



The Bratva's Weakness

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Category: Erotic, Romance, Adult, Crime And Mafia

Description: James

I've inherited the family business –

Yeah, exactly, that kind. The kind you can't just walk away from.

So instead, I'm trying to make it legitimate.

When I hop in the car of a complete stranger,

that's when I realize how much I need to change.

Because in order to keep Allie safe, in order to keep her mine,

I need to rewrite the rules.

But other players in the game don't agree.

And in my line of work, that doesn't mean you're out...

that means you're dead.

Allie

I can't believe I picked up a complete stranger at the airport!

In my defense, he didn't really object.

As I get to know James, and he offers me a job to help

with my impending financial doom,

I thank the universe it was him I picked up.

Because as I spend my days with him,

I realize he's so much more than his family name.

And as I fall in love with him, I start to think I'm the luckiest girl alive.

But what I should have been thinking

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Chapter One

Allie

Shit, shit, shit.

I'm running so late to meet my friend Katie that I'm basically forcing Zoey, the itty bitty chihuahua I'm walking to run at full speed down the street. It's not even helping because her full run is more of a normal paced walk for me.

"Okay, Zo, we've gotta get a move on," I say, scooping the little dog up into my arms because I can't risk being another minute late to meet Katie. I'll make sure Zoey gets her steps in on our walk back.

Being a dog walker isn't what I ever envisioned for myself. Ever since I graduated from college last year with my degree in business administration, I feel like I've just been floundering around, at a complete and total loss of what to do with myself.

So, to pay the bills, I've been filling my time dog walking and babysitting. I'm starting to think that the people in the film industry were right when they said don't work with dogs or kids. That's not completely true; I enjoy pet sitting the most, but it's the parents of fur babies and human babies that are the most difficult to deal with. The issue isn't the work itself, it's that I can't think of a way forward.

These thoughts are racing through my head as I spot Katie seated on the outdoor patio of the café we agreed to meet at. She has a salad in front of her and the one across from her looks like my favorite harvest bowl..

She looks up from her phone, her bright blue eyes meeting mine as she gives me a grin and a wave. With her black hair, she looks like Snow White—a Disney princess come to life. She has no idea how beautiful she is and it's one of the things I love most about her.

“Hi hi! I'm so sorry, Zoey here was not as fast of a walker as I'd hoped, but here we are,” I say, pulling out my chair and tying Zoey's leash to the iron fence beside me. She promptly sits down and leaves me wondering why her owners even hire me to walk her when she basically never wants to move. But whatever, the cash is the cash.

“All good,” Katie says with an easy smile. “How's the walking going?”

“A nightmare, as always,” I say, taking a bite of my salad. “The dogs are good... sometimes,” I say, cutting a glance to where Zoey lounges on the ground beside me. I do love walking her, despite the amount of time it takes for her to get good exercise in. “But the pay is definitely not enough to make it long term. I just don't know what else to do, because I really like the flexibility of this and the babysitting. It gives me time to do everything else I want to do with my life. I just wish everything wasn't so centered around the nine-to-five structure.”

Katie gives me a sympathetic nod. Even though she's my best friend, this is why I hate opening up about my lack of direction. People pity me for it. Katie is lucky, she found her calling as a nurse when we went off to college and has never looked back. I crave that kind of drive, that stability. I just hope that one day I can find it.

“I agree,” Katie says after a moment. “With my shifts, I get the flexibility I want, but that can always change at a moment's notice.”

“Yeah,” I say softly. I continue digging into my salad and ask Katie about work. She's based in the emergency room, so she usually has one horror story or another to share. She tells me about a man who came in the other day with a fishhook through

his eyebrow, crying because his wedding was this weekend and it was going to look like he got a piercing for the occasion.

By the time we're finishing our salads and ordering a slice of key lime pie to split (like we've done since college), I feel much more relaxed and at peace with my life. Just as we're scraping off the last bits of pie, Katie's phone starts ringing.

She flips it around letting out a grumbled "Ugh," before taking the call. Through the line I can hear that she's being called into work on her day off and suddenly I feel glad that there are rarely ever any emergencies in my current line of work.

