hope she understands why I kept the knowledge from her.

“Damien,” Theo calls out, breaking into my thoughts.

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I blink, and I find his direct gaze on me. “You haven’t been listening, have you?” he asks.

I sigh.

I shouldn’t have come to this meeting.

“I apologize, Theo. I’m a little preoccupied. I’ll text you the information on how to locate the chapel, and the time you’ll find the person you’re looking for. In regards to the new case, can we reschedule this meeting to another day? Maybe next week,” I offer.

“It’s alright. I’ll just tell my friend to wait till next week, and if he can’t, he’ll find another person for the job,” he assures.

“Good. Well, I’ll see you then,” I say, rising to my feet.

“You seem in a hurry. Is your wife waiting at home?” he teases.

A wide grin stretches my lips at the thought of Rose being my wife.

Not bad. Not bad at all.

“Yes,” I answer, laughing at the shock on his face. “Good to see you, Theo,” I call as I head out of the room.

I tell Jane, “Mr. Kane is rescheduling his meeting to next week. Make sure to ask him

when will be most convenient for him.” I almost grin at her befuddled stare as I punch repeatedly on the elevator button.

In a few minutes, I’m striding out of the building and walking toward my car. I wonder what Rose is up to in my absence. I hope she’s not bored.

Damn.

I miss my princess. It’s a throbbing ache that refuses to go away, and one I’m sure only her presence can ease.

Chapter Eight

Rose

The house feels empty in Damien’s absence. It reminds me of how quiet it was back home before I left.

Before I was sold off.

I shake my head to dislodge the painful memory from my head. There’s no use thinking about what has already happened. Besides, it was a blessing in disguise for me. I got to leave my tormentor and meet my savior.

Damien stormed into my life like an avenging demon and gave me my wings back. I’m free for the first time in my life, and it feels...settling. I don’t have to hide who I am. My identity. My personality. He accepts it all, giving me room to flourish.

I go to stand before the large glass windows and look down at the busy street below. It’s a nice view. I never thought I would enjoy having a bird’s-eye view of the city like this, but I find it refreshing. I could get a book from the library as Damien

suggested and sit by the windows...

Minutes later, I'm two pages in and the book is lying face down on my lap, forgotten. Instead, I find myself watching the road for the familiar Mercedes car that Damien drives. I miss him already and it's making me restless. Several cars of the same model have gone past, and every time, my heart jumps in excitement only to be disappointed.

Maybe the idea to read by the window isn't so great after all. I return the book to its rightful place and go back to sitting on the couch. I can't help but think about my mother in the resounding silence. What lie did Jared concoct to explain my absence? How far has her health deteriorated?

I should have just asked Damien for a phone and contacted her right away. I'll ask him as soon as he returns. That way I can reassure her while still staying away from Jared. I might even find the courage to tell her about Damien, and how I feel about him.

My gaze roams around the living area and lands on the flat-screen television fixed to the wall. I reach out for the remote and switch it on, scrolling through the channels until it lands on the local news—I'm shocked to see a picture of my mother.

My heart races at the words I read on the screen. The shocking demise of the Beaumont magnate...

"No." I shake my head. "No..."

I increase the volume.

"It's been a week since the shocking death of the Beaumont magnate, Beatrice Beaumont. We mourn the loss of a leader in the industry, a founder of one of the

largest companies in the city. She's survived by her only child and daughter, Rose Beaumont, whom we haven't seen or heard from since her mother's demise, and her loving husband, Jared Fields. Information reaching us at this moment is that Beatrice Beaumont had been battling lung cancer for four years and had finally succumbed to it. The world mourns the death of a cancer warrior and financial wiz of the business world. On behalf of Beatrice, her husband and daughter pledge to start a foundation for survivors and patients of lung cancer in honor of her memory. May her soul rest in peace..."

There's a loud ringing in my head. It gets louder the longer I stare at my mother's picture on the screen. It's a photo of her from before she got sick. She looked so healthy and carefree, with her long brown hair cascading down her shoulders and a wide smile. Then, Jared fills the screen, looking teary and depressed.

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I can't muster any feeling as I watch him. I feel nothing but deep, biting sadness.

No...

I refuse to believe this. My mom isn't dead. Hot tears well up in my eyes and steadily roll down my cheeks. They keep falling as I remember the last time I saw my mother.

