



# Sold to the Mogul

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**Category:** Erotic, Romance, Billionaire Romance, Adult

**Description:** Bella

My dad was the best artist I've ever known. And I know he didn't commit suicide.

I just have to figure out a way to prove it.

So when a clue drops into my lap, I don't think twice. But the trail leads me somewhere so much darker than I expected, and soon I'm auctioned off, sold, purchased.

I know I shouldn't trust the man who paid millions to possess me.

But I do. I'm drawn to him, in a way I don't understand. Roman is my protector, and I know he'll never hurt me. There's a softness in those gray eyes that's only for me.

He promises to help me find answers, and shows me a love that's stronger than I ever imagined. When I discover the truth about his past, I have to decide if that love will last, or if it's too good to be true.

Roman

At a shady art auction, on the hunt for clues about my best friend's suspicious death, I never expected to be bidding on something far more precious than stolen art.

Bella. My Muse.

She touches a part of me no one else ever has.

Now she is mine, and I'll never let her go.

And when I find out who she really is, and the way our lives have been twisted together for longer than we thought, I'm even more certain. I'll do whatever it takes to protect her. To get to the bottom of the questions hanging over us.

To keep her light in my life forever.

**Total Pages (Source):** 21

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 9, 2025, 1:52 am*

## Chapter One

Bella

A loud banging sound pulls me from the deep confines of sleep. I sit up slowly in bed, trying to figure out the source through the haze in my head. I don't remember where I am at first, and then the scratchy wool of the blanket helps me focus.

My father's cabin. The guest room.

Another sound reaches me—footsteps, maybe? —and I jump out of bed.

Something's wrong. Someone is in the house.

I grab my jacket and pull it over my silk nightgown, heading toward the door. As an afterthought, I grab the heavy flashlight on the nightstand, my hand shaking slightly as I hold it over my head.

Better this than nothing.

I swallow hard and push open the bedroom door, then tiptoe down the dimly lit hallway to the living room, my heart pounding loudly in my chest. I look around the little cozy cabin that used to be my father's home. Everything looks intact—the wrapped artwork in the corner, the half-packed boxes, even the leftover slice of pizza from dinner just a few hours ago. Nothing seems out of place.

Did I imagine the noise?

Maybe the exhaustion of the last few days is finally messing with my head. I shouldn't have taken those sleeping pills I found in Dad's medicine cabinet, but it seemed like the only way to get some sleep and escape the crushing grief that is slowly eating me up.

I let out a soft sigh and start to turn around, but something catches my attention. The large landscape painting by the fireplace is hanging at an awkward angle, and what seems to be a streak of light is streaming out from the wall behind.

Are the pills really causing me to hallucinate?

Slowly, I make my way toward the painting, gripping the flashlight tighter with every step. As I reach it, I reach out to press my free hand against the wall behind, gasping in shock when it suddenly gives way. I enter the room beyond, forcing one leg in front of the other, and then stand in the middle of the room, staring in shock at the scattered paintings, overturned paint tubes, and ransacked drawers.

It wasn't a hallucination. Someone was in here, and they left in a hurry.

How did an invader know about a private studio in my father's house that I didn't even know existed?

Maybe if you came home more often you would have known about it, my subconscious whispers.

And if you came home enough, you might have also noticed your father's suicidal tendencies.

My heart clenches painfully with guilt and regret. But those feelings are useless now. I'm the most terrible daughter in the world.

I walk over to the stool in the corner, fighting back tears as I trace my hand over the wooden easel in front of it. I try to imagine my dad sitting on the stool, his heavy brows knitted in an adorable frown, hands moving smoothly over the canvas.

He was the best artist I know. And that's why he was so damn successful.

My eyes fall on an old leather journal on the desk. As I pick it up, something falls out of it. I bend over to retrieve it from the floor—it's a luxurious-looking access card with a bold inscription in gold: The Chapel.

The Chapel? What is that?

Without any kind of religious symbolism on the card, my best guess is that it's some kind of exclusive club.

I turn the card around with a frown, but there's nothing on the back. I glance down at the opened page of the journal, and right there in my father's sprawling handwriting is written:

Chapel. Must be there. 08-22. 10pm.

And on the bottom right side of the page is an address that looks like it was scribbled in a rush.

Wheels start to turn in my head. I had my suspicions about my dad suddenly committing suicide, but there's been no solid evidence to prove otherwise. With the break-in tonight, and this strange access card, maybe I can find a clue.

08-22. That's tonight. I still have time.

Without a second thought, I rush out of the secret studio into the living room, quickly

pulling the wall back into place. Then I hurry to my room, grab the first dress I find in the closet, and change quickly. Soon, I'm driving down the long dusty road in my father's old Mustang.

## Page 2

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The drive is longer than I anticipated, and just when I start to think the GPS might be broken, a luxurious black BMW zooms past me, quickly taking a right turn and disappearing into a dark parking lot. I follow the car, and I'm shocked to see a huge, desolate building. It appears so suddenly through the darkness that the reveal was almost a shock.

What is this place?

Though the stone chapel is old and covered in vines, the parking lot is filled with brand-new, expensive-looking cars that glint in the sparse light from the streetlamps. My truck sticks out like a sore thumb.

Quickly, I turn off the ignition and grab the access card from the glove compartment, then step out of the truck. I walk over to the entrance just in time to see a suited man with dark hair step up to the huge, stern-faced security guard. I step up behind him, my heart thrumming like crazy in my chest as my eyes fall on the poorly concealed gun in the security guard's waistband. He checks the dark-haired man's access card and motions him in with a curt salute, and then his eyes fall on me.

"Evening, ma'am."

"G-good evening," I squeak, then clear my throat awkwardly. I raise my chin, trying to mimic the dark-haired man's confidence as I hold out my access card to the guard. "I have this."

The guard must see through my ruse, because his eyes narrow suspiciously. "What is your business here?" he asks coldly, his hand resting menacingly on the gun at his

waist.

My eyes widen at the dark threat in his eyes. I swallow hard, desperately racking my brain for anything to say that will get me in the door. My palms have gone sweaty, my stomach tightening with dread.

“She’s with me,” comes a deep, rich voice. The dark-haired man in front of me has turned slightly to rescue me, pausing as if he’s giving me time to catch up to him. I look up, my gaze clashing with the alluring grey eyes of the most striking man I’ve ever seen. And it seems for a moment that I’ve forgotten how to breathe.

“Okay, sir,” the guard says, his features relaxing as he returns his attention to me. “You can go in, ma’am.”

I nod speechlessly, urging my legs to move. My whole body is shaking, my legs threatening to give way beneath me.

That could have gone horribly. I don’t know what this place is, but it’s clear their security is no joke. I could have died.

My savior gazes at me for a moment, his expression unchanging. Then he simply nods his head and turns to enter the building ahead of me. There’s no way I can catch up to his long, confident strides, and by the time I enter the building, he’s nowhere to be found. Ignoring my disappointment, I look around the long corridor with rows of doors on each side, wondering which way to go.

Suddenly, one of the doors is pushed open and a stocky bald-headed man walks out, heading straight for me.

“What the fuck are you doing standing around out here?” he thunders with an angry sneer. “The auction will be starting any minute now.”

“W-what?” I mutter, blinking at him blankly.

“Aren’t you the auctioneer for the VIP section?”

Auction? Is that what they do here? Was Dad coming here to procure a particular piece of art?

Only one way to find out.

“Uhm...yes,” I say, nodding at the man. “Yes, I am.”

What the hell are you doing, Bella?

“Come with me,” the man snaps irritably, already walking down the long hallway.

I follow after him and he leads me to one of the doors in the corridor and turns to face me. “There’re important people in there tonight,” he says, the threat in his voice unveiled. “Fuck this up and you’re dead meat.”

My heart drops to my stomach at his words. I can tell he isn’t bluffing. He’d really kill me if I mess up whatever business is going on behind that door.

Swallowing nervously, I nod at him. “I promise to do a good job.”

Something akin to suspicion crosses his eyes, but he grits his teeth and pushes open the door. I walk in, clenching my fist against the urge to turn around and get the hell out of here. The door closes behind me, and I’m faced by a number of serious-looking men in suits. They are all comfortably seated on plush couches with sturdy wooden tables in front of them and glasses of some sparkling liquid.

I scan the room, and my gaze falls on a familiar broad-shouldered figure. It’s my



dark-haired savior from earlier. My heart skips with a nervous excitement at the sight of him, though I don't understand why. He spreads his long legs out in front of him in a nonchalant manner, his firm lips tilted slightly as he takes a sip of his drink. Suddenly, he raises his head and our gazes clash.

And in that moment, it seems like the world stops and all I can see is him. I feel a flush rising to my cheeks, but then something crosses his eyes, a dark emotion that quickly disappears as another man rises to his feet and joins me on the stage, shooting me a confused look.

It seems the event is about to begin.

"Good evening, gentlemen," the man on stage says smoothly, his deep voice ringing authoritatively in the room. "I'm Lucian Devereaux, your host for this fine evening. I welcome you all to another gathering where you will be able to bid on some of the most sought-after pieces of art in the world...and some the most expensive!" He winks and the audience chuckles.

## Page 3

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“Now, I’ll leave the rest of the evening in the capable hands of our lovely auctioneer,” he drawls, gesturing to me with a strong arm. His lips curl slightly in a knowing smirk as he lowers himself back into his seat. He clearly doesn’t recognize me, and knows I’m not the usual auctioneer, but he’s playing along.

Every gaze in the room turns in my direction, and it takes everything in me—including the fear of death—not to turn around and take to my heels. Instead, I send the room a wide smile and move closer to the artwork neatly arranged on a platform at the center of the room.

“Good evening, gentlemen,” I greet in a strong voice that hides my fear, and I gesture to the first painting. “This is a beautiful piece. It’s called ‘The Musicians.’” I don’t even need to read the title at the edge. At least my three years toward an Art History degree might help me out here. “It’s one of Caravaggio’s first paintings in the late sixteenth century...”

I know this piece—it was stolen years ago, and has long been thought to be lost. If this is authentic, and it seems like it is, then I understand why this auction is taking place at night and with armed guards.

Caravaggio was one of my dad’s inspirations as an artist, and he used to tell me stories about each of his paintings, so it’s easy for me to paint a fine story about the piece, talking it up a bit before starting the auction.

“If you want to own this beautiful piece of art, the bidding starts at...” I pause to read the price stuck at the base of the frame. “...Seven million dollars,” I call out.

Bidding starts to roll in, and I follow along as well as I can, amazed at how much people will spend to own a painting. I watch them, trying to imagine my dad among these people, in one of these plush chairs with one of those sparkling drinks in his hand.

The picture just doesn't fit. He wasn't a very social man, so if he was planning on coming to a gathering like this, it must have been for a very important reason.

"Ten million!" a voice calls out, cutting sharply into my thoughts.

"Twelve!" someone else counters almost immediately.

I wait for a beat, and when it seems like no one is going to go higher I slam the gavel against the block. "Sold!"

I smile out into the room as I shift the painting to the other side of the platform, grateful for the auction videos I've binge-watched on YouTube over the years.

Aside from being definitely illegal, this isn't so bad.

My gaze keeps returning to my dark-haired savior, no matter how hard I try to look away. His steady and direct gaze gives me the courage I need to keep going.

I sell another painting, and I'm on the third one when a cruel-looking old man with a white scruffy beard and a sly gaze clears his throat loudly, interrupting my pitch. "How much do I pay to own you!"

I freeze, unsure of how to respond. Surely he's joking, right?

Against my will, my gaze goes straight to him, my dark-haired savior, hoping for another miraculous rescue. But his expression is unreadable, and there's an

undeniable steeliness in his gaze that sends a shiver down my spine.

I swallow nervously and glance around the room, my heart dropping to my stomach at the expressions of sick excitement on the faces in the audience. They're not laughing—they're looking to the director of the auction for a real answer, as if there's even a possibility...