"Okay," Katie sighs, "I'll be there in an hour." She hangs up the phone. "Fuck," she grumbles, tapping away on her phone. "I was supposed to pick up my brother from the airport this afternoon, he's coming back from that trip to Colombia I told you about? For work?" I nod, recalling her mentioning how cool she thought it was that he could travel for work and how she was thinking of changing to becoming a travel nurse so she could see more of the country.

"I can get him," I offer without really thinking. The airport in this city is a pain to get an Uber from, so it's always easier if you have a ride.

"Oh my god, are you sure? I don't want to put you out..."

"I literally just spent this whole lunch telling you about how I have nothing going on in my life, I can spare the few hours to grab your brother. What's his name again?" I ask, feeling stupid for not remembering his name.

"Jim," she says with a laugh. "He has a bunch of tattoos and dark hair, he shouldn't be hard to miss," she finishes.

Jim is like ten years older than us and wasn't around when we were in college, but

now that I'm thinking about it, it feels weird that I've never met him... or even seen him before, considering Katie and I have been friends since the moment we were assigned as roommates our freshman year of college. I'm glad our friendship has lasted the last six years because I truly don't know what I'd do without her.

"Okay I can grab him, no problem. I'll just have to drop Zoey back off and grab my car. What time does his flight land?"

"You're literally a lifesaver, Al. I don't know what I would do without you." She tells me she'll text me the flight details so I can track it and quickly pays for our lunch, insisting she owes me one for this, before rushing off. I still have a few hours before I need to head out, so I take my time walking Zoey back home and stop for a quick coffee before walking the short distance back to my house and grabbing my car.

I head into the house, wanting to quickly check-in on my grandfather. He "lets" me live with him because he thinks I need the help, but in reality, I think he was getting a bit lonely since my grandmother passed. And if I'm being honest, I love living with him, getting to spend more time with him. Especially in this time of uncertainty, it's been wonderful to have his stability.

"Hey sweetheart," he pops a kiss on my head as he grabs his jacket off the hook by the door. "I'm heading to the cribbage club and won't be back until late." He gives me a wink and leaves me shaking my head with a smile on my face. It's pretty pathetic when your 75-year-old grandfather has a more vibrant social life than you, I think, my smile turning into a grimace.

I hop into my red Toyota Camry, my pride and joy purchased from thousands of hours of babysitting that I saved up from the time I was fourteen until my college graduation. I plug the airport into my GPS and head out.

The drive gives me even more time to think about all that I'm not doing with my life,

my relaxation from lunch long gone. When I was in school, I interned at a variety of businesses, including retail, restaurants, and a garden center. Each job gave me the opportunity to see how to run those businesses, but none of them called to me.

I think that's why I've just stayed drifting for the last few years, because nothing sounds that great to me, so I'd rather not waste my time doing any of them. The con of that is now I'm 24 and still feel like I have no direction and have been wasting time anyways.

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These thoughts continue to race through my mind for the rest of the drive and by the time I pull up outside of the arrivals section of the airport, I'm frustrated and distracted, barely paying attention to my surroundings. I park, place my hazards on, and step out of the car, trying to see if I spot a man with dark hair and tattoos who looks like he could be a Jim.

Just as I'm wondering if I even came to the right terminal, I spot the most handsome man I have ever seen. Dark, wavy hair falls to just above his shoulders and, as soon as I spot the tattoos peeking out of the collar of his dark green t-shirt, I'm pretty sure I've found who I'm looking for.

Katie didn't mention his tattoos were on his neck, or that his hair was so gorgeous, but I guess that would have been a strange way to describe her own brother.

I round the car and approach the man, suddenly feeling a bit nervous. I don't have much—okay, make that any —experience with men. I've never even kissed a man before – the two high school boys that I exchanged a peck on the lips with don't count - so I feel a bit shy approaching this random man, even though I know he's my friend's brother and I should feel safe with him.

He looks up from his phone as I approach, chocolate brown eyes meeting mine and I swear I feel instant butterflies. He looks at me curiously, and I realize I've been staring at him for way too long without saying anything.

“Are you Jim?” I ask, kind of hoping he says no so I don't have to address my crippling attraction to him.

“Uh... yeah. Who are you?” he asks, his gruff voice sending a shock right through my core. Shit.

“Allie,” I say, brushing a lock of my blonde hair behind my ear. “I’m supposed to pick you up. And I’ve kind of been parked herefor way too long, so we need to get a move on.” I turn back to my car, popping the trunk as I round the back, hoping he follows.