Did Damien know about this?

The whirring sound of the elevator reaches my ears but I remain in place, frozen in shock. I hear his footsteps and I feel nothing.

"Rose?"

It almost feels strange hearing him call my name. I guess I got used to being his princess.

My chest tightens painfully as I raise my eyes to his. A lone tear slides down my cheek.

"Ohfuck," Damien mutters hoarsely under his breath, sitting beside me on the couch.

I turn to face him, a sense of betrayal slicing deep into me at the look of guilt on his handsome face. "Did you know?" I ask.

"Yes, I did," he answers.

My heart clenches in anger. “Why? Why would you keep this from me?”

“Because I didn’t want to burden you with too much all at once, princess.” He tries to move closer to me, but I recoil. He closes his eyes, opens them, and in his gaze there is a wall of immense torment.

“I have to tell you how it all started,” he says quietly, his expression shutting down. “I didn’t go to the auction house for anyone else but you. Before your mother died, she knew your disappearance was suspicious and hired me to find you. I went to the auction house a week before I met you, but I couldn’t find you. A few days after that, your mother succumbed to her illness, and I made a promise to find and protect you no matter what. So, I went back to the auction house and there you were on the stage, and I knew I had to have you.”

My anger grows with every word he utters. “And you couldn’t say a word to me in all the days I’ve spent with you? You know how guilty I’ve felt for being away from my mom, and you knew she was dead and didn’t say a word?” My breath catches at the last few words.

“I’m sorry, princess. It killed me not to tell you right away, but you had just escaped from a terrible ordeal and I wanted to protect you. I planned to tell you—”

“When?” I snap, cutting him off. “When did you plan to tell me? When my mother is forgotten by the world and Jared squanders everything she and my dad worked hard to build? Or when I finally tell you how much I love you...” My voice trembles and a fresh bout of tears seeps out of my eyes.

“Princess,” Damien says in an agonizing whisper.

“No, Damien.” I spring up from beside him, turning to face him, white-hot anger spearing through me. “I’m not a child. I don’t need you or anyone else protecting

me.”

I see devastation in his eyes, but I’m on a roll. “I’m sick and tired of being a pawn. I’m old enough to make my own decisions. And I’m making one now.” I sigh, suddenly drained of all my anger, but the sharp pangs of hurt and betrayal remain, cutting deeper with each passing second.

“I’m grateful that you saved me from the auction house, but right now I need space,” I say in a voice devoid of emotion.

I walk away from him before he can protest, and as I enter the elevator, I hear him muttering a long string of curse words to himself.

In the silence of the elevator ride, the death of my mother suddenly dawns on me and I feel a wrenching grief in the pit of my stomach. It’s a wave that slowly overwhelms me until huge sobs wrack my body. A few seconds later, a thought crosses my mind, taking me back to the conversation I overheard between my mom and her doctor at one of her recent appointments.

A year to live...

My brain goes on overdrive as I start to put it all together. My mom contacted Damien a few days after Jared sold me off. And with Damien’s explanation, I know I was at the auction house for a little more than two weeks. There’s no way she succumbed to her sickness without help.

Another wave of anger coils up inside of me. This has Jared written all over it, and I’ll be damned if I let him get away with it.

I step out of the elevator as soon as it stops and walk out to the busy streets. In no time, I hail a cab and slide into the back. “Beaufort drive, please,” I call to the driver,

still riding on the wave of my emotions.

I watch the world speed by in seething fury. There is no way my mom, who fought an illness for as long as she did, would suddenly give up when she knows she has only a few months to live.

I refuse to believe it. And even if I have doubts, it won't stop me from confronting Jared. If he hadn't sold me off, my mom might still be alive. Or at least I would've been by her side when she left this world. The thought brings tears to my eyes, and they keep flowing until the cab parks in front of the Beaumont mansion.

"Thank you," I whisper thickly, hastily wiping tears off my face. "I'll have one of the guards pay you," I assure the driver.

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I quickly walk toward the huge wrought-iron gates and press on the intercom to alert the security guard. A face pops out of the small office building, familiar dark eyes widening with shock.

“Miss Beaumont!”

“Hi, Kelvin. Can you open the gates? Is Jared in?” I ask.