Oh, dear. What have you gotten yourself into, Bella?

## Chapter Two

Roman

I want to punch Sergio in the fucking face for suggesting to buy the girl. Dick-faced bastard.

Now, the whole room is contemplating the idea of owning the gorgeous redhead in the short blue-and-green sequin dress that hugs her curvy body in all the right places. There's absolutely no doubt in the world that she's drop-dead gorgeous. Her thick, curly red hair and those pouty pink lips affect me in a way no other woman ever has.

That's where the problem lies.

From the moment I spotted her in the parking lot getting out of that badass truck, my mind has been a clusterfuck of thoughts. It was obvious that she doesn't belong here—but it was also obvious that she was intent on gaining access to the building regardless. I couldn't stop myself from helping her into the chapel, though I told myself I couldn't get involved any further.

There's something about the fierceness in her expression that reaches for a part of me I'm unwilling to give, unwilling to share with the world.

Life hasn't been fair to a boy like me who grew up in the slums of Harlem with addicts for parents. I ran off to Seattle when I was fourteen, and got odd jobs in a biker bar where I sometimes slept. I used to sneak into the public school for classes, especially art, and that's where I met Warren Flint—my best friend for most of my teenage years. Even when he went to an art college in New York and I remained in Seattle, we kept in touch.

It turned out that even though I'm a good artist, I enjoy dealing art even more. With my previous jobs in biker bars and other clubs, my connections and reputation grew in the criminal underworld. And that's how I met Lucian Devereaux, who hosts the art auctions here at the chapel. I wouldn't consider him a friend, but we have a lot in common and often exchange clients and artifacts.

My reputation precedes me, and my clients know not to fuck around with me. I might look sophisticated in my sleek suit and shoes, but I don't suffer fools, nor do I let my friends die unjustly. I don't have many of them, but the few I have are dear to me. And that's why I'm attending this auction—to locate one of Warren's paintings that has gone missing. I'm hoping it might lead me to a clue about his so-called suicide.

If his death was just a suicide, then why did his last painting go missing?

## Page 4

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For the life of me, I didn't expect to have to deal with this striking auctioneer who makes my cock hard and my heart race with the need to possess her.

I wondered what Lucian was playing at when she arrived, but it's clear that he's as clueless as I am. It's obvious that she has no idea about art dealing or being an auctioneer, but she does have a little knowledge of art—enough to convince the rich old fools who just want to spend their money on the most expensive artifact.

Why is she here?

“Well, I-I'm not for sale,” a soft, husky voice interrupts the excited chatter in the room.

It pulls me out of my thoughts, and for some reason my lips pull to the side in a smile. Despite her fear, she spoke up for herself. It makes me even more attracted to her.

Sergio guffaws, his laughter grating on my nerves. “Who do you think you are to object? Everything in this room has a price, even you,” he declares, then laughs noisily. It mingles with the spattering of laughter in the room.

Then Sergio turns to Lucian. “Lucian, I want that hot piece of ass for a plaything. The one I bought last month isn't any fun anymore. And I hear redheads are feisty in bed.” He guffaws again, and this time the whole room joins in.

Distaste spreads inside me as I take in his red face and greedy eyes. Violence becomes a living breathing fire that burns through me as I take in the growing fear in

her brown eyes. The need to protect her from his rotten soul beats at me.

She's mine, and no one dares to take what's mine.

Fuck. Where did that thought come from?

Still, I straighten in my seat. What if I declare ownership of her? Just to protect her from their grubby hands. Everyone knows not to fuck with me. And if Sergio needs a reminder, then I'm happy to oblige.

I turn to Lucian, arching a brow, my eyes telling him to do something or I'll intervene. I know he's in a difficult position due to his role here at the chapel, since his father is the owner of this entire operation. Lucian shares my distaste for the auctions that take place in the main auction hall, and he prefers to deal in artwork, not women. His expression assures me he'll do his best to talk his way out of this.

I shift my gaze back to the woman on stage, only to find her eyes on me. My heart warms, and I almost smile reassuringly at her.

What the fuck?

"Now, Sergio," Lucian drawls. "We're here to talk about art. And I've got the Van Gogh you've been dying to own. You can purchase a new plaything another time."

I turn to watch Sergio's lips part with greed at the prospect of owning the famous piece, but then they turn down in a sneer and my hands bunch into fists.

"The idea is tempting, Lucian," he says in an offhand manner. "But I doubt I'll find her the next time I want to buy a new plaything. Besides, I have enough money to buy both the art and her. Name your price."

Voices mingle, rising in support of Sergio's statement.

"Yes!"

"Name your price!"

Greedy fuckers.

A soft growl of warning almost leaves my lips, and it takes years of hard-won discipline to hold it in. I don't understand the possessiveness I feel, or the flare of protective instincts at the sight of her distressed state.

I want to keep this woman happy and safe at all costs, and it's alarming how strong the need is. What is it about her that pulls at the base of my being and makes me want to give her everything? I try to ignore it, but I can't. It's all-consuming and quickly taking over the sane part of my mind.

"Alright, everyone," Lucian declares with a raised brow. "If I'm going to allow this to happen, then anyone who pays to own her will forfeit their initial plan to buy any art tonight."

There's a resounding silence as the men contemplate their decisions. In that moment, my gaze shifts to meet Lucian's. I don't know what he's playing at, but I don't think his idea will work. Most of these men have more than enough money to buy whatever the fuck they want whenever they want.

"I agree," Sergio says, confirming my thoughts.

Lucian's expression barely changes, but as he meets my eyes again I know what he's saying: This is out of my hands. You want to protect her? You buy her.



Before long, the whole room is agreeing with Sergio, and I listen, my body rigid with molten anger, as they haggle and bid for her.

“Three million,” Sergio calls out, countering a two million bid.

It’s obvious that he’s determined to have the gorgeous redhead. I should join in, but it goes against my moral code to bid on a living person as if they’re cattle.

## Page 5

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I've always known what goes on in the chapel, and even though I find it distasteful, I don't consider it my business. After all, I've only ever attended to buy art for my clients. It takes a morally skewed person to know about the depraved activity and do nothing—which I admit I am—but it takes someone truly evil to take part in it.

“Four million,” someone else declares, and Sergio counters immediately. “Five million!”

My attention returns to the woman on stage, and I see her eyes widen with fear and disbelief. She should be scared. I've heard a lot of things about Sergio and none of them are good. He's an evil bastard who thrives on seeing his plaything bleed. Suddenly, the image of her soft, creamy flesh marred and stained with blood fills my mind, and my anger reaches a threshold.

My grip tightens on the chair's arms. She should be pampered and worshiped, not used and discarded like Sergio would undoubtedly do. I would rather go against my morals than have him take her from me. The soft growl I tried to hold on to leaves my lips, heightening the tension in the room.

“Ten million.” My voice rings out in the deafening silence, and my gaze doesn't waver from hers.

Even through the tension of the moment, need punches into my gut and makes my blood sing. I can't let her go, or imagine her in someone else's arms. If anyone in this room is allowed to have her, it's me.

Sergio sputters at my declaration, and I almost smile, knowing my sudden bid has put

him off.

“Twelve million,” he says in a wobbly voice.

I shift my gaze to him and call out in a hard, resolute tone. “Fifteen million.” My cold gaze remains on his, telling him I’ll bid higher, no matter the price.

He sputters again and I arch a brow, daring him. I couldn’t care less what everyone else thinks about me in this moment.

“Well, gentlemen, Roman is the highest bidder at fifteen million,” Lucian says, looking around the room. “If anyone would like to counter, now is the time...” After a few seconds of silence, he declares, “Sold—Roman gets to take her home.” I can hear the satisfaction in his voice. He might have felt trapped into performing this sick auction, but at least he knows I won’t hurt the girl.

“What’s your name, sweetheart?” Lucian asks, turning his attention to her.

She exhales softly and answers, “My name is Bella.”

Bella. It’s a beautiful name that fits her well. I’m amazed at her strength, despite her growing fear and discomfort. The only indication that what has just transpired doesn’t sit well with her is the way she folds her trembling hand on the hem of her dress.

“Bella, you’ll be going home with Roman,” Lucian declares, and she swallows and nods.

“Not so fast,” Sergio says, drawing the attention of everyone. “As we know, the tradition of the chapel states that the buyer tests his merchandise and gives us a show. Roman shouldn’t be an exception. Isn’t that right, Lucian?” he adds in a sly tone that matches the sick delight in his eyes.

“That’s not fucking happening. This isn’t like the regular auctions,” I say darkly, straightening the cuffs of my sleeves.

“Lucian should decide that,” Sergio replies, then swallows at the full force of my cold stare.

“I have to agree with Roman,” Lucian replies brusquely. “I invited you all to bid on stolen artifacts, not on girls. If I wanted to watch a show, then I know where to go and so do you all.”

“If you didn’t want a show, then you shouldn’t have allowed the bid to take place,” another voice chimes in.

I could argue the idea, but I know I won’t win. More voices join in, filling the room with noisy chatter. Although it pains me to admit, I know I’d better give them all the show they’re clamoring for.

“Come here,” I say softly to Bella.

The wide flare of her soft brown eyes is tantalizing as I watch her leave the stage. The noise in the room dies down as she walks toward me. I’ve never been more grateful for the corner I’m seated in—it gives me control over the room and how much they can see.

As soon as she stops before me, I tug her into my lap, reveling in her soft gasp of shock. She sits sideways, her legs hanging off my thighs. Her scent hits me—a soft blend of jasmine and vanilla—and it goes straight to my aching cock. I pull her tense body closer and place my lips against her ear, delighting in her slight shiver as she relaxes in my arms. It’s good to know that I affect her the same way she affects me.

“I know this isn’t what you were expecting tonight, but we have to comply with their

demands if we want to get out of here. Is that okay?" I whisper into her ear.

I can feel the pointed stares around us, the air rife with their arousal and delight about what's going to happen. I push back the malevolent feeling riding at me at the thought of giving them a show.

"H-how far do we have to go?" Bella asks hesitantly, her brows furrowing in concern.

My hand reaches up of its own accord to smooth the wrinkle on her forehead, my heart tightening as I imagine what I would do if she was hurt, or if I ever see tears in those almond-shaped eyes. I sweep her thick red hair behind her ear and slide my hands to cup her cheeks. "Don't think about anything or anyone. It's just you and me. Trust me." I search her gaze as I gently slide a finger over her lower lip.

She nods gently, and my heart warms at the blatant look of trust in her soft brown eyes. They reel me in until I'm drunk in her gaze, and I slowly guide her mouth to mine, smiling softly as she meets me halfway. Our lips touch, sending currents streaking through my blood. Her movements are soft and hesitant on mine, warming up my body.

I can't hold back. The sparks of need push at me until I deepen the kiss, devouring her lips in a passionate embrace.

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### Chapter Three

Bella

Sizzling sensations build inside me with every stroke of Roman's lips. His tongue slowly glides against mine in a passionate tangle, and an intense ache blooms in my core.

What am I doing?

I'm kissing someone I don't know. I should push him away and run out of here. I have a good memory, and each hallway that leads to the side entrance is clear in my mind, but I can't make myself move.

I've been drawn to this dark-haired stranger ever since I laid eyes on him.

When the old pervert suggested they bid on me, a twisted part of me wished that Roman would win the bid, and now that dark wish has been fulfilled. I don't know why I can't resist him. He's good-looking, but he's obviously stone-cold dangerous. His interaction with the old pervert reminded me of a wild panther stalking its prey. And instead of making me feel scared, it sent shivers of awareness down my spine.

His kiss is as potent as his essence—wild and intoxicating, pulling me deeper into his empowering presence until we are just two people getting lost in each other. It's like we're two lost souls finally connected. It's undeniable and scary. His fingers sink into my hair, gripping it tight, and I find myself letting go and surrendering to the intense need growing inside me.