He looks confused, like he’s debating whether he should actually get in the car. I assume Katie told him I was going to be getting him, so I’m not sure why he’s hesitating. I glance to the left where a policeman is glaring and starting to walk my way.

“The angry policeman is walking our way. Can we please hurry?” I basically plead with him; I’m not good with confrontation, and I definitely don’t have the money to pay for a parking ticket.

With an almost predatory snap of his head, he looks at the policeman, who missteps then stops altogether. The man turns back to me, his eyes slightly narrowed, darker than when I first approached him. For a moment, I think I should feel scared. But scared is far, far away from what my lady bits are feeling right now. My cheeks darken, and I hop into the driver’s seat, waiting. Finally, he walks towards the car and tosses his bag in the trunk before sliding in beside me.

God, he’s HUGE.

As his muscular body fills the seat beside me, I can’t help but wonder if maybe picking up Katie’s brother wasn’t such a bad thing after all.

Chapter Two

James

Well, I am definitely not the Jim this girl was looking for. But with her gorgeous blonde waves and mesmerizing hazel eyes, something inside me couldn't resist getting into her car.

I've had a long few days, travelling all around trying to make a gemstone deal with what I'm hoping could be a partnership group in Colombia. The people I met there seemed eager to make a deal, and I think the emerald trade we were setting up could work out well for both of us.

Ever since I took over the "family business" from my father last year, I've been looking for more lucrative ways for us to make our money. Setting up a legit jewelry store to funnel some of our money through seemed like the best way to do that, and if I succeed in this emerald deal, we'll be able to double our profits from last year and hopefully be able to move on from doing some of the shadier aspects of our business.

I'm exhausted, socialized out, and was really looking forward to getting home and not speaking to anyone until tomorrow, but the second I saw Allie, I knew I needed to adjust my plans. I probably should tell her I'm not who she was supposed to be picking up, but I don't want the magic of this to be over quite yet.

I slide into the seat beside her and don't miss the way her cheeks brighten when she looks at me.

Control yourself, O'Connor, I chide myself. But, for the better part of the year I have done nothingbutcontrol myself. Maybe it's time I let myself have a bit of fun.

We pull out and when we're on the highway I decide it's time to break the silence. Hopefully, she'll get a laugh out of this rather than thinking it's creepy. I don't want my time with her to end on a bad note—I don't really want it to end at all, if I'm

being honest.

“Allie?” She briefly turns to me and gives me a soft smile before turning her eyes back to the road.

“Yeah?” she asks, and I can’t help but notice how beautiful she looks from the side. Tan skin glowing with end of summer warmth, nails painted a soft pink that highlights her glow. She’s stunning, and for a moment I almost lose my nerve. But that’s not who I am. I don’t get nervous, especially around women who seem to be nearly a decade younger than me.

“I have to tell you... I’m not the Jim you were looking for. When you were insisting I get in your car, I decided what’s the harm. But you, uh, definitely were not supposed to be the one picking me up.”

She looks at me, mouth agape, and it makes me wonder what she’d look like on her knees for me. Before I can let my imagination run with that little picture, she lets out a screeched “WHAT?!” that nearly bursts my eardrums.

“Why the hell didn’t you say anything? I basically forced you into my car and now you’re telling me you’re not even the right guy. Oh my god, Katie is going to kill me,” she says, in a near breathless stream of her thoughts. I laugh. I can’t help myself, something about her rambling is so adorable.

“Don’t laugh,” she groans, and I can’t help but notice she’s made no effort to stop driving, which means she can’t be that upset. “What am I going to do about Jim? And what are the chances that you’re also a guy named Jim who vaguely matches his description—you even have tattoos!”

“I guess I’m not as unique as I thought,” I say, unable to keep the teasing out of his voice. “And I actually go by James. Tell you what, I’ll order a car for your friend’s

brother—I know how much of a pain it can be to get a ride from the airport—what’s his last name?”

“Martin,” she says with another groan. “God. I try to do one favor and I can’t even get that right.”

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I finish typing a message into the car service I use, and they get back to me right away letting me know that they can have someone at the airport in ten minutes or so, which is exactly why I contacted them.

I look back at Allie and notice the tears streaming down her cheeks. “Hey, baby, don’t worry. Someone will be there to get him in a few minutes, they’ll have a sign and everything so there will be no confusion. It’ll probably be better than riding in this,” I gesture around her objectively dingy car, “anyways.”