“Yes, ma’am,” he answers as he opens the gates. “Welcome back, Miss Beaumont.”

“Thank you,” I reply, not wanting to talk too much. I don’t ever want to stay in this huge, empty house again. “Please, pay the driver. I don’t have money with me.”

“Of course, ma’am.”

As I walk up the steps of what used to be my home, memories of time spent in this mansion wash over me, reigniting a series of conflicting emotions. When I reach the threshold, the door is pulled open from within and Jared’s large frame fills the doorway. I’m sure the cameras alerted him of my presence. I stop a few feet away from him, my anger spiking at the pretentious smile on his face.

“Well, well. Look who we have here. The runaway princess,” he drawls silkily, his voice grating on my nerves.

My jaw tightens at the use of Damien’s endearment for me. “I have you to thank for that, don’t I?” I say, gritting my teeth.

“Oh. Now the kitten has claws. It seems your buyer wasn’t as sadistic as I hoped.” He rakes his eyes up and down my form. “You don’t look like you’ve been punished enough. Guess you got lucky. Has he fucked you yet, or do you have him wrapped around your tiny little finger?” He grins slyly, fueling my rage. “I knew your face would be useful for something.”

“You good-for-nothing bastard!” I snap. “You sold me for money that I’m sure didn’t last a week. You tricked my mom into marrying you, and now she’s dead and you’ll never see a dime of her money!”

Jared’s mocking laughter rings out, filling me with disgust. “It’s too late, Rose.” He sneers. “I now have power over the Beaumont fortune. I made sure your cunt of a mother signed it all over to me, as she should.”

My rage boils over and I snap. “You will never win, Jared. You know why? Because I’ve written down everything you’ve said or done to me. You think you have it all, but wait till I go to the press about how you sold me off to the highest bidder as a sex slave.” Something akin to fear flashes in his eyes and I grin in satisfaction.

“No one would believe the spoiled princess who made her mother’s life a living hell while alive and neglected her when she died,” he says with a satisfactory gleam in his soulless black eyes. “No one has seen you since your mother’s death, remember? You should know I can spin the story any way I want, because I have the money and the manpower. Everyone will believe the loving, attentive husband of Beatrice Beaumont.”

His words threaten to shake me, but I refuse to let him get to me. “The next time you see me, it’s with the authorities,” I fire back, and with that I turn around, forcing my shaky legs to remain steady.

As I walk toward the huge gates, my anger slowly eases, leaving me hurt and

grieving. Tears well up in my eyes, blinding me.

I should have asked the cab to wait...

A teary laugh escapes my lips at the thought. Where would I ask him to take me? I have nowhere to go. My few friends from college don't live in the city. I have no family—only a few family members scattered across the country whom I know nothing about. The only family friends I can think of in the city...I can't trust them not to go to Jared, tell him where I am.

Except Damien...

Anger swirls inside me at the thought of him. He shouldn't have hidden my mother's death from me. He had no right. Yet, I miss him. Being apart from him is tearing at me, but I can't let go of the feeling of betrayal.

A huge sweaty hand clamps over my mouth, jolting me out of my thoughts. I stiffen, then start to struggle as my attacker bands his other arm around my waist and drags me closer to his chest.

I try to scream but my voice comes out in a muffled groan. I clamp my teeth down hard into the palm covering my mouth, eliciting a loud grunt from my assailant. His hold slackens and I scramble out of his grasp, but he suddenly grabs me by my hair.

A burning pain bites into my scalp. I scream in pain, but his fingers clasp around my throat, cutting me off, choking me. My vision swims in front of my eyes. I claw at his hands as he gradually cuts off my air supply. I struggle in his arms, turning and twisting, but his hands only tighten.

Darkness encroaches into my vision and I struggle to pull in air. My heart bangs loudly in my ears and my breaths turn choppy. Regret fills me as I remember my last

moment with Damien. I wish we had left things in a better state. My anger seems so unimportant in the face of death.

Suddenly there's a loud screech, tires scraping against the ground in a sudden halt.

“Rose!”

Damien...

The hands around my neck are dislodged and I instantly take in deep gulps of air, massaging my throat. Loud, rattling coughs wrack my body, and my chest heaves hard until the ringing in my head gradually subsides. Loud grunts reach my ears, and the sound of flesh hitting flesh. I turn to find Damien kneeling over...Henry?