A low groan leaves my throat as his finger slowly slides down to my chest. Warmth races over my skin, and my core slicks up as heat spreads inside me. He lets go of my lips and gently nips at the corner of my mouth, eliciting a soft whimper from a deep and needy part of me. Then he slowly licks at the area, soothing it while oh-so-slowly grazing his thumb over my right nipple.

My core tightens in response, and my nipple hardens beneath his touch, tightening until it's poking hard through my dress. He moves his thumb to the other nipple, lavishing the same attention on it until it's begging to be released. His molten eyes slide to mine, and everything stops as I take in the raw need in them. This close, I can see that his eyes are smoky gray, a gray that has turned dark and liquid with want.

"You're going to enjoy this," he says, though it sounds more like a command.

Then his eyes soften.

"I won't hurt you. I promise," he vows.

My dad used to say the eyes are a window to the soul. I don't know if he's right, but the tender warmth in Roman's gaze makes me believe every word he utters.

Then he leans down to softly lick at the sensitive flesh behind my right ear, and all my thoughts dissipate.

I tremble softly and gasp, arching into his wandering tongue, and at the same time I slide my arms around his neck until I'm gripping his lush dark brown hair for dear life. I slowly slide my legs against each other, trying to ease the throbbing ache growing at my center. Every flick of his tongue sends streaks of sensation to my core, heightening my need, until I'm gyrating in his arms and my ass is grinding over his hard shaft through his pants.

He rolls a hard nipple with his thumb and forefinger over my dress, sending a stab of ache to my slick sex. Then he slides his hands down to my thighs, slowly caressing them before pushing up the hem of the dress and sliding his fingers up my inner thighs. His touch causes me to moan and tremble in anticipation, while goose bumps dot my flesh. Warm hands glide to the juncture of my thighs just as he trails his lips back to my own with another moan of pleasure.

His fingers graze my wet lacy panties, and he groans into my mouth, pushing the fabric to the side. He breaks the kiss and growls against my lips, “You’re so wet and I fucking love it.”

I whimper softly at his words, his thick growl prompting fresh bouts of wetness to slick up my channel. “So fucking responsive,” he rasps, then gently slides his thumb over my swollen clit.

A loud moan leaves my lips as I quiver in response.

“Look at me,” he orders softly.

I slowly open my eyes. The pull between us is intense and riveting, drawing us deeper until our breaths mingle and I’m taking in his scent. It’s a blend of raw manliness, warm spice and amber—heady and alluring, spiking my desire. His thumb slowly strokes my clit, over and over, until my breath climbs and my grip tightens in his hair at the stabbing ache.

I can’t look away from him. Nothing else matters.

In this moment, I know that no matter what happens, our lives are intertwined.

The ache in my core grows with every stroke, and I grow slicker with need. He slowly slides a finger into my tight heat, gliding and grazing sensitive nerves. My



other hand slides to his shoulder and I grip it hard as I experience sensations I've never felt before.

My incessant whimpers turn into soft, throaty moans as he slowly strokes the finger in and out. At the same time, his thumb continues its assault on my sensitive bud, stroking me until I'm quivering and writhing in his arms. He slides another finger inside my tight sheath, and I feel fuller than I've ever been, his strokes never-ending as they graze nerves and build one sensation after another.

My gaze pleads with his, unable to hold on to the burning ache. It grows until an intense need wells up inside me, like a wave of heat, searing me from inside out. I don't understand it. I've never touched myself, and I didn't know it would be this overwhelming.

"R-Roman?" I ask softly.

"It's alright, baby. Let go," he rasps.

"I...I can't," I whisper huskily. I don't know how.

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“You can, baby. Let go.” This time, his tone is soft, and so commanding that I can’t help but obey.

At the same time, he presses his thumb hard on my clit and pushes his fingers deeper into me. The wave reaches a crest, and I moan into his lips as he slams his mouth over mine. An intense quiver seizes my body as I jerk and disintegrate, my sex clenching tightly around the fingers that continue stroking me through my climax.

His mouth moves over mine in a deep, unyielding kiss, filled with the need still brimming inside him. When he finally releases my lips, he slips his fingers from my slick channel and slowly licks them as his gaze devours mine. My heaving breaths turn even heavier as my sex clenches at the image. His gray eyes are dark with intense need, and his firm lips are a bit swollen from our kisses. I shift in his arms and my ass grazes his rigid cock.

“What about you?” I whisper softly, and I watch his eyes grow even darker.

“Not here, baby.” His voice is a dark promise that sends shivers racing up my spine.

My eyes go wide, and I suddenly remember that we’re not alone. Memories of my moans of pleasure fill my mind, and my cheeks heat up in embarrassment.

Roman’s gaze narrows on mine. “Don’t ever feel ashamed for what happened between us. I don’t care about them, so neither should you,” he states in a voice that brooks no argument.

I can’t help the smile that tugs at my lips.

He must be so used to telling people what to do that he doesn't understand that sometimes they have a mind of their own. He stands from the seat, pulling me up with him, and gently straightens my dress.

His gaze goes cold as he looks around the room. "I believe we're done here, gentlemen," he declares as his large hand envelops mine. It's warm and comforting, boosting my confidence. I slowly become aware of the eyes on us, and I even dare to briefly glance at the old pervert. My stomach turns, my tongue coating with distaste as I watch him zip up his pants. I don't even want to imagine what he was doing, so I quickly look away.

"Let's go," Roman says, tugging at my hand.

I turn to look up at him, inhaling softly as a sizzling current passes between us when our gazes meet. "Where are we going?" I ask softly.

His eyes soften. "Home," he replies, and he pulls me until we're walking side by side, then out of the auction room.

I don't know what it is, but a wave of emotion sweeps through me at the sound of that simple word.

Home.

## Chapter Four

Roman

The drive to my hillside home is filled with sexual tension. By the time I pull into the garage, I can barely wait to hold Bella in my arms again. The memory of her soft moans and whimpers has kept my cock hard as granite this whole time, and now all I

can think about is finding a flat surface so I can drive it into her.

Fuck! Why am I being this way?

I usually have a lot more restraint than this. What is it about this woman that makes me lose all my senses?

I turn in my seat to find Bella staring at me. Her soft brown eyes are dilated and dark with an unabashed need which she seems oblivious to. She looks like a precious piece of spun glass, perched nervously at the edge of her seat. I inhale slowly, clenching my fist hard on the steering wheel and striving for control. No matter how I feel, I know I can't take advantage of her. Even though I want to lick every part of her body until she's screaming my name, I have to do the right thing.

"Bella, I'm not a good man," I say in a guttural tone, "so I'll only say this once. I don't know why you were at the chapel, but I know you didn't plan on being sold to anyone. Right now, all I can think about is sinking my cock inside you, and I'm holding on by a thread. So if you want to leave, tell me now. I'll find a way to get you wherever you want to go."

I hear her sharp intake of breath and look over just in time to see her gripping her hands together tightly. "I w-want to stay here with you," she says in a trembling voice.

I release the steering wheel and straighten. "You better be careful what you say. Choose wisely, because once I'm out of this car, you can't change your mind," I grit out in a harsh tone.

She nods softly and whispers, "I'm sure. I want to stay with you."

Blood rushes to my cock and it grows even harder as I open the car door. She begins

to do the same but I command softly, “Don’t.”

She pauses. I step out of the car and close the door, reaching the passenger side in three long strides. Once I open her door, I tug her into my arms.

“Please, wait,” she says softly as I lean down to kiss her. To devour her.

I frown down at her in concern. “What is it, baby?” I ask, already feeling edgy at her obvious distress.

I don’t know what it is, but I don’t like to see her unhappy. I reach out to cup her jaw, tilting her face up until I’m staring into her frightened gaze.

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“I’ve n-never done this before. Please be g-gentle with me,” she whispers, and then she quickly looks away, her cheeks turning red.

I freeze, staring at her profile. Knowing that this beautiful woman in my arms is untouched makes me want to roar to the heavens. My possessive feelings increase tenfold, and I know in my heart that I’m never letting her go. In just a short period, she has managed to sneak her way into a deep corner in my heart. And the surprising part is that I’m not even mad about it. Instead, I welcome the idea of having her with me at all times.

So I turn her face back to mine, staring at her with the need that has consumed me since I laid eyes on her.

“Like I said at the auction house, my word still holds true. I’ll never hurt you. I promise,” I state earnestly.

She nods, and I watch her eyes fill with the same emotion I saw in the auction house. Trust. I slide my hand up her neck, gliding my fingers slowly over her skin until they sink into her thick red curls, and I tug her head back. Her lips part gently as she pants, her eyes clouding with want. I slowly lean down to trace her soft, pink lips with my tongue, reveling in her sharp inhale.

“I can’t wait to enter your wet pussy and make you moan loud on my cock,” I rasp against her lips. Then I gently close my lips over hers, trapping her moan.

It’s hard and consuming, the way my mouth moves over hers, sending my nerve endings singing. My tongue slips into the warm heat of her mouth, and I feel her

shiver against me as it tangles with hers in a clash of heat and need.

She melts into my arms, her hands going straight to my shoulders. Even though she's inexperienced, her lips glide eagerly beneath mine, spurring me on. I slide my hands down to her waist, spanning it to lift her into my arms without breaking the kiss. I kick the car door closed before turning and walking toward the entrance, my lips ravaging hers. There's a wild beast running rampant inside me, filling me with the urge to drive into her over and over again, but I push down the need.

It's her first time. I have to make it memorable.

Once we enter the house, I make a beeline for my room, climbing the wooden stairs in urgency as I release her lips and trail soft licks and kisses down her neck. Her hands cling to my shoulders as she arches her neck, moaning softly. By the time I enter the bedroom, she's grinding hard on my cock, pushing at the reins of my control. I place her on the edge of the bed, pressing a lingering kiss on her neck before letting go.

I take in her glazed eyes and swollen lips, feeling a tightness in my chest as I gently lower the zipper at the back of her dress. I push it down her shoulders, exposing her soft, pale skin.

"Stand," I order in a hoarse tone, and I watch as her eyes dilate in response before she complies.

I push the rest of the dress down, inhaling sharply at the sight of her breasts cupped in a black, lacy bra and her ass in matching panties. Black has never looked so good. My hands glide down her cleavage to her waist of their own accord, and I take in her soft, trembling form.

"Fucking exquisite," I rasp.

I watch her with a lidded gaze and dark need as I quietly unbutton my suit jacket, then my shirt, letting my clothes fall to the ground. My gaze never wavers as I do the same for my pants and briefs, watching her eyes widen considerably as my cock springs against the hard flesh of my abdomen. She pants harder, and her nipples tighten before my eyes until they're straining against her lace bra. I move closer to her until my chest grazes her hers, then I slowly remove the pins holding down her hair and comb my fingers through the thickness of it.

I slide my arms to her back and gently unclip the bra, throwing it over my shoulder and baring her soft, pink nipples. My hard cock weeps at the sight of her heaving breasts, and I reach out to slowly roll each nipple until it's hard and shivering breaths are leaving her lips. Then I bend to peel her panties off, letting them slide down and fall onto the dress pooling at her feet. She looks ethereal in her naked glory, her pink, rosy nipples peeking out through her wild, curly red hair that flows over her shoulders and falls just beneath her breasts.

Like an erotic painting...

But my mind is filled with something more urgent than art—an overwhelming need to ease the hunger in her gaze and satiate the unbearable ache in my cock.

So I slide my arms to her waist and pull her closer, reveling in the way her legs wrap around my waist and her arms circle my neck. The move seems so effortless, and her body fits mine like a glove. Like it's specially made for me. With my cock nestling against her sopping wet sex and her breasts gliding over the hard planes of my chest, sending stabs of sensations to my groin, I take her lips in mine.