She looks back at me with a scowl. “This car is my baby, don’t slander it. But... thank you. I really fucked that up, my mind was just elsewhere,” she trails off before adding. “Just, thank you. Wait, where should I even be taking you? This is such a mess.”

Without thinking, I reach out a hand and squeeze her thigh, feeling sparks through my fingers the second my skin meets the fabric of her black leggings.

I might be fucked.

I quickly squeeze her thigh and then move my hand to plug her address into the GPS of her car.

“I hope it’s not too far out of your way,” I say, looking back at her.

She gives me a small smile in return, seemingly calmed down from a moment ago. “Nope. It’s kind of the least I could do, I mean I basically kidnapped you from the airport,” she lets out a soft laugh at that sound like music to my ears.

“True,” I say, laughing with her. I don’t know what’s come over me, I’m usually a pretty stoic guy, but she makes me feel lighter, makes me want to laugh more. I don’t know what that means for a woman I have only known for twenty minutes and I can’t bring myself to care for now.

We spend the rest of the drive making small talk. She tells me she’s twenty-four and hasn’t quite figured out what to do with her life yet. She sounds lost and I’m filled with this overwhelming feeling of wanting to help her.

When she asks about me, I tell her I’ve just turned thirty-five and I watch her face for any signs of feeling weird that I’m more than a decade older than her, but I find none. Although I find myself wanting to tell her what the family business actually is, I give her the cover of the jewelry store and some of our other enterprises, not quite knowing if I can trust her and not sure if I want to freak her out just yet.

The drive passes quickly and when we pull up to my place, she looks at it with shock. Sure, the house is massive, but I like to think of it as understated compared to some of the other mansions in town. It’s white stone structure with a black iron gate, both of which are covered in greenery to help it blend in.

“Well, sorry for stealing you from the airport,” Allie says, turning to meet my eyes. I smile back at her, overwhelmed at her beauty. God, I want to wrap her golden locks around my fist.

“Wasn’t the worst way to be kidnapped,” I say, my grin not breaking. “Do you want to come in for a drink?”

She thinks it over for a moment before nodding, “Sure,” she says, surprising and elating me all at once.

I hop out of the car, and she has the trunk popped already. I quickly grab my bag

before rounding the car and opening her door for her.

“You don’t have to do that,” she says somewhat shyly as she takes my hand to get out of the car.

I lean into her, “If you think that, you’ve been with the wrong men.”

“I haven’t been with any men,” she blurts, then gasps, clapping a hand over her mouth.

Oh fuck. That truth has my dick straining against my jeans, and I take a deep breath, pulling away from her.

Giving her a quick smile, I lead her into the house, entering my door code. I wander into the kitchen to see that my housekeeper has prepared dinner for me, and like always, has left way too much.

“Do you like steak?” I ask Allie as she peers around the kitchen.

“Definitely,” she says, still looking around. “Wow, this place is gorgeous.”

“Thanks, I wanted it to be a relaxing place to unwind after all my busy days. Do you want to eat?”

“It seems calming, despite how outwardly menacing it is,” she says with a laugh. “I’d love to eat, I’m starving.”

“Perfect, go make yourself comfortable in the living room. I’ll be in with everything in a minute.”

She nods and gives me a small okay before rounding the corner to the other room. I

take the chance to toss the steak, potatoes, and asparagus onto two plates and into the microwave before running upstairs and tossing my bag in my room. I quickly wash up and head back downstairs, selecting a bottle of red from my wine room and pouring us each a glass.

I drop the glasses on the coffee table in front of the couch where Allie has curled up and it strikes me just how right she looks in my house. I head back into the kitchen before returning with our food.

We chat idly over dinner, and she tells me the steak is one of the best she's ever had. I let her know I'll pass on her regards to my housekeeper.

As we finish up, she twists her hands in her lap. I place mine over hers, and she immediately stills.

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“So, you travel a lot for work?” she asks.

“Yeah,” I trace her hands, causing tingles to break out on her arm. “I’ve been to every continent, except Antarctica.”

“The penguins don’t want your business?” she laughs, and the sound of her melodic voice goes straight to my cock. I move, trying to alleviate the pressure without her knowing.