It's the same guard who drugged me when Jared sold me off. And Damien is punching the hell out of him.

“Damien. Don't kill him,” I rasp out.

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He pauses mid-punch, a muscle ticking furiously in his jaw. I can tell he's barely holding himself back from doing more damage to Henry's bloody face. "If you ever come near my woman or even dare to breathe the same air as her, I'll fucking slit your throat," he says to Henry, his voice deathly cold.

He stands up slowly and turns in my direction, his hard gaze instantly softening. He walks toward me and cups my cheeks in his palms. "I'm so glad you're safe, princess," he says tenderly, gently caressing my neck with his thumb, then he closes his eyes as if in torment.

My breath catches. "Damien," I rasp.

He opens his eyes and my heart tightens at the despair in them. "If I'd been a minute too late, I...I don't know what I would do," he whispers.

I grip his wrist. "I'm fine. I'm okay," I say, looking into his eyes. My chest tightens painfully at the guilt I see there. "I'm fine. Do you hear me?"

He nods.

"How did you find me?" I ask hoarsely.

"It was a gamble, but I figured you'd go back home," he answers, then continues gruffly, "Let's go, princess. We can't stay here."

"Okay."

The drive home is silent. It's impossible to guess what's going on behind his expressionless façade, but I glance down at our joined hands, my heart skipping happily. He hasn't let go once since he took my hand. Soon, we arrive at his apartment building and Damien pulls into the garage, only letting go of my hand when he gets out of the car. He comes around to the passenger side to open the door and reclaims my hand. Wordlessly, we walk into the elevator and head up to the penthouse.

I exhale softly as we enter the cozy and spacious living room. Home.

Before I can say anything, Damien pulls me into his arms, hugging me tight against his chest.

"I'm sorry, princess," he whispers against my hair. "I shouldn't have kept your mother's death from you. My carelessness almost cost you your life. I'm so sorry."

My hands tighten around him, knowing my anger went out the window the moment I almost died. "I know you did it to protect me. You don't have to apologize."

"I keep seeing his hands around your neck," Damien rasps, visibly shuddering. "It's like a never-ending loop in my mind. I could've lost you."

I pull back slightly, keeping my arms looped around his waist. "I'm okay, Damien. I'm alive."

His eyes soften, suddenly filled with a vulnerability that melts my soul. "I love you, Rose," he says softly, his gaze unwavering. "I love you deeply. Madly."

My stomach flutters and tears well up in my eyes at his simple but soul-shattering words. And looking at those steady and intense dark eyes, I realize that I can't wait to spend the rest of my life with him. "I love you too, Damien."

He smiles softly and lowers his mouth to mine, taking over my lips hungrily. The kiss is deep and tender as he slowly savors my lips, sending sharp bites of pleasure through my veins. I break the kiss and lean forward until our foreheads meet.

“Damien, I feel something isn’t right about my mom’s death. I think...I think Jared had something to do with it,” I whisper.

He straightens and gives me a puzzled look. “Why do you think so?” he asks.

I tell him about the conversation I eavesdropped on with my mom and her doctor, and also Jared’s incriminating words when I confronted him. “I need your help,” I say softly.

“And you’ll have it,” he says darkly, tenderly gathering me into his arms.

Jared Fields has taken everything from me. My childhood. And now my mother. This time I won’t let it go.

Chapter Nine

Damien

I crawl out of bed at the crack of dawn and silently pull on the jeans I discarded on the floor last night. My gaze stays on Rose, taking in the finger marks around her neck, and my gut clenches at the near miss she had yesterday.

I could have lost her...

A deep well of anger surges through me as I think of the bastard who put his hands on her. He should be dead, but there are other ways to get him.

I gently lean over Rose and glide my gaze over her gorgeous features—her long lashes resting over creamy skin, her perfect nose and soft, pink lips. A wave of tenderness fills me, and I know my feelings for her will only grow deeper. I lean in to kiss her gently on her lips, reveling in her honeydew scent.

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Careful not to disturb her, I head out of the room, down the long corridor to my study. The familiar scent of leather and paper envelops me, instantly grounding me. I close the distance to my desk in long strides, my bare feet gliding over the cold tiled floor, until I'm settling into my soft leather chair.