This time, my lips glide over hers gently but deeply as I savor the warm sensations moving through my body like current. I move us onto the bed as I explore her mouth, lavishing attention on her lips and enjoying her moan of satisfaction. When her back hits the middle of the bed, I glide my hands to her neck and deepen the kiss. She



moves her hands over my back and chest, exploring my body, her fingers gliding over my sensitive skin.

I release her lips and slowly kiss a path down to her cleavage, taking in her soft pants as I close my lips over one nipple, sucking it against the roof of my mouth. Bella jerks and moans softly, arching into my mouth as she reaches out to grip my hair. I slowly rotate the other nipple between my fingers, flicking the hard tip at the same time. Then I let go of her tight nipple and reach for the other, sucking and licking until she's panting hard and moaning softly.

After a last lick, I kiss my way down to her quivering belly, placing tiny bites and soothing them with the flick of my tongue. I slowly part her thighs, wedging my shoulders beneath them and baring her wet and shaved pussy.

"You're so fucking responsive," I whisper, then lean down to blow hot air on the engorged pink clit peeking from between her slippery folds, enjoying her small jerk of reaction. I continue to blow warm air on it and then slowly swirl the tip of my tongue around her clit, enjoying her soft whimpers and trembles.

Fresh bouts of wetness slick up her sex with every tease, her whimpers climbing with her every plea. "R-roman, p-please," she begs, her hands a clenched fist in my hair and her head thrashing around.

She has long given up on arching her hips into my mouth and searching for release, since I restrained her movements with an arm holding down her waist.

"What do you want, baby?" I rasp out in a guttural tone, flicking my tongue against her clit again.

"Y-you have to do s-something. P-please, I can't take it anymore," she says on a sob, after another flick of my tongue.

“Well, since you asked so nicely.”

I release her waist and close my lips on her clit, sucking hard and deep. Her loud moans reverberate in the room as I feast on her, licking my way down to her sex and back to her engorged nub. Her thighs tremble and her body gyrates with the need to orgasm.

I slowly slide two fingers into her waiting channel, pumping hard while I continue to suck hard on her clit. Her moans turn loud and she clenches hard on my fingers. Another pump of my fingers and she combusts with a high keening sound.

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“Roman!” she shouts hoarsely, trembling and pulling hard at my hair.

The biting pain sends bolts of arousal down to my aching shaft. I can’t wait any longer.

I gently extract my fingers and climb up her body, pressing lingering kisses and licks to her breasts. I suck both nipples at intervals, grazing my fingers over every part of her body and enjoying her soft moans of pleasure. By the time I reach her lips, she’s a quivering mess, ready to let go for the second time.

I close my lips over hers, taking in her moans and desires as I slowly grind my shaft against her dripping pussy. I savor her lips, letting her take as much as I give, my cock never halting its movements against her flooding sex. When she’s a whimpering mess, I reach down to arrange the tip of my cock against her and slowly sink into her tight channel until I meet resistance. I thrust shallowly, ordering hoarsely, “I need your eyes, baby.”

As soon as she opens her need-filled eyes to meet mine, I lean down to press a kiss to her forehead. “It’s going to hurt a bit,” I say, barely holding on to my need, sweat dotting my temples as I keep up my shorts thrusts right inside her entrance.

“I t-trust you,” she whispers on a sob, her need palpable.

What undoes me is the blatant trust and devotion in her gaze. She is no doubt made for me, irrevocably mine. I’ll fight whatever force says otherwise. I let out a loud groan of satisfaction, slamming my lips against hers just as I thrust deeper until I’m fully seated inside her.

I halt my movements as her fingers dig into my back and she gasps at the new sensation. Allowing her to get used to the ache, I release her lips to look into her eyes. My heart breaks at the sheen of tears in them. "I'm sorry," I whisper, gritting back against the need to move my cock.

She's so tight that it's overwhelming, filling me with the need to combust, but the need to ease her pain is paramount.

"It's alright. I don't feel any pain," she reassures me bravely.

My heart clenches with tenderness as I take in her slowly relaxing features. "Liar," I whisper, then I grind my cock inside her.

She gasps softly, desire sparking in those soft brown eyes. I reach back to tug on her hands, intertwine our fingers, and spread them above our heads as I slowly move inside her. Her eyes widen with every stroke, growing darker with need as her gasps turn into loud whimpers.

"Oh," she moans as I thrust even deeper, hitting a sensitive bundle of nerves.

Her throaty moans spur me on until I'm driving inside her, stroking deep in the same spot, over and over. An overwhelming ache builds up from the base of my spine, growing hotter and sharper with every thrust. Her sex tightens harder on my shaft in response, pushing me into a frenzy. My strokes turn deeper and faster, and the need to orgasm rides me hard until I'm filled with it. Her moans grow louder, climbing the walls, and she thrashes around, her hands gripping mine tight.

"Argh!" she screams as she goes over the edge, her tight sheath clenching me hard.

"Fuck!" I grunt aloud, jerking and thrusting as I orgasm, coming deep inside her.

I release her hands, pulling her trembling body into my arms as I shift sideways to the bed. “You’re mine,” I whisper softly before taking her lips in a sweet kiss.

## Chapter Five

Bella

The first thing that comes to my mind as I slowly awake is the languid feeling in my bones. The next is the feel of the soft bedding beneath me.

Memories of last night wash over me, and I don’t know whether to laugh in happiness or scream into the pillow in embarrassment. I can’t believe I was so bold as to give myself to Roman.

But then again, I couldn’t help myself. The attraction between us is so intense that I find him irresistible. It’s like a strong tether that will always pull us together no matter how far apart we are.

I remember his words to me right before I fell asleep, and my heart swells with an unnamed emotion. You’re mine.

I slowly blink my eyes open, and take in the sight of Roman, sitting a few feet away from the huge bed. My heart races in my chest at the sight of him. He’s sitting sideways, shirtless, a paintbrush in hand and his head bent over an easel. He looks even more handsome in the early morning with his hair disheveled and his perfectly chiseled features as he concentrates on whatever he’s painting.

He turns his head to look at me and our gazes clash. “Oh, good morning, baby,” he says in a velvety tone that sends shivers up my spine.

I can’t stop the blush that heats up my cheeks as his gray eyes bring back more

memories. “Good morning,” I reply, clearing my throat.

“Don’t move. Stay,” he commands softly as I start to rise onto my elbows. “Have you been awake long?” he asks, his gaze sweeping across my face as I return to my position and he shifts back to the easel.

“Not really,” I reply. Then I wedge my hands behind my head, using my elbow as an anchor as I gaze at him curiously. “I didn’t know you paint.”

“Yes. I’ve always enjoyed painting. Could’ve made a living out of it if I wanted to, but I prefer dealing,” he answers as he glances up at me for another look.

“Really?” I say, wanting to know more. “I can’t wait to see what you’re painting.”

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“Later. Right now, I want you to strike a pose,” he says, his brows scrunching up in concentration.

I don’t know what it is, but all of a sudden, I feel the need to make him let loose and let go of his tightly held control. So I strike the silliest pose I can think of, making a goofy expression. I burst into laughter at his shocked expression—I know he wasn’t expecting that. Then I strike another, and another, making crazy facial expressions until he’s laughing alongside me.

After a few minutes, his laughter dies down to chuckles and he says, “Be serious, Bella.”

“Alright,” I say, giggling softly. I push down the soft coverlet, feeling bolder. I strike the most provocative pose I can think of, enjoying the way his gaze traces over the skin of my breasts and down to my now exposed sex between my spread legs.

Roman’s brush freezes mid-air and I watch his eyes go dark with desire. “Perfect,” he says with approval, then continues to swipe his brush as if nothing happened. “Don’t move,” he orders as he bends his head to swipe his brush over the easel, glancing up at intervals.

Every dark stare from him heightens my need to be touched. I chose the erotic pose to shake his composure, but it turns out that I’m the one most affected by it. My breath comes out in heavy pants and my sex floods with every stare from those gray eyes. Every brushstroke feels like a phantom hand grazing my skin, making me feel sensitive and responsive all over. My nipples peak and I can almost feel his breath against my skin.

“You look ready to come,” Roman says with a raised brow, as if unaffected, and I moan in response.

The only indication that he’s enjoying this as much as I am is the darkening of his gray eyes. And his aloofness only makes me wetter. I squeeze my thighs together, sliding one subtly over the other, hoping to ease the ache.

“If I sink my fingers into your pussy, will I find it soaking wet?” he asks as his eyes trace over my body again, his words causing the ache to grow.

I moan softly in response, pleading with my eyes. The torture continues for a few minutes until he finally finishes with his painting. “Done,” he states, then puts down the brush.

He looks at me with a hooded gaze. “You want me to ease the ache, baby?” he asks in a soft, rough tone.

“Y-yes,” I whisper brokenly.

“Baby, as much as I want to fuck you and make you come hard, I can’t. You’re still sore from last night,” he explains, and I moan in disappointment.

“I want you to do something else. Touch yourself,” he commands.

I inhale sharply, my eyes going wide. I’ve never done this before. “I-I don’t...” I stutter, blushing hard under his stare.

“You’ve never touched yourself before?” he asks in surprise, and I nod in response. “That’s okay, baby. I’ll guide you through it,” he reassures me. “I want you to caress your breasts and gently roll your nipples between your fingers.”



We stare at each other and I grow wetter under his gaze as I slide my hand to my breasts and gently tease my nipples, then roll them between my fingers like he instructed. Warm tingles grow under my ministrations, Roman's gaze causing goose bumps all over my body. I continue to knead and roll my nipples until I'm gyrating and writhing.

"Good. Now, circle your fingers over your clit, then slowly dip them in your pussy," he rasps roughly.

My hands glide down my breasts to my aching sex and my thighs fall open. A moan falls from my lips as I rotate my finger over my clit, my wetness serving as lubrication. Our gazes remain connected as pleasure mounts and the ache in my core blooms with every stroke. I whimper as the sensations climb higher and the need to let go grows. I moan, staring into Roman's cloudy gaze. Then, I slowly slide a finger inside my wet channel, whimpering softly at the dual sensations, amplified by his presence. The need in his eyes, in addition to the stroke of my fingers and thumb, pushes me over the edge.

"Ohh," I moan aloud, quivering and jerking as my pussy slicks up and I climax, continuing to flick my clit and trembling softly as my orgasm gradually subsides.

I withdraw my hands, looking up to find Roman's potent stare on me, and my cheeks heat up at being watched as I pleasure myself. "Don't be shy," Roman growls, and I giggle at his chiding look, my embarrassment forgotten.

"Can I see the painting now?" I ask as I don his discarded shirt after cleaning up in the bathroom.

"Of course."

I head to his side and gasp, speechless. Before me is a lifelike painting of my first

pose. My head and shoulders are resting on the pillow, my hair spread out around me, and my body is covered by the blanket. I look sultry—my eyes are dark with desire. My hair is like a wild wave, draping over my shoulders, and my cleavage peeks out just a little.

“This is perfect. You’re really good,” I say breathily, still in awe as I stare at the portrait. Then I turn to face him with a frown. “But, why did you tell me to strike more poses, if you were going to paint the first one anyway?” I ask, hiding a smile.

Roman’s lips twitch as he straightens and tugs me onto his lap, my arms instinctively encircling his neck. “You don’t really think I’d let anyone else see your beautiful body? You’re mine, baby, and I don’t share,” he murmurs as he nuzzles my neck.

My heart melts at his words, and I find myself wishing I could stay in this cocoon forever. I shake my head and smile. “That’s so possessive. I don’t think I’ve ever met anyone like you.”

“You better not,” he says, and growls playfully into my neck, making me giggle breathlessly.

I shift my body sideways, dropping an arm to look at the portrait again. “It’s truly beautiful. Thank you,” I whisper.