“Probably not. Most people don’t,” I immediately regret letting that slip when her brow furrows. “I spend most of my time in South America.”

“What do you do?” her breath hitches as I slowly stroke upward, her skin velvet smooth beneath my touch.

“God, your skin is like porcelain,” I huskily whisper, reverently.

“In the car you called me baby,” she suddenly says. I can’t tell if she’s asking why or just making a comment. Perhaps she’s trying to tell me off for being so forward. She has no idea this is me holding back.

I scoot closer, grabbing her hand and bringing it to my lips.

“Would you rather I not?” I ask.

“I don’t know,” she admits. Her mouth parts as I suck one of her fingers into my mouth. She groans and shifts toward me. I should probably stop, we just fucking met,

but instead I reach over and haul her on top of me, sitting on my lap.

“What – what are you doing?” she sighs as I move her hair off the back of her neck and plant kisses against her skin. Her hands grip my thighs, and her legs open of their own accord and her head falls back against my shoulder.

“I should probably go,” she says, hesitantly.

“Only if you want to,” I whisper in her ear. My hands find the bottom of her shirt, and I graze my fingers underneath, stroking up and down her sides. She presses back against me, a gasp leaving her as she meets my hardness. I pause, waiting, and let out a tortured moan as she slowly moves back against me.

“Baby,” I grunt before grabbing her hips and thrusting up into her backside. She cries out, this time hunching forward, so my dick, still straining to escape my pants, hits her in just the right spot. I thrust again, and her hands clamp down on my knees, helping to grind against me.

“James,” she cries.

“Baby, fuck me,” is all I can say as I start a steady rhythm. She mewls and squirms, needing more. I stop, twisting her around so she’s straddling me, and plant her back down on my dick.

“Use me, baby,” I tell her. I grasp her shirt, yanking it high, ready to see her perfect tits, and when my mouth covers her nipple beneath her barely-there bra, I suck for all I’m worth. Her fingers find my hair, her noises louder and louder as she now sets the pace.

My balls are so tight it’s painful, and all I want to do is unzip my pants and sink into her perfect cunt. But I resist. I move, helping hit her clit just like she needs, and lave

the other breast, leaving wet prints on her bra.

Allie cries out and clenches around me, holding me tight, her hands fisted in my hair as she finds her release. I slow my ministrations and plant soft kisses along her chest until she sinks against me, breathing heavy.

“I don’t even know you,” she mumbles.

I chuckle and stroke her back, willing my hard-on to lessen. “I plan on getting to know you,” I boldly tell her.

She pulls back and looks at me with a small grin. “Allie Miller. Your turn.”

I move the hair behind her ear as I answer, “James O’Connor.” She freezes, the smile slipping off her face. Shit. I guess she recognizes the name - the legendary O’Connor crime family that’s run this city for the better part of the last half-century. I start to clutch her hips a bit tighter but instead force myself to relax and wait.

She searches my face before sliding slowly off my lap and backing away, straightening her clothes.

“Don’t do that,” I say too harshly. She flinches, and I swipe a hand down my face. I lean forward, putting my hands in my hair, and taking deep breaths.

“I’m not mad at you,” I tell her, glancing up. “Please don’t be scared of me.”

She takes a tentative step forward that about wrenches my heart in half. I pull at my hair, frustrated that my name sparks so much fear in her. In my world, that’s usually a good thing. But with her? She should never be scared of me.

Suddenly. I feel her hands on mine, pulling my hands away and smoothing the mess

I'd made. I lean back, closing my eyes, letting her touch and presence relax me again.

"I'm not scared of you," she says slowly.

I wrap my arms around her, shaking my head. "It's okay, you should be baby. I should make you leave and never come back."

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“No!” Her tone causes me to open my eyes, amazed to find her wide and fearful. But not at me, at what I’d just said.

I stand, cupping her ass with my hands and finally taking her mouth in a possessive kiss. We moan together, and our tongues dance as we take and take. When both of us need breathe, we pull away together.

“I can’t let you go now. I’ll just have to keep you safe.”

She smiles like she doesn’t believe the danger she could be in. That’s fine. I don’t want her to worry anyway.

“I need to go,” she says.

I’m not ready to let her go. What if she gets home and her family and friends talk her out of ever seeing me again?