Rose asked me to help investigate her asshole stepfather, and with her evidence, I think she's right to be suspicious. I consider who else from my company I trust to bring in on this. It's Daniel's day off, but I grab my phone and dial his personal number.

"I need you for a job today," I say, going straight to the point. My employees and I aren't much into pleasantries. It's a mutual understanding that works for all of us.

"I'm all ears."

"I need you to get some listening bugs and camera to the Beaumont mansion," I say, then proceed to explain Rose's suspicions. "I want you to watch till he's gone to work, then place the bugs and cameras in his home office and bedroom. Those are the places he likely thinks are private."

"Alright, boss."

"Listen and watch. Don't miss out on a thing. Relay it to me ASAP," I urge.

"Will do."

I end the call and recline in my seat.

I have faith in Daniel. In all my employees, really. Most of them are veterans, discharged from the army, and have the same code of honor I live by, which fits well with my vision for the company. I would've done the surveillance myself, but I hate to leave Rose alone while she's still grieving her mother.

I turn my attention to my laptop and start working until Rose wanders in, looking like a temptress in my shirt.

"Morning, princess. How are you feeling?" I ask, rising to my feet to sweep her into my arms.

She smiles against my neck. "Much better, I think," she says softly. Her voice still rasps a little, but it does sound like it's getting better.

Frowning at the bruises still visible on her neck, I head to the kitchen to make her some tea with honey to soothe her throat as we eat breakfast together.

The rest of the day passes by with me alternating between comforting Rose and distracting her. I regale her with tales of my childhood and tease her until she laughs and blushes a gorgeous pink. And then I urge her to tell me more stories about her mom, holding her when she ends up in tears more times than not. It's in those moments that I feel like tearing my heart out or finding Jared and beating the shit out of him.

When Rose becomes sleepy in the afternoon, I pick her up and carry her back to our room. I tuck her into bed and lie down with her, cuddling her until she drifts to sleep.

Then I return to my office to continue from where I left off.

It isn't long before I'm staring at the evidence of Jared's crimes on my laptop, wondering how Rose will handle it all. It was quite easy for Daniel to get it. In fact, it

was given to him on a silver platter. Jared is just as stupid as I assumed. He couldn't wait to gloat and rant in the privacy of his office.

I move away from my desk and head to the living room, where I find Rose standing in front of the glass panes and looking down into the street. I walk over and pull her into my arms, pressing a soft kiss to her temple.

“You're awake.”

She sighs, her body melting against mine. “I keep seeing Mom in my dreams.”

My heart breaks at the pain in her voice. I press a kiss to her temple. “I have news, princess,” I say, keeping my voice as gentle as I can manage. “You may need to sit.”

She turns around in my arms, her gaze pure and trusting, searching mine. “Okay,” she says on a soft exhale.

I pull her with me to a couch, sitting side by side. I hold her hands in mine and pin her with my gaze. “Daniel, one of my employees, found evidence that confirms your suspicions. There is proof that Jared indeed influenced your mother's death.”

“How?” she asks softly, and my heart tightens at her tear-filled gaze.

“I told Daniel to bug his office and bedroom this morning. I didn't say anything to you because I didn't want to get your hopes up. But, this afternoon I got a recording of some calls he made and the conversation he had with a friend. He got in touch with a doctor friend who gave him a huge dose of Lorazepam. It's a sedative that can be fatal when ingested in large doses. He injected it into your mother's morphine, which led to her death. He also spoke about how he forced her to give him the right of attorney and also some of the things he did to you in the house. I'm so sorry, princess,” I say, drawing her into my arms.

She crumples against me, deep sobs wracking her tiny body as she gives in to her grief. I grind my teeth, my heart wrenching at the pain in her beautiful eyes. Her sorrow is like a sharp knife, piercing my heart, pulling it apart with every whimper.

My rage is potent and has nowhere to go. I want to punch something, preferably Jared's face, but I force myself to remain calm. I continue to caress her hair, pressing kisses to her temple and the top of her head.

"I'm so sorry, princess. I'm so sorry." I keep whispering words of comfort and rubbing my hands down her back until her tears subside into sniffs and hiccups.

She pulls back gently and looks up at me with tear-stained lashes. "I want him to pay for what he did," she says hoarsely.