His hands tighten around my waist in response, and I place my chin on his head, settling deeper into his arms as I stare at the painting. Suddenly, I’m reminded of my father. It’s sad and sentimental at the same time, as I think about the times he used to paint portraits of me.

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The rush of excitement I felt earlier seeps out of me, and I stiffen in Roman's arms, feeling guilty. I can't believe that for a while I totally forgot the reason I went to the chapel in the first place. Tears of frustration well up in my eyes.

"What's wrong, baby?" Roman asks in a concerned tone, shifting his head from beneath mine and cupping my jaw.

I muster a smile, but it's melancholic as I say, "It's nothing. The painting just reminds me of my late dad."

"Oh, I'm sorry you lost him. He was a painter too?" he asks in a low tone.

I sigh softly. "Yes, he's a popular artist. His name is Warren Flint, but everyone in the art world knows him as Donovan," I explain. I look up to see Roman's eyes flare with shock and recognition. "You've heard of him?" I ask.

Roman nods, seeming to school his expression. "I've seen his work, yes," he answers. Then he asks, "Is that the reason you were at the auction house yesterday?"

"Yes," I say, then turn to face him with furrowed brows. "I know you've heard the news about my father killing himself. Well, I don't believe he would ever do that. He had a lot to live for, and he was looking forward to his retirement. He had no reason to be suicidal. I suspected foul play since one of his last pieces was missing, but with no evidence, the police ruled it out. And I'd almost given up on ever getting justice when an intruder broke into his studio. I searched the room after that, and found the access card to the chapel. And well...you know what happened after that."

“What you did was very risky,” Roman says in a chiding tone. “What if it had turned out differently for you?”

“I know, but I couldn’t just sit at home. I had to do something.”

“Alright. But no more investigating on your own,” he says. “I know a very good private investigator—I’ll hire him to find out more about your dad’s death.”

I nod softly, feeling a weightlifting off my shoulders. “Thank you,” I say. Then a thought strikes me. “I need to ask another favor from you.”

“What is it, baby?”

“I went to the auction house with my dad’s truck, and I don’t know if you can find a way to get it out of there?”

“I can do that,” he answers, then eyes me, his eyes flaring with want. “Now, kiss me,” he orders.

## Chapter Six

Roman

I can’t fucking believe this...

Bella is Bella Flint, Warren’s daughter.

My friend’s little girl. He used to send me photos of her, though more often photos of the childish art she made while growing up. He was so proud of her when she decided to study art history. It had been a while since I’d received an update on her, and many years since I saw a photo of her. I had no idea.

Oh fuck.

But as she closes her soft lips over mine, my thoughts evaporate and I push my worries aside, savoring the taste of her. I slide one hand into her hair and the other around her waist, holding her close. Her lips move tentatively over mine as if searching and teasing, her hands clutching my shoulders. I nip at her lower lip and gently suck it into my mouth, teasing out a moan. She deepens the kiss, sliding her tongue against mine in an erotic dance.

My hard cock weeps in my shorts as she unconsciously grinds over it, her hands caressing my chest and back. The need to slide into her warm heat fills me, causing my cock to jerk. My breath trembles as I break the kiss, striving for control. My hands frame the back of her head and I draw her close, pressing my forehead against hers, our chests softly heaving from the thorough kiss.

“You’re sore, baby. We can’t do anything,” I whisper, trying to remind myself why I can’t fuck her right now.

“Okay,” she replies, her lips against mine.

I pull my head back, taking in her dilated eyes and swollen lips. “You’re so tempting,” I say, leaning in to kiss her lips, and then I stand, pulling her up with me as she giggles in response.

For a few seconds, I stare at her laughing gaze, mesmerized by her. I don’t know how this happened, but I don’t think I can ever imagine being without her. The overwhelming emotion fills me, and I remember again that she’s Warren’s daughter.

What the hell am I doing?

“Are you alright?” Bella asks, her gaze softening with concern as she takes in my

rigid stance and the subtle tightening of my arms around her waist.

“I’m fine. I just remembered some work I need to finish up. I might have to be in my home office for a few minutes,” I say, feeling guilty.

“Oh, that’s okay. I’m going to have a bath while you do that,” she says with a warm smile.

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“It won’t take long, baby. I promise. And after that, we’ll eat breakfast and I’ll give you a tour of the house.”

She slides her arms around my neck. “I can’t wait,” she says, rising on tiptoe and pressing a lingering kiss to my lips.

I deepen the kiss, taking my time to savor her lips, feeling the need to make up for a lot of things. Then I gently release her, giving her a warm smile. “Later,” I say, then I head out of the room, taking the image of her beautiful, smiling face with me.

As I reach the ground floor, I make a beeline for the kitchen, going straight to the coffee machine. Bella’s revelation makes me crave something strong. I pour the ground coffee beans into the machine and set it running. In a few minutes, I have a mug of steaming hot coffee in hand as I look out through the full-length window that looks out over my very large, private back yard. I take a sip of the black coffee, savoring the punch in my throat as I take in the view.

My mind travels back to Bella, and one question rises in my thoughts. Would I still have taken her if I knew she was Warren’s daughter? And the answer is yes. I’m sane enough to know that my attraction to her is magnetic. Something I’ve never experienced with any woman. She brings out a side of me that I didn’t think existed, and there’s no doubt that I’m falling in love with her.

And now, I’m lying to her about knowing her father. A man I considered my friend for most of my life. I should have just come clean, but for some reason the words didn’t come out.

It feels taboo, knowing I'm sleeping with my friend's daughter. If Warren was alive, I don't think he would approve. He'd think I'm too old for her, and he never really condoned my shadier dealings. But I know I would still have met her sooner or later, and the pull between us would be just as undeniable.

I'm not going to lie to her forever, but right now, I need to get used to the fact that I might have betrayed my friend.

I remember Bella's suspicion about her father's death. I've had the same suspicions ever since I heard of Warren's suicide, but with her information about the intruder and the access card, I know his death is even more suspicious than I imagined it to be. I've been dealing in stolen art for a long time, and I've been attending the auctions at the chapel for as long as that, and I've never come across Warren there. Which is why I told Bella that I'd be hiring a PI.

The only person I can think of who can do a thorough enough job is Damien Hart. He has ties in the underworld criminal organization just as I do, and also works for some of the most powerful people in the city. I wouldn't consider us to be close friends, but I've met him on multiple occasions and I know he's a cold bastard with a code of honor.

I take another gulp of coffee, feeling the warmth as it travels down my throat, and then I head toward the left corner of the house where my home office is situated. Once inside the office, I dial Damien's number, and he answers the call on the first ring.

"It's Roman West," I say, knowing he isn't one for small talk.

"Oh, Roman. What can I do for you?" he asks.

I recline deeper in my seat, looking at the artwork on the walls, some of which is



Warren's. "I want to hire you for a job. It's about the death of Warren Flint," I say, then go ahead to explain the circumstances around his death and my and Bella's suspicions.

"Do you have any leads?" Damien asks.

I pause, trying to piece my theory together. "I'm going to be straightforward and say that he was murdered. First, I find it fishy that he had an access card to the chapel, especially when I know that he never dealt in stolen artifacts. Any art he owned was bought legally, which leads me to believe that he got the access card for something else. Another thing I find suspicious is the fact that only one of his pieces is missing, which leads me to believe it contains some sort of evidence that someone doesn't want to be found."

"Okay, I'll investigate further. I'll find a way to get the police report on the crime scene and death. But, you have to understand that it may just be an accident or suicide as reported. We can't rule that out yet," Damien states, his tone brusque and succinct.

"Understood."

"I would like to see the access card, and also need access to the house that was broken into to check for fingerprints and more evidence," he says.

"No problem, I'll arrange for everything."

"Good. I'll get back to you once I have something."

"Alright," I reply, ending the call.

Damien's warning replays in my mind. Could Warren's death truly be an accident? I shake my head in denial. I can't wrap my mind around the fact that he might have

truly wanted to kill himself. It just doesn't add up with my knowledge of him.

I exhale softly. Right now, there's nothing much I can do but wait for Damien's verdict. With that thought, I push back my seat, rising to my feet.

Bella should be done with her bath. A fond smile pulls at my lips at the thought of her. At forty, I had given up on the thought of falling in love, least of all with a woman half my age. I didn't think I had the emotional capacity.

I always believed people like me didn't get to have happily ever afters. That I didn't deserve forever, given my background and profession. But having Bella around has proven to me that I have the capacity to feel strongly for another human, and also to be the object of happiness for someone else.

Now that I have her, I intend to keep her. With that thought, I walk out of the office, eager to be in her presence again. As I enter the living room, I hear a humming sound and trace it to the kitchen to find Bella, wearing nothing but my shirt, dancing to a throaty tune while stirring something in the pan in front of her. I relax and rest my shoulder against the doorframe, watching her with a smile on my face.

"I thought I would order breakfast—I didn't think I'd find you in here putting on the best show ever," I finally say after a few minutes.

She snaps her head up, blushing profusely. "How long have you been standing there?" she asks with a shy smile.

My smile widens and I straighten, slipping my hands into my pockets. "Long enough to know that you dance well," I reply, walking deeper into the kitchen until I'm standing by her side.

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I turn her around and give her a deep, lingering kiss. “I didn’t know you could cook,” I say as I pull back, taking in the fried bacon and sausages.

She smiles and turns back to the skillet. “Well, I had to learn early on in life if I didn’t want my dad and I to starve.” She glances at me with a wistful smile. “My dad, God rest his soul, was a great artist, but he could be nonchalant about everything else around him when he was in work mode. So, I decided to learn how to cook for us both.” She scoops out the last batch of bacon.

My smile dims as she talks about Warren. This should be the time I tell her I knew her father, but still the words don’t come out, and I feel overshadowed by my guilt.

Not yet.

I push it to the back of my mind and slip my hands around her from behind, pressing kisses to her neck and jaw, delighting in her happy giggles and hoping I don’t ever lose this feeling.

## Chapter Seven

Bella

The evening air in the garden is warm and smooth on my skin. I’m lying on a soft, thick blanket, naked as day I was born—except for the intricate gold anklet Roman gifted me early this morning. My gaze shifts to his face above the wide easel as he paints me, and I can’t help the smile that tips my lips. There’s a slight growth of beard on his chin, adding to his sharp features. All he needs is an eye patch and he

would pass for a pirate.

A rogue, sexy-ass pirate...

I love how his face is all scrunched up in concentration, and the way he bites the tip of the brush when he's trying to get a shade right. It's so endearing that I giggle silently, unable to imagine his expression when I tell him how cute I find his habit.

I sigh softly as I think about the blissful bubble I've been in since I met Roman. The more I spend time with him, the softer the painful memories grow. Everything just seems to work out with him and around him. The air is lighter and the sky seems brighter. Even his home is a dream. The backyard is bordered by a hill, and surrounded by lovely trees, and the house somehow feels both traditional and modern at the same time.

This feeling of perfection scares me, yet I don't ever want it to end.

I don't want to leave...

My final year of college starts soon, and I'm honestly not looking forward to going back to NYU.

Still in my thoughts, I exhale aloud, already feeling bereft about leaving Roman.

"What is it, baby?" Roman asks, his concerned tone penetrating my thoughts. "You don't seem happy, and that is your second sigh," he points out, putting down the paintbrush.

I slide my gaze up to his, feeling melancholic. "It's nothing serious. I'm just thinking about going back to college. And I honestly don't want to...leave," I whisper, suddenly feeling shy.

He reaches my side in quick strides and settles beside me, his right arm bracketing my body. He leans close until I can see the excitement and desire in his smoky gray eyes. “Are you sure?” he asks, his tone curious and his gaze searching.

I nod, unable to speak.

And I watch his handsome face brighten with a wide smile, making my heart race and my blood sing. He leans down to press a kiss into my throat, sending a jolt of desire through my body. I inhale sharply, arching my neck as he trails kisses up to my ear.