I brace myself for rejection, my mind burning through ideas of how to convince her when I ask, “Would you be interested in working for me. As my assistant?”

She pauses. “Are you offering me a job because of what just happened?”

“God, no,” I exclaim. “It’s not because of that. In the few hours I’ve spent with you, I’ve seen you guide yourself through a rough day and turn it around. I think we would be a good fit to work together. Among other things we’d keep separate,” I end with a wink, eliciting a laugh.

She takes a moment to think it over. “Okay,” she says, and I can’t help but break into another grin. I seem to do an awful lot of smiling with her around.

“Perfect, you’ll start tomorrow,” I say as I escort her to the door. “9 a.m.?”

“Perfect, I’ll start tomorrow,” she says, parroting my words back to me with a mischievous glint in her eyes. I finish walking her to her car, holding the door open as she buckles herself in.

We stare at each other a moment longer before saying our goodnights. I stand in my driveway watching her drive off for way too long.

I can’t wait to see her tomorrow.

Chapter Three

Allie

I can’t believe I’m doing this.

Yesterday turned out to be such a whirlwind that after I got home last night, I spent hours lying awake in bed just wondering how the day could have taken such a turn. I also made sure that Katie heard what happened and after she finished hysterically laughing over the airport incident, she told me that everything happens for a reason and maybe I met James at just the right time.

I decided to take her advice to heart and finally fell asleep after we got off the phone at 3 a.m. Now, I’m staring at myself in the mirror trying to find an outfit that screams “professional and competent” and not “I think my boss is super-hot.” It’s a fine line.

James is so attractive and kind. Though I desperately want to continue what we

started last night, I also want this job to be a turning point for my non-existent career path. I'm also a little wary of how many girls James might have done this with; I'm trying to decide if he's like that with everyone, or if it's really only with me. Deep down, I hope it's just for me.

I've never felt this kind of instant attraction before, and I think I need to tamp it down considering he's going to be my boss. But another part of me is desperate to know what the tattoos that span down his neck look like, the peaks of black ink through the tip of his collar have been driving me crazy and...wow, I need to get a grip.

Finally, I settle on the third outfit I've tried on today. Simple dark green wide leg pants, black loafers, and a plain white t-shirt. It feels like the proper level of professionalism for whatever this job is.

After James said his name and the shock of it passed, I knew I should be scared, but I wasn't. Something about James makes me feel safe.

With my mind racing, I head downstairs and see my grandfather, Alan, sitting in the living room watching the morning news.

"Where are you off to, Allie cat?" he asks as he sets down his coffee. He's got his signature round glasses on and his somehow still full head of gray hair is perfectly slicked back. Grandpa is nothing if not a man of style.

"I got a job!" I tell him eagerly. He knows how lost I've been feeling lately and his face lights up with the news as he rises to hug me.

He pulls back, hazel eyes that look just like mine meeting my own, "I'm so proud of you, Al. What are you doing?"

I tell him the story of meeting James and the airport mishap that ended with him

offering me a job. Grandpa laughs at the scenario but is careful to warn me about getting close to someone of James' background. He tells me he knows I can look after myself, but that I still need to be cautious.

I understand his concern; everyone knows about the O'Connor's, but I don't want anything dampening my excitement. Grandpa tells me he's heading out on a bird watching trip with some friends for the next few days, but he'll be reachable if I need him to "rescue me."

I laugh, popping a kiss on his cheek and wishing him a fun trip before heading out to start my brand-new life.

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I hope this is the right decision.

The workday is off to an interesting start, to say the least. When I got to James' house, we promptly jumped into his Range Rover to head to a meeting.

"Do you want me to drive?" I asked.

"No, I don't want to risk getting kidnapped again," he rumbled. I looked at him in shock but then noticed the upturn of his lips. I hit him with a light slap, and we were on our way.

The first stop was at a jewelry store that I see ads for all the time. Their stuff is truly beautiful and when we went inside, I spent the entire time admiring this gorgeous emerald necklace and praying for the day I could afford something like it.

James came out of his meeting in the back, and we headed to a warehouse on the outskirts of town.

"Stay in the car," he ordered. I looked at him in surprise; he'd never used this voice on me before.

"How am I supposed to help you from out here?" I argued.

His only response was the look on his face telling me it wasn't up for debate. I sat in the car scrolling my phone for an hour before he appeared again.