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“It’s all handled, princess. I’ve forwarded the recordings to the authorities and the press. He’s not going to escape this time,” I assure her.

“Thank you, Damien.”

“I love you, princess” I declare, softly kissing her forehead.

I pull back. “Another thing. If you’re willing, I can have my lawyer start the process of retrieving your family’s company back into your control. Would you like that?” I ask.

“No,” she says, shaking her head. “I don’t want to run the company. I’d rather it be handled by the board of directors or an external CEO. I would appreciate it if your lawyer can help me with that instead.”

I press a single, deep kiss on her lips. “Anything you want, princess,” I say. Then I ask, “What would you like to do then?”

A soft smile spreads across her features, sad yet so bright it illuminates the darkest part of my soul.

“I want to open a flower shop,” she says, shrugging shyly. “My mom loved flowers. It’s one of the few things we bonded over before she got sick. She had a flower garden and we would prune and water them together. And when she was too sick to go out, I’d take care of the flowers myself and describe each flower’s growth to her.” I smile at the sudden sparkle in her eyes.

I'm a little taken aback by the simple request, but I'm not shocked. Rose is just as pure and warm as the flower she was named after, and now I can't imagine her doing anything else. It's so fitting. I lean to press another kiss on her lips. "I'll help with anything you want, princess. As long as it makes you happy," I whisper against her lips, chuckling at the happiness in her gorgeous blue eyes.

I gently tilt her head upward to capture her lips in a long, smoldering kiss.

Oh, bliss...

Epilogue

Rose

Three Years Later...

The three happy years I've spent with Damien have been the best years of my life. Every day feels like a dream. I'm married to the best man ever, who puts my needs above all else. I'm happier than I ever dreamed or imagined. My flower shop is doing amazingly well, and every day I spend running it, the part of me that misses my mom heals a little bit more. Damien has cut back on taking dangerous missions, after a near miss on his life a year ago, and I couldn't be any happier about his decision.

These days, life's good.

My phone rings, the loud vibration jarring me out of my thoughts. I look down at the screen and smile. It's Damien. My heart skips a beat, butterflies fluttering in my stomach as I raise the phone to my ear.

"Hey, honey."

“Hey, princess, how’s your day going?”

The sound of his deep sexy voice washes over my skin like a gentle caress.

“Better now that I’m hearing your voice,” I reply, feeling a familiar rush of giddiness. “I miss you.”

His deep groan reaches deep within me and my body trembles in response. “I miss you too, princess. I can’t wait to see you,” he answers hoarsely.

I do a happy dance in my office at his words. Because it means he’ll be coming home earlier than expected. And I have a plan to surprise him.

“I’m closing earlier than usual too. I’ve sent out all the flower orders I have, and Theresa can handle the rest,” I say breezily, referring to my assistant shop manager who has been an absolute godsend after the business really took off in the last year.

“That’s great, princess. I love you.”

I close my eyes, letting the magic of those three words wash over me. It doesn’t matter how often I hear them; the feeling is invigorating each time.

“I love you too.”

At the end of the call, I’m grinning widely from ear to ear. I quickly pack my essentials and head out of the office. I don’t want Damien to get home before me, or my surprise will be ruined.

I say a quick goodbye to Theresa, pick up my already-packed basket of wine and flowers, and hurry out of the shop. I gently place the basket on the passenger seat of the white Mercedes that Damien got me for my twenty-first birthday before taking

my space behind the wheel. The drive home fills me with so much anticipation that my legs are jiggling anxiously until I pull into the garage.

An hour later, I walk out of the shower and dry myself, making sure not to mess up the arrangements in the room. I smile in satisfaction as I take in the lighted candles placed in all corners of the room, wafting a vanilla and honey scent and giving the room a golden glow. A bottle of non-alcoholic fruit wine is neatly arranged by the bedside with two empty wine glasses, and red rose petals are scattered across the white sheets. It's amagnificent view. And all it needs is me, lying seductively at the center of the bed, patiently waiting for my husband.

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My insides jump with anticipation, eliciting electrifying goose bumps on my skin. I pick up the sexy lingerie I bought for the occasion, gently rubbing the silky material against my skin before pulling it over my head with a silly giggle. It's the closest I could find to the lingerie I wore on the night I met Damien, barely covering any of my skin, with its sheer lacy material and garter. The difference is the wide hole at the crotch area.