“Would you consider transferring to a college in Seattle?” he asks, his lips beside my ear, sending shivers down my spine.

“Why?” I ask softly, turning to face him.

“Because I don’t want you to leave either,” he says, his eyes dark with determination and need.

A huge smile widens my lips, and my heart melts at his words. I close my lips over his, kissing him with all the excitement I feel.

He pulls me to a sitting position, deepening the kiss, his lips firm and soft, awakening my desire. I moan softly into his mouth, sliding my hands beneath his sweatshirt. My hands feverishly glide over his hard, lean muscles, trailing over his warm, golden skin. He licks my lips, his teeth catching my bottom lip and biting gently. My hands find his nipples and I graze my fingers over them. Roman groans aloud, the sound of his pleasure sliding over me like a caress.

One of his hands slides into the back of my hair and the other glides up my thighs, grazing my sensitive skin until it rests on the curve of my neck. Goose bumps dot my flesh and my skin goes warm under his palm. His lips move sensuously over mine, as

if he can't get enough.

This kiss is different than the others we've shared. It's searing and soul stealing, and at same time it's reverent and sweet. Intimacy with Roman is like a thrilling adventure—it just gets better and better, and I must confess that I'm a willing participant for the ride.

The need to feel his skin against mine rides at me until it's all I can think about as his hands tease my flesh. I quickly break the kiss, breathing hard as I push up his sweatshirt, urging it over his head. Roman assists me until it's off, then he chucks it over his shoulder. We stare hungrily at each other, panting heavily. His upper body gleams under the sunset, making his muscles seem more defined and inviting. My mouth waters with the need to stroke his skin and lick him all over.

I take in his wild and harsh gaze, so blatantly filled with his desire for me, and his firm, swollen lips, slightly parted. It makes my nipples go heavy and my sex flood with wetness. I don't know who moves first, but suddenly we're back in each other's arms, kissing with intensity.

My nipples pebble and grow under his touch, and I break the kiss and arch my back to his sensory assault, my hands gliding over the hard planes of his body. He gently rolls my nipples then leans down to slowly lap at each one with his tongue. Wetness floods my insides and I jerk into his mouth, clutching the hair at his nape.

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“Roman,” I whimper as he takes a nipple between his teeth and nips at it.

My core spasms and the ache blooms. I grow hotter as he closes his mouth over a nub and sucks deep into his warm mouth. My breath explodes in my chest at the sensations, the suction, rendering me almost mindless and helpless to his touch. He moves to the other tight nipple, sucking and nipping. I moan low in my throat, squeezing my thighs as my sex tightens in response.

My hands slide down his back and I slip them into his shorts, clutching his tight ass cheeks. Feeling bolder, I move a hand to his front, closing it over his hardening shaft. His cock jerks in my hands and Roman groans. The sound washes over me and spurs me on. My grip tightens and I slide it up his shaft. He lets go of my nipples and raises his head.

Our gazes clash and I inhale sharply at the molten desire swimming in the depths of his gray eyes. “I want to touch you,” I rasp, pushing down his shorts.

He rises to his feet, dislodging my hands and yanking off his shorts. He throws them aside and lies on the blanket beside me, his glistening cock hard and erect. “I’m all yours, baby,” he says in a rough tone, arranging his arms behind his head.

My breath seizes as I take in the sight of Roman in all of his glory. I haven’t had the time to really see the whole of his body, and now I can’t take my gaze off him. His cock is thick and long, curving slightly, and a drop of precum wells up at the tip under my stare. My mouth waters with the need to lick it off him, but I shift my gaze upward when I see a long scar at his right side.

My eyes widen as I trace it with my fingertips. “What happened to you here?” I ask, grazing my thumb on the spot as I look up at him.

“I had a different upbringing, baby. And I’ll tell you all about it later. Right now, I need you,” he says softly, and I gasp at the deep need in his eyes.

I know his need to have my hands on him is as strong as my need to touch him. So I sit up and slide my thighs over his lap, my legs on either side of him. I lean down to press a lingering kiss on his lips, and then I slide my mouth down to his throat, reveling in his low groan. My hands grow bolder, gliding over his shoulders and chest, and I look up to find his harsh gaze on mine. Then I swirl my tongue around a nipple and suck while watching him. He jerks in my arms, his arms tightening and his breath growing harsher with each suck.

Heat blooms and grows inside me at his response. I slide my hands sensually all over him, trailing nips and soothing kisses down his chest to his abdomen until his hands reach out to grip my shoulders.

“No touching,” I purr in a husky voice filled with need. I know that all bets are off when his hands touch my body. Just a slight graze of his hands and I’m trembling with need.

“Too late, baby,” he growls, then pulls me until my nipples graze his chest and my whole body tightens.

“I haven’t pleased you yet,” I say with disapproval, my body humming with desire as he grinds his cock against my core.

“I know, baby. I want to do the same,” he rasps, still wreaking havoc as he grinds against me. Suddenly he stops and orders in a guttural tone, “Turn around.”



I do as he says, facing his hard cock with my sex turned toward his face. I can feel myself growing even wetter at the thought of what's going to happen next. He leans in, his beard tickling my inner thighs, and I tremble, unable to concentrate.

"I can't feel your hands or mouth on me, baby. Do you want me to stop?" he asks. His breath puffs against my sex and sends warm shivers through my body.

"N-no," I say, then slowly lick the precum at the tip of his cock.

He jerks and groans against my flesh. Two can play this game...

I smile and gently close my mouth on the tip of his cock and suck hard. The hands holding my thighs tighten. Then I feel the heat of his mouth before he sucks my swollen and achy clit. I moan low in my throat as I encircle his thick girth and slide his cock deeper into my mouth, sucking hard. My thighs tremble as he slowly pushes two fingers into my aching channel and I tighten convulsively around them. He slides his fingers in and out, grazing sensitive nerves and triggering moans and whimpers. My mouth tightens around him in response and I suck him deeper until I gag.

He jerks hard, pushing his cock deeper, and my throat expands to accommodate him. "Fuck, Bella," he grunts harshly. Then he releases my thighs and pulls me up by the waist, dislodging my mouth from his cock.

"I need to be inside you, right now," he growls. "Turn around, baby." He urges my body to turn around until I comply.

He lifts me, lining up his hard shaft against my soaked slit. I slowly slide down onto his cock, wetness flooding my channel, lubricating my walls, allowing his shaft to slide deeper. Then, Roman slams into me from below, triggering a sudden orgasm.

"Oh God!" I shout.

It's sharp and fast. My fingers rake his sides as I clench hard on his shaft. He doesn't wait or let up, starting to drive into me as if possessed, stroking the nerves in my walls and triggering aftershocks. His movements are precise and passionate as he enters me stroke for stroke. Before long, I'm moving with him, sliding over his cock. The position makes me feel every stroke of his flesh inside me, deeper and fuller than I've ever known.

My soft whimpers turn into moans, and they mingle with his grunts of pleasure, drifting into the warm air. Heat flares up inside me, gripping my mind and filling it with unrestrained pleasure and the need to climax again. I can't take it anymore. I lean down until my upper body rests on his and my hands grips his shoulders.

His strokes go even deeper and I freeze, gripping him hard. "Roman!" I cry out as another orgasm washes over me.

But he doesn't let up. I'm a trembling and quivering mess as he strokes faster. My gaze goes to his eyes and I can't look away. The rawness and deep-seated hunger in them holds me hostage, and I'm a willing slave to it.

"P-please. I-I can't," I sob as a tidal wave of pleasure rises inside me.

"You can, baby. Just one more," he says in a tone harsh with need.

This time, the ache is fervent and urgent, rising from the depths of my gut. My sobbing moans ring aloud with every driving thrust, and I'm so mindless with the need to come that it scares me. Roman suddenly jackknifes, flipping us over so my back is on the blanket and he's above me, thrusting hard and not breaking his gaze or stride.

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His thrusts become urgent, going deeper and stroking every sensitive nerve inside me. Then, he slams deep and I detonate. “Roman!” I scream, convulsing hard in his arms as wave after wave of pleasure slams into me and my sex clenches hard around him.

“Fuck, Bella, I love you!” he shouts hoarsely, jerking hard as he spurts his release inside me.

### Chapter Eight

#### Roman

I turn my car onto the street where I live. After living most of my life in the city, I yearned for the quiet of the country, so I purchased this property deep in the suburbs. It’s the last house on the street. Huge enough to meet my need for space and privacy, while also being near the beauty of nature. And it’s the only place I’ve found that’s close enough to the city so I can meet my clients and then go back to the comfort of my home. Due to the nature of my business, I keep the location of my home private and always meet with clients at my office or theirs.

My home is my safe haven, and I always feel grateful for it when I return home after work or a business deal. It only takes a shot of brandy and a stroll through my garden to feel content. Now, knowing I have someone I love waiting for me at home gives me the utmost pleasure. Especially after a stressful business meeting.

#### Fucking Sergio...

The creep who wanted to buy my Bella. Before now, I’ve only ever seen him at the

auction house and sometimes at high-stakes events. We were never in the same circles, and he's too greedy and sadistic for me to work with.

So I found it strange that he approached the bikers I have an alliance with, claiming to be an old friend of mine with a stolen antiquity he knows I've been looking for. He insisted he needed to meet with me in person.

I wouldn't have left Bella by herself, but if Sergio was up to something I wanted to gather as much information as possible.

Why did he want to see me? My confusion goes up a notch as I wonder about his motive, and I frown slightly, thinking I might have underestimated the fucker. He knows I would never buy the artifact off him, no matter how desperate I am, yet he showed up with it anyway. I'm starting to think it was a ruse to get me to meet with him, but if it was meant to be a trap, it didn't work. He could never get to me on the Dragons MC territory—they're too loyal to me. So we parted ways without making the deal.

I dismiss all thoughts of him. Sergio might think he's powerful, but I have far-reaching connections that he isn't aware of. I didn't grow up in the street just to end up without the right alliances.

With that, I close down any thoughts of work, feeling elation at the thought of seeing Bella again. My fingers tap the wheel rhythmically, eager to get back to her side.

Thoughts of her leaving for college fill my mind, and my heart constricts. Although I've suggested that she transfer to a college nearby, she hasn't given me her response.

Now that I think about it, asking her to change schools for me sounds selfish. After losing her father in the most gruesome way, she should have something stable and constant that she can hold on to. And if that means leaving Seattle and going to New

York with her, then I don't have to think twice.

The few days that I've spent with her have been the best days I've ever known. There is no doubt that I need her in my life. If she isn't around me, I'll go back to being the shell of a man I was, aiming to stay on top without truly embracing life. Bella is filled with the brightest of colors, lighting up my life. And I'll fight to the death to have that light and keep those colors shining bright no matter what.

Even though she hasn't expressed it in the same words, I have no doubt of her feelings for me. So, wherever she goes, I'll gladly trail behind.

As I drive up to the house, thoughts of Warren flit through my mind. I know I should tell her. Now, knowing everything I feel for her, holding on to that knowledge seems silly.

The garage door slides up and I drive inside, parking the car next to my motorcycle. One of these days, I'll take Bella for a ride on it. Knowing her, she'll be thrilled. I smile to myself as I imagine her fiery red hair flying out from beneath the helmet, her arms gripping me tight and her boisterous laughter wrapping around me.

When I enter the living room and see Bella, my heart melts and my anxiety flies out the window. She's sitting on one of the couches, dressed in the same blue-and-green sequin dress she wore on the day of the auction, her head bent over a photograph.

"Hey, baby," I say, smiling softly.

My smile slowly dies as she looks up, her soft brown eyes filled with unshed tears. "What's wrong, baby? What's going on?" I ask, walking closer.

She stands up instantly, pushing out her hand. "Stop right there. Don't come any closer," she orders in a trembling voice.