When we were in the car heading back to his place, he finally gave me my first task for the day. Ordering us lunch. Not exactly what I was hoping for when I took this job.

I've basically been twiddling my thumbs, which is ridiculous because this morning he told me my salary is nearly \$100,000 a year and I choked on my coffee. He's paying me that much and not having me do really anything at all for him?

I should be fine with it, but if I wanted to be in a position where I didn't do anything with my degree, I would have just stuck with the dog walking and babysitting rather than working for a questionable—but very hot—man.

It's nearly 5 o'clock when James emerges from the back room where he's been running off to take his mysterious calls all afternoon and the urge to ask him why he hired me has taken over.

He stalks into the living room looking annoyingly handsome. Dark hair is casually styled, and I can still see the tips of his tattoos peeking through the unbuttoned collar of his baby blue button down. He was wearing a full navy suit this morning for his meetings and I have to admit, he looks absolutely delicious in both.

"Sorry about that, the call went a bit longer than I expected," he says, sitting down on the coffee table across from where I'm seated on the couch. He rests his elbows on his knees and leans towards me. His smell—like oranges and wood and justman—takes over my senses, but I can't let my attraction to him overwhelm my need for answers.

I gather my courage, "James, I don't think this is going to work out. You haven't given me anything to do besides order lunch today. I don't feel right taking an obscene amount of money to do nothing." I wait for his response hoping my voice sounded confident and secure and not as nervous as I feel.

He doesn't say anything so I stand, disappointed, and round the couch, heading for the door. I'm about to open it when I feel a hand wrap around my wrist followed by a gruff, "Wait. Don't go. I want you to work for me. I'm just not used to having someone else help me with my work."

He pulls me close, wrapping an arm around my shoulder as he asks, "Stay for dinner."

"Okay," I say, staring up at him and finding his chocolate brown eyes swimming with warmth. "But you're going to have to give me more to do tomorrow; just being here to keep you company isn't something I want paid for."

"I promise I'll give you more responsibility."

"How do you feel about sushi for dinner?" he asks, leading me back towards the living room.

"Perfect," I say, hoping I'm not making a huge mistake by agreeing to stay.

Chapter Four

James

I can't fuck this up.

I'm feeling more and more desperate to be around Allie as the day goes on, like letting her out of my sight would be detrimental to us both. I want to tell her that the reason I'm keeping things from her is to keep her safe, but I think that will just freak her out more.

She's right that I need to give her more to do, but when she showed up this morning

looking like a goddess, as always, I knew I would do anything to keep her around me. So, I had her shuffle with me to meetings I couldn't let her into rather than having her stay here and do the work I actually need done.

It was stupid, and a mistake I won't be making again.

I call in an order to my favorite sushi spot, ordering a mix of dishes. I then grab us a bottle of white wine to split, and we settle back in the living room once the sushi arrives.

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“Oh my god, this is the best sushi I’ve ever had,” Allie says to me in between bites of her spicy salmon roll.

“It’s unreal. I’ve been to Japan and this is on par with that,” I say, admiring the way her throat moves as she takes a sip of her wine. Everything about this woman turns me on.

“Wow,” she says, plucking another roll from the assortment. “It must be amazing to see so many other places. Or maybe...not?” I don’t miss the hesitation in her tone, and I feel terrible for not being able to tell her what I really do, but I want to keep her safe. I can’t risk anything happening to her.

“It is,” I say, picking up a slice of sashimi. “I’m not usually ready to come home. This time is different though.” I watch her, making sure she understands how different this time actually is. Her blush says it all.

I ask her where she’s travelled, and she said she’s only been to London as part of a school trip and Canada for some family vacations as a child. She mentions not being very close with her parents, but that she has a great relationship with her grandfather, who she lives with.

I crave that kind of closeness with just one member of my family, but my family has never been the close-knit type. We deal with each other for business reasons and that’s about it. If I’m being honest, Allie is the first person I’ve felt like forming a connection with in a very long time. That should scare me, but it doesn’t. It makes me want to be better for her.

We finish up our dinner and I ask her if she wants to sit by the fire pit in the backyard while we finish our wine.

“That sounds perfect,” she says, rising from the couch. “Do you need any help cleaning this up?”