I quickly arrange myself on the bed, careful not to disturb the scene, and strike a pose. I lay sideways, facing the door. My right palm is jammed into the back my head, raising it at an angle, and my left leg is folded over my right in a seductive pose, pushing my hips outward.

After five minutes of restlessness, Damien announces his arrival. "I'm home, princess," he calls.

I giggle softly to myself as my heart starts to race. His light footsteps come closer until he opens the bedroom door with a click. His tall, wide frame fills the doorway and I look up to find a pair of dark brown eyes growing darker as they hungrily roam over my body. An ache blooms between my thighs, and I rub my legs together to ease it.

His intense gaze tracks my movements as he enters and closes the door behind him. "Fuck, princess," he rasps in a voice hoarse with need.

"Welcome home, honey," I say, grinning up at him.

"This is definitely the best fucking welcome party," he growls, swiftly unbuttoning

his shirt.

I giggle and straighten, putting my hands behind my head. The action pushes out my breasts. “Do you like it?” I ask.

“I fucking love it, princess,” he replies, climbing onto the bed and taking my lips like a starved man.

The kiss is hard and possessive. I’m drowning in sensation as he bites, sucks, nips, and licks. His hands grip my face as he sweeps his tongue into my mouth, tangling it with mine. I moan softly at the need that courses through me. It’s a searing sensation. My fingers sink into his thick hair as he slowly licks his way to my neck, creating sizzling currents as he goes.

I shiver slightly and tilt my head to the side for more of it. Reality starts to set in and I remember the reason for all my plans. “Damien,” I whisper, shuddering as he grazes his teeth over the beating pulse in the sensitive arch of my neck.

“Yes, princess?” he growls softly against my skin, starting to kiss down over my collarbone toward my breasts.

“I have something to tell you,” I breathe out.

“Later,” he growls, then closes his lips over a hard nipple.

I moan low in my throat, losing my train of thought, and I surrender to the sensations buzzing inside me. My hands roam restlessly over his chest as he traces his tongue over the other nipple. I tremble and my breath hitches at the spike of desire. The need to touch his skin is consuming me as I caress my hands over the white T-shirt he has on, and I groan aloud in frustration. Before long, I’m pulling it over his head, dislodging his lips.

I throw the shirt to the ground, arching my back as he reclaims my breasts. He closes his lips over one, sucking it deep into the warmth of his mouth. I whimper and arch into him, gliding my hands over the hard ridges of his back. My hand movements are erratic and urgent as he feasts on each nipple, nipping and sucking. My body trembles harder and undulates with every sensation that spears through me. My moans grow louder and wetness trickles out of me, soaking my slit.

Damien slowly lets go of my nipples and gently pushes me until my back hits the pillow, his wild, hungry gaze roaming over me. My breaths come out in hard pants and I feel myself grow wetter and hornier under his hooded stare.

“You’re magnificent, and all mine,” he growls, low in his throat, and a soft moan falls from my lips.

His gaze turns darker as his hands reach the juncture of my thighs, and he groans low and deep.

“You’ll be death of me, princess,” he says gruffly, then flicks his finger over my exposed clit. I buckle under his touch and moan in disappointment when he withdraws and climb off the bed.

“Soon, princess,” he vows.

He reaches down to undo his jeans and in one swift motion pulls them off together with his boxers. His cock springs up, bobbing against his hard stomach, and I rub my legs together at the thought of him driving hard into my pussy.

He pumps his dick and a drop of pre-cum slowly trickles out. My desire heightens at the sight, and I can’t help but rise to my knees. I crawl to the edge of the bed, licking my lips in anticipation. I love the feeling of his hot, stiff flesh driving into my mouth as I watch Damien lose control. The urge to swallow him deep fills me, and my core

clenches at the thought.

Damien's heavy lidded eyes go to my lips. "You want a taste, princess?" he asks, and I nod shyly in response.

He shifts closer until my lips are at the same level as his stiff cock, and I reach out to squeeze the base. He groans softly and jerks in my hands as I slowly pump his cock, watching in awe as another drop of pre-cum joins the other. I slowly glide my lip over the cap, swiping off the salty liquid and teasing out another groan from him.