My gaze shifts to her other hand, holding tightly to the picture, and unease settles in my gut. “Baby. Whatever it is, we can sort it out,” I say gently, my heart tightening. But I know of only one thing that could make her this heartbroken.

Stupid. Why didn’t I just fucking tell her right away?

She pushes the photo in my face, her hands trembling. It’s an image of Warren and me, laughing into the camera, our arms wrapped around each other’s shoulders.

“I trusted you,” she whispers. “I asked if you knew my dad, and you said nothing. Why?”

My chest tightens at her words. “Baby...”

“Stop,” she interrupts. “I don’t want to hear your excuses. What’s your relationship with my father?”

I sigh. “Your dad and I were good friends,” I say, nodding at her shocked expression. “When I lived on the streets, I used to sneak into the nearby public school and stay for classes, especially the art classes—that’s where I met him. He left for college, but then years later, we met at an art conference and rekindled our friendship. But...given the nature of my job, I didn’t want my friends mixed up in my world, especially Warren, so I distanced myself.”

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My heart is breaking as I take in her sad expression, but I continue, “He told me about you, used to send me photos, but it was a long time since I’d seen a photo and you’ve grown up so much...I swear I had no idea you were his daughter until you told me about him. Baby, I’m so sorry.”

She waves me off. “I don’t want to hear it. Do you know anything about his death? Did you cause his death? Did you invite him to the auction house?”

Her voice gains momentum with every question and her eyes are fierce and bold on mine despite the tears trailing down her cheeks. Even though I know she’s hurting, her words feel like the stab of a knife, twisting deeper into my gut.

I exhale softly. “No, I don’t know anything about Warren’s death. He was a dear friend that I’ll always cherish. I never invited him to the auction house—although we were from two different worlds, we always respected each other’s boundaries.”

Then I admit, “Warren might have been doing things the right way, but I’m not surprised that he knew something about the other side of things. When I heard of his death and the missing art, I knew something wasn’t right. It’s the reason I attended the auction that night. I got word that his stolen piece might be sold, and I wanted to buy it. Maybe it holds a clue...but then I didn’t see it in the lineup that night. And things didn’t turn out the way I planned. I met you and I lost all my senses.”

I pause for a reaction to my last sentence, but all I see is a flicker of sadness that disappears again like nothing happened, so I continue. “When you told me about the access card, it confirmed my suspicions. I’ve never seen Warren at the auction house, so I knew the access card had to be newly acquired, and it also ties his death to the

auction house. That's why I suggested hiring a private investigator, and I've done that. All I'm waiting for is his feedback."

"Good. When you get a call from the PI, you know where to find me," she says in a dead voice.

My heart constricts painfully. "Baby, I wanted to tell you..."

"Then, why didn't you?" she interrupts. "You had plenty of time to come clean. Why did you hide that bit of information?" She slowly wipes the tears from her eyes and exhales softly, "You know what? I can't be here right now. I need space." She walks past me toward the door.

"Bella—"

"I can't do this, Roman," she snaps, her eyes blazing with anger. "I need to think. Let me go. Please."

I stand in place and watch her open the front door, immediately feeling bereft at her absence.

No!

I can't let the only woman I love walk out of my life without a fight. Bella is mine. She has been since that first time I saw her, and I won't let her run at the first sign of trouble. Even though it's my fault.

I jump into action and reach the entrance in quick strides. I open the door and jog down the driveway in time to see Bella entering a black taxi. I frown in confusion, wondering how a cab was just idling in front of my house, when I notice the absence of a plate number as they drive away.



Fuck! It's a trap.

"Fuck!" I run back to the house, my heart pounding with fear. I swipe the keys to my bike and rush to the garage.

I just fucking watched the love of my life get kidnapped.

I should have been more careful. I shouldn't have let her out of my sight. Thoughts race through my mind as I rev the engine and drive off, making sure to keep the taxi in my sights.

## Chapter Nine

Bella

Am I overreacting?

I don't think so, I think as I slam the door of Roman's house and stomp down the driveway to the gate.

Tears cloud my vision again and I immediately wipe them away. Every step puts distance between us, and I feel my chest tightening with pain, as if the tether holding us together is growing taut.

The only word that rings in my mind is: Why?

Why didn't he tell me he knew my dad? If he was shocked the first time I mentioned him, he should have told me any other time. There were opportunities to come clean, and he didn't, which only made finding out more painful.

I remember Roman's words about how he met my father, and I feel a pang of pain in

my heart for the young boy who had to fend for himself. Despite my current anger, it makes me glad to know that he had my father in his corner growing up.

Luckily, a cab is idling in front of the house. Perfect.

I open the door to ask if they can take me downtown, and I'm greeted by the sight of a man dressed all in black, sitting in the back seat. He's holding a gun, pointed in my direction, and he says, "Hello, Bella. Don't turn around. Don't scream. Get in the car, or I will shoot you."

My mind goes blank with panic, and the adrenaline from the fight with Roman is replaced with a fear that overtakes me completely. I couldn't scream even if I wanted to—there's not enough breath in my lungs.

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Silently, I get into the back seat of the car, and the driver pulls away from the curb.

I turn to face the stranger. “Who are you?” I ask in a strong tone that masks my fear.

My eyes adjust to the darkness in the car and I see a dangerous-looking man with cruel eyes and a permanent sneer.

“W-what do you want from me?” I stutter, trying to control my erratic heartbeat.

“Nothing serious. If you answer my questions correctly and give me what I want, then I’ll let you go,” he says, and I nod nervously.

“Where is your father’s last artwork?” he asks in a harsh tone. “The one that went missing after his death.”

I stare back in confusion. “I don’t know. It’s missing.”

He cocks the gun and jams it into my forehead. My heart races hard in fear. “Don’t fuck with me—where is the fuck is it!” he snaps, his eyes taking on a sinister glint.

I open my mouth, but words refuse to come. Fear is clogging my throat. Besides, I don’t know what to say. I have no idea where my father’s missing piece is.

“I’ll fucking blow your brains out if you don’t tell me where you’ve kept it. Did you give it to your boyfriend? Or did you trade it for letting you go?” he sneers, sliding the gun suggestively down to my cleavage as he trails his creepy eyes over my body.

Distaste coats my mouth as I shiver in fear. What have I done?

Suddenly, I'm drowning in regret about my accusations toward Roman before I left. I remember the hurt that he tried to mask. I can't believe I accused him of knowing about my father's death, even though I know deep down he had no hand in it. My anger was like a bitterness that I needed to expel, and he was there to receive it.

I should never have left. I should have stayed and resolved any misunderstanding.

I shouldn't have walked out on Roman, and now I'm going to die without telling him how I feel about him.

Suddenly, the car jerks, racing forward. The gun slips from my face and fires beside me, missing me by a few inches. I gasp in shock and freeze, my heart now a drum, resounding in my head as fear becomes a familiar taste.

"What the fuck, Luca?" the stranger snaps at the driver. "I almost fucking killed her without getting the information we need."

"Sorry, Silas," the driver jeers. "We're being followed. Maybe I should slow down for him to catch up?" he snaps sarcastically.

"You don't have to be a fucking dick," Silas mutters.

He turns around to look behind us, and I follow suit. A man is racing behind the taxi on a motorcycle at full speed. The rider has on a black helmet, but I know with every fiber of my being that it's Roman.

I exhale softly in relief. Still, fear grips me at the thought of him being hurt. I know he can handle himself, but these people are erratic and one of them has a weapon.

“Hurry the fuck up, Luca—get us to a freeway so we can lose him,” Silas snaps, pushing his head into the space between the front seats.

“Don’t fucking tell me how to do my job! I don’t interfere in yours, or do I?” Luca retorts as he maneuvers the car.

“Shut the fuck up and drive.”

Roman suddenly revs the motorcycle to pull through traffic and come up next to the car. I gasp when he boldly jerks the motorcycle toward the car, causing Luca to almost lose control of the vehicle as he swerves to avoid a collision.

“Luca, don’t fucking stop the car, run him over!” Silas shouts.

“If we crash into him we’re dead, you moron,” Luca snaps back.

“Then do something. We can’t let him have her.”

The two bicker as Luca takes a sudden turn away from Roman. The car is fast, shooting down side streets and alleyways, but on his motorcycle, Roman is faster and can get through spaces where the car can’t fit.

Soon the motorcycle is gaining on us again, and the car has entered a narrow road with few ways to escape. I realize Roman might have been herding us here on purpose, as the car is forced to slow down.

I look around and contemplate opening the door and rolling out of the car since we’re driving at a slower speed. My injuries would be minimal, and there’s little chance of Roman getting injured. But as I move to open the door, pain bites into my scalp as Silas pulls at my hair. Tears well up in my eyes at the sharp ache.

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“And where the fuck do you think you’re going?” he grits out, pulling me back until he wraps his arm tightly around my neck.

Luca turns around to face us. “Stop choking her. The boss wants her in one piece,” he says.

“That’s if we get out of here alive,” Silas retorts, but thankfully he removes his arm from around my neck.

Luca’s distraction causes him to finally lose control of the car, and we slam into a dumpster, the airbag flying into Luca’s face. Though the jolt is sudden, we’re not going fast enough to cause any real damage. Aside from my pounding heart and an ache where the seat belt dug into my body, I appear to be unharmed.

Before Luca can say anything else, the door at his side flies open and Roman slams a punch into his temple. Another to the jaw, knocking him out instantly. Silas quickly presses the gun to my temple and whispers harshly into my ear, “Open the fucking door.”

I comply and he pushes me out of the car, the gun against my temple as Roman rolls a passed out Luca to the ground. I notice the change in his stance the moment he realizes the compromising position I’m in with Silas.

He slams the driver side door loudly. “Let her go.”

Although soft, his tone carries a threatening undertone. There’s a tic in his jaw, and the slight twitch in his hand indicates his fury.

Silas's voice trembles slightly as he says, "I'll let her go if you give me Donovan's last artwork or tell me its whereabouts."

"Really?" Roman says, cocking his head, his gray eyes growing colder with every second, showing no indication of the man who smiles lovingly at me or shares his affection freely. This is another side of him that I've never seen, and now I understand why he was feared at the auction house.

Silas's hand trembles slightly and the gun wavers against my temple as he audibly swallows. "Yes, I promise."

"I'll give you one more pass. Let her go in one piece, and I won't fucking kill you where you stand," Roman states softly, then arches a brow. "You know, I really underestimated Sergio. I knew his intent to sell me that piece was a ruse. So, it turns out he wanted to draw me out so I would lead you guys to my place."

As Roman reveals that he knows who their boss is, I watch him stealthily extract a knife from his pocket. I know what he intends to do.

No, I can't let him have a death on his conscience.

My gaze meets his and I silently plead with my eyes. He shifts his gaze away from mine, and I know I have to do something. If there's one thing that's certain, it's Roman's unwavering love for me.

And I also know he'll do anything to defend and protect the people he loves, because it's not an emotion he gives easily.

With that thought in mind, I bite deeply into the arm around my neck. Silas howls and releases my neck, the gun clattering to the ground. I quickly move away from him just as Roman rushes at him and tackles him to the ground. I hear loud grunts as

Roman lays two punches in his stomach, then another to his jaw, and Silas passes out just like Luca.

Roman rushes over, dragging me into his arms. “Fuck, baby. Thank God you’re safe. I was so fucking terrified when I heard that gunshot,” he says in an agonized whisper.

His hand tightens convulsively around my waist, and the other glides soothingly over my hair. I wrap my arms around his waist, gripping him tightly as I lay my head on his chest. His heart is pounding hard against my ear, and I notice a slight tremble in the hand caressing my head.

“Thank you for coming to save me,” I whisper, feeling so stupid now for my earlier outburst.