I straighten on my knees, then slowly swallow his hard length until it touches my throat. I suck hard and moan when more pre-cum trickles down my throat. Damien jerks hard in response and slowly dislodges his cock from my mouth.

"Not yet. I want to cum inside your hot pussy as I fuck you to orgasm," he growls, and bends to take my lips.

His lips glide over mine, slow and deep, and I give in to the sensations that grip me. He releases my lips and slowly unclasps the sheer lace around my breasts, letting them free. His lips glide over the taut, pink nubs, licking and stroking, intensifying my desire. I whimper softly, arching into his mouth. Then he kisses a path down to my navel and gently swirls his tongue around it before moving to the sensitive flesh between my thighs. Kneeling before me, he pulls me to the edge of the bed, arranging my legs over his shoulders.

His warm breath fans over my exposed flesh, and my stomach quivers in anticipation. I reach out to grab a fistful of his hair just as he dives into my pussy like a starving animal. A loud moan rings out of me and I buck under Damien's assault. His lips and tongue are everywhere, wreaking havoc. My thighs are locked down under his strong arms and I can only give in to the clash of need and sensations. My grip tightens in his hair and I whimper and moan and squeal until I'm a trembling mess under him.

He laps at my clit, sucks on it, then stabs his thick tongue into my entrance, repeating the motions until he brings me to the brink over and over again. My body is overcome by a blazing fire of heightened sensations, threatening to burn everything in its path. It's a volcano that climbs higher under his expert lips and has nowhere to go.

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My whimpers and moans have turned into loud wails and throaty moans as I babble and plead for mercy.

“Damien...I can’t,” I beg. “Please. I...need to...p-please.”

Suddenly he releases me, sits on the edge of the bed, then lifts me and sits me astride him. He guides his cock into my waiting channel, then slams deep from beneath.

“Oh God!” I convulse hard, grabbing his shoulders, but he doesn’t let up. In this position, his hard cock feels deeper and fuller inside me as he thrusts. His arm bands around my waist, giving him leverage to drive into me.

“Look at me, princess,” he orders in a soft growl, and I open my eyes, suddenly unable to look away.

His face is harsh and his eyes are crazed, filled with deep-seated need and something else—devotion. Another wave of desire grows with every stroke, every thrust, until I’m meeting him thrust for thrust and my moans turns into loud cries. He bends his head to suck a hard nipple into his mouth and I mewl at the added sensation, digging my hands into his shoulders.

The growing desire becomes a roaring fire in my head, building until my breath trembles and every part of my body starts to go taut. Damien releases my nipples and looks at me, his dark gaze penetrating my heart.

“I love you,” he growls, then slams harder and deeper into me, grazing a bundle of nerves.

“I love you!” I scream as my orgasm takes me over.

I clutch him tight and press my face hard into his shoulder as my body convulses, clamping hard on his cock. He grunts loud and jerks repeatedly into me, shooting his release. I quiver and tremble in his embrace, wracked with aftershocks as he continues to thrust shallowly, still coming.

“Fuck, princess,” he whispers hoarsely, pulling back until we’re staring at each other, breathing hard. “It always gets better with you,” he says, kissing me slowly.

This is perfection...

A few minutes later, I’m sated and snugly wrapped in Damien’s arms, breathing in his scent and basking in his body warmth. “What were you going to tell me?” he asks in a low tone, scattering shivers all over my skin.

Excitement sparks inside of me and I look into his loving gaze. “I’m pregnant,” I say softly, grinning wide.

Damien freezes. “What?” Shock is evident in his dark brown eyes.

His eyes widen and I watch excitement and love grow in them as his hand slides to my stomach. “You’re pregnant?” he asks.

I nod, smiling wide at his reaction. “This is the best fucking news,” he whispers hoarsely, claiming my mouth in a long, deep kiss.

When we come up for breath, I look up at him eagerly. “You’re really happy?” I ask.

“The happiest I’ve ever been,” he says sincerely.

I smile, curling into his arms and whispering, “Me too.”

Damien has given me everything I ever wanted—a home, his love, and now a child. We cuddle even closer, our legs tangled together, and I fall asleep dreaming of a future full of more happiness than I ever thought possible.

~The End