Roman pulls back, his concerned gaze holding mine. “It’s my fault. I’m so sorry, baby. I should have told you I was your dad’s friend. At first I was shocked when you told me, and later...being with you felt like I had betrayed my friend.”

“I’m sorry too...but I’m not mad at you for not telling me, not anymore. I think I was really just...running from my feelings. The way I feel about you, Roman—it’s this overwhelming emotion that scares me. I’ve never felt like this about anyone before. But I don’t ever want to run from you again—it hurts to be without you. I love you, Roman,” I whisper, tears welling up in my eyes.

His gaze searches mine, his eyes bright with happiness. “Bella, I love you so much. You are the brightest light in my life, and without you I’m not whole. Marry me. Please.” His gaze is sure and true.

I freeze in his arms at the unexpected marriage proposal. We’re standing in the middle of the street, my kidnappers knocked out a few feet away, and I know there’s no one else I’d rather spend the rest of my life with. “Yes, I will marry you,” I



whisper, and my heart sighs as his gray eyes turn soft and tender.

He leans down to take my lips in a soft, sweet kiss that lasts long enough for us to pant softly after it ends. My arms slide up to wrap around his neck. “What about them?” I ask, nodding in the direction of Silas and Luca.

“Don’t worry about them. I’ll call some people to come pick them up and question them. They’re a link to your father’s death,” Roman answers.

At his words, my mind goes back to his revelation about their boss. “How did you know they work for Sergio?” I ask with a frown.

“That creep was the reason for my business meeting today,” he explains. “He approached a bikers club I’m associated with, claiming he was a friend who wanted to sell an artifact to me. The one holding the gun to your head was with him, but I just thought he was a bodyguard. I knew his aim to sell the art piece to me was just a cover for something else. It wasn’t until I saw the fucker holding you hostage that I put it all together.”

I shiver slightly at Sergio’s plan. If it hadn’t been for Roman, I would have ended up just like my dad.

“It’s okay baby. I’ll never let anyone hurt you again,” Roman says. He slides his hand down my waist to grab my hand. “Let’s go home,” he says, leading me to his motorcycle.

Epilogue

Roman

One year later...

“Thank you, Mr. Vincent. I’ll get back to you soon,” I say, ending the call.

This client intends to pay millions for a piece of art that’s been missing from the public for more than twenty years. He claims it belonged to his family before it was swindled off his grandfather. When an artifact like that is considered missing, it’s in someone else’s private collection and very hard to retrieve. But that’s why he reached out to me—no matter how coveted a piece of art is, most collectors are greedy and would sell for the right price.

Just like the art I recently acquired.

My gaze shifts to the beautiful painting displayed against the wall of my home office and a wide smile pulls at my lips. It’s a gift I got Bella for her graduation. One of Warren’s earlier pieces—a painting of Bella when she was a child. In it, Bella is depicted as a young girl walking through a field of flowers. Warren’s masterful use of color really captures the way the summer sunlight glints off of young Bella’s red hair.

She had mentioned in passing how she would like to see the painting again. And now it’s here, after a series of connecting calls and palm greasing.

It wasn’t easy to retrieve, especially when the owner blatantly refused to part with it.

But, after some thorough research to find his most coveted artifact—because people like him always have something that they desire more—I found his weakness. And when I got my hand on the artifact he most desired, it was easy to negotiate and trade for Bella’s gift.

It arrived just in time. The ceremony is tomorrow, and I want to surprise her with it today, when she’ll have enough time to appreciate it.

Speaking of my wife, I push back my seat, remembering that I told her to wait for me in the living room. I pick up the covered painting and walk out of the office. A little smile tugs at my lips as I draw closer to the living area.

“Baby?” I call.

“In here,” she replies in a muffled voice.

I frown slightly, balancing the piece against the wall before heading into the kitchen. My eyes widen and a fond smile tugs at my lips as I find Bella standing in front of a huge ice cream carton.

“Baby? Why are you eating ice cream directly from the container?” I ask with a slight chuckle as she swallows a spoonful. I walk to stand behind her and slip my hands around her waist.

“It tastes better this way,” she replies as she turns in my arms.

I laugh softly, shaking my head at her. “That’s just so wrong, but I love you anyway,” I whisper against her smile before taking her lips in mine.

My tongue explores her mouth, the taste of vanilla mingling with the naturally intoxicating taste of her. I slowly break the kiss. “Come. I have a surprise gift for

you,” I say, gently pulling her along with me.

We walk into the living room and I gently push her down onto the sofa. Then, I pick up the wrapped painting and place it in her lap. “Happy graduation, baby,” I say, looking into her soft gaze.

“Oh, thank you!” she exclaims with a quick smile.

Then she turns her attention to the gift, painstakingly unwrapping the brown paper until she reveals the art. She looks up at me, gasping in shock. “Oh my God. Roman, how...how did you find it?” she whispers, her voice thick with tears as she reverently slides her hands over the surface.

“I made some calls, and the man was able to settle for the right price,” I say.

She places the artwork beside her and shifts closer to me. “Oh, Roman. This is the best gift. Thank you,” she whispers, hugging me tight. “I love you so much.”

I slide my hands up her back. “I love you too, baby.” I straighten and cup her cheek as I steadily gaze into her eyes. “I’m so proud of you and how far you’ve come. Your father would have been proud of you. Remember that I’ll do anything for you, baby. I’ll always make sure you’re happy,” I whisper, feeling elated for bringing that sparkle of excitement to her soft brown eyes.

“I know.” Her hand reaches up to cover mine on her cheek and her eyes go tender with warmth and love. “I have some great news for you,” she says softly.

“Really? What’s the news?” I ask, my fingers gently grazing her soft cheeks.

“You’re going to be a father,” she says, smiling warmly.

I stare at her in shock, wondering if I heard her right. “What?”

Her lips stretch wider with a smile. “I’m pregnant, Roman,” she says, giggling.

My eyes widen and an overwhelming feeling of joy fills me. My hand goes to her still-flat stomach and an intense feeling of love fills my heart for our unborn baby. I never thought I would ever fall in love, or ever bring a child into this world. I hadn’t wanted any of these things, because I thought I didn’t deserve them.

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Then, Bella came into my life and turned all my doubts around. My life makes so much sense with her.

“We’re having a baby,” I breathe out, and then my smile widens. “I love you,” I say as I lean in to kiss her lips. “Thank you,” I whisper, pressing another kiss to her mouth.

Then another. And another, until I close my lips on hers, kissing her fully. My whole body thrums with excitement as I slowly lick her lips and suck them in my mouth.

“Roman, the ice cream,” Bella says against my lips, breaking the kiss.

“Don’t worry about it,” I breathe out, drawing her lips into mine for another kiss.

Her hands slip to the back of my head and she pulls me back, breaking the kiss. “It will melt,” she whispers in disbelief.

“I’ll buy you a thousand more cartons,” I answer.

Bella gapes. “But...”

I cut her off, swallowing her moan of disapproval as I slide my tongue inside her mouth, sucking and licking with the intensity of my excitement. I revel in her moan of pleasure as I run my palm over her chest, grazing her nipples.

I slowly break the kiss, panting softly. I yank her soft green sundress off her body, exposing her to my gaze. A loud groan of satisfaction leaves my lips as my eyes roam

over her body. My gaze stays a little longer on her stomach, and I imagine her heavy with my child, her breasts big and swollen with milk.

My cock jerks at the thought, and I shift my gaze up to find Bella's dilated eyes on me. My heart thumps hard at the impact of her stare, and I quickly remove my shirt and sweatpants, showing off my erect cock.

I reach out to unclasp her bra and slowly push her panties off her thighs. My fingers graze and slide over her skin, causing her breathing to grow heavy and her eyes dark with desire.

"I can't wait to see your belly grow with our child," I whisper, softly leaning into her again.

I gently push her back onto the couch, and my body covers hers. I take her lips in a brief kiss before slowly licking down to the wildly beating pulse at the base of her neck.

I bite down gently on the area, then suck it into my mouth, giving her a hickey and reveling in her slight shiver. I kiss a path down to her breasts, and I gently roll a nipple with my fingers. She arches gently and moans, her face a rapture of pleasure that spikes my need.

I shift my attention to the other nipple, rolling and kneading, and then I lean down to trace my tongue teasingly around her nipple. She moans as I do the same to the other one. She's usually responsive, but I want to see how much more sensitive she is now that she's pregnant.

I continue my sexual torture, giving pleasure and not giving enough until Bella is arching and trembling in my arms.

“Roman, p-please,” she pleads.

Obliging her, I close my lips over a hardened nipple and suck deeply into my mouth. She whimpers aloud, jerking and moving restlessly in ecstasy as I alternate between both nipples.

When her fingers clutch hard on my ass, I let go of her nipples. I nip and lick my way down to the juncture of her thighs, gently wedging my shoulders between them.

Then, I slowly slide my finger into wet slit, grazing over her hooded clit. Another moan leaves her lips as she bucks her hips. I slowly rotate my thumb over the pink nub, teasing out a deep whimper of desire that sends blood rushing down to my aching cock. The need to fill her sends heat spreading through my veins. Bella starts to thrash her head, her fingers gripping my hair for dear life as I slowly slide two fingers inside her hot sheath.

Her loud moans turn into a deep keen of want as I run my fingers through her wet sex, sliding and stroking. Then I lean down to suck her clit into my mouth, tasting her sweetness.

“Oh!” Bella gasps.

I stroke deeper into her with slightly curved fingers that rake over sensitive nerves, and I lick and suck on her clit until she’s shivering and pulling hard on my hair. The biting pain sending streaks of pleasure down to my aching shaft.

“Roman!” she shouts. Suddenly she seizes, her sheath clinging hard to my fingers as wetness floods them.

I remove my hand from between her thighs and cover her body, my hard shaft nestling against her wet pussy. I reach down to line my cock against her sex and



gently push into her tight sheath. Her legs instinctively wrap around my waist and her heels dig into the back of my thighs.

Once I'm fully seated inside her, I slowly grind into her, teasing out a low moan. I gently pull out and then push back in, my eyes meeting her need-filled ones. Her hand grips my back, sliding around with every gentle stroke, and her whimpers sink into my blood.

The ache in my cock grows, and I groan aloud at the thrilling pleasure it evokes inside me. Bella's moans turn feverish and loud, spiking my desire, and my thrusts turn deeper. I slide in and out, grazing every sensitive nerve of her tight sheath. Her fingers rake over my back as her moans climb higher, turning me into a mindless, raging beast.

I drive deeper and harder inside her, her tight pussy gripping me harder than ever. Blood rushes down to my tight balls and they pull tight.

Bella's back bows as she bucks widely. Her mouth opens in a wordless cry and her walls clench hard on my granite cock.

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My head explodes. “Bella!” I give a hoarse shout as I jerk hard, thrusting inside her tight pussy and spurting hard until I’m spent.

My chest heaves hard as I gather her quivering body in my arms, her pussy walls still clutching convulsively around my shaft. Sweat rolls down my temples as I glide my hands over her hair, sweeping it back. My right hand clutches a fistful of her curly red hair and I pull her head back, leaning down to claim her lips in a deep, searing kiss that awakens desire inside me.

I let go of her lips, staring deep into her soft and sleepy gaze. “I love you,” I say.

“Love you too,” she murmurs, then yawns tiredly.

My heart melts at the sight and I gently disentangle my body, rising to my feet. I bend to lift her into my arms, and she wraps her legs around my waist. My hands grab her thighs as her arms encircle my neck.

“Sleep, baby,” I whisper, urging her head to my shoulders.

Knowing I’ve worn her out, I smile tenderly when she instantly falls asleep, snoring softly against my neck, her hot breath teasing my flesh. As I walk up the steps with her in my arms, I slide a hand over her belly, gently rubbing it. An overwhelming tenderness steals my breath, my chest tightening with a plethora of emotions.

And in that moment, I vow to cherish this life that Bella and I have created. Together.

~The End