“Nope, you’re my guest,” I say, grabbing her hand and pulling her towards me. “Go get settled out there, there’s blankets in the bin next to the couch.” I press a kiss to her forehead and her creamy cheeks redden before she grabs her glass of wine and heads through the French doors at the back of the room.

I quickly clean up the dishes and stash our meager leftovers in the fridge, thinking one of us will want them for lunch tomorrow. It strikes me then how easily Allie has fit into my life, how in just a day I’m already planning for our days ahead together.

A few minutes later, I’m heading outside with the rest of our bottle of wine after clicking on the outdoor firepit. When I see her sitting next to the glow of the fire, I know that I would do anything for her—anything for us to be together.

I sit right next to her on the couch, not wanting to leave any pretenses of this being platonic, and wrap my arm around her as I stretch her blanket over both of us.

“It’s beautiful out here. I would spend every night outside like this if I were you,” she says, peering up at me.

“Yeah,” I reply, “life gets so busy I forget to come out here a lot of the time. I’m glad you’re here—it made me want to show off this space to you.” She smiles at that before leaning her head back against my shoulder and staring at the sky. I stare at her golden locks turning red in the fire and am filled with a peace I haven’t felt since before I had to take on the stress of running the family business.

We sit in a comfortable silence for a few minutes before we're interrupted by my phone ringing. When I see it's Pedro from the gem mine in Colombia, I know I have to answer. Nothing with this deal has been easy and the negotiations only keep going more off the rails. I can't risk this not working out.

"I'm so sorry, Allie, I have to take this," I say, rising and heading back into the kitchen to take the call.

When I emerge a few minutes later, I'm irritated and definitely not in the right space to deal with the questions Allie immediately starts throwing at me.

"Can you tell me who that was? Maybe I can help you with something," she says, looking small as she's wrapped up in the blanket. She looks upset. This only makes me frustrated, unable and unwilling to share that part of my life.

"I can't tell you. I'm sorry, but we honestly barely know each other."

She flinches back like I've hit her.

"You asked, Allie. You fucking asked," I'm frustrated that I can't tell her my life, that I can't share what I want to with her. "You have to believe that it's for your own safety. You. Don't. Want. To. Know," I say, punctuating each word and feeling my tone grow darker with each pause. I can't help it. Pedro and his team are pushing me for more money and the stress of it all is making me crazy. I need her to understand that knowing what's going on will only make her life harder.

She's wide-eyed after my tirade, but then she rises and looks directly into my eyes, the different shades of hers glowing in the light of the fire with something that looks a lot like hurt and anger. "I know you're upset because I know you, even though we 'barely know each other'." She throws my words back at me as her eyes well up with tears.

Fuck.

“I want to help you,” she continues, placing a hand briefly on my chest, “but I can’t if you keep me in the dark and push me away.” She steps back and gathers her coat. I can’t do anything but stand there frozen, my heart beating too fast.

“When you decide to start letting me in, you know where to find me,” she finishes softly then turns and walks out the door.

I’m a fucking mafia boss, and yet when the door shuts behind her I feel shaken and suddenly very, very alone. I grab what’s left of my wine and down it in one gulp. My phone rings again, and I curse as I see Pedro’s name again. I send it to voicemail and run a hand through my hair.

Shit, what did I do? And why the hell am I not going after her?

Without another thought, I grab my keys, run into my office to find her address, and race out the door.

Though it’s only a fifteen-minute drive, it feels much longer by the time I park my Range, hop out, and stalk up the small stone pathway to the front door. I see the lights are still on, but instead of forcing my way in like I’d like to, demanding she never run from me again, I force myself to ring the doorbell. A minute later, Allie answers the door, and before she can even get a word out, I shove my way in and shut the door behind me.

“Where’s your grandfather?” I ask, my voice deepened with my emotions.

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“He’s not here,” she whispers.

“Good.”

I take her face in my hands and steal her gasp as I place my lips on hers. Pushing her back against the wall, I kiss her, wanting to consume her, the fire between us raging. She kisses me back, her fingernails scraping my scalp as she pulls me as close as possible. My hands lower to her hips, and I pick her up, our mouths never losing contact. As our tongues dance, her legs wrap around me, and I clutch her close to me.

Just when I think I’m going to have to move to release some of the tension from my straining dick, she pulls away, gasping for breath.

“James,” she pants.

“Yeah baby,” I nip her lower lip then soothe it with my tongue.

“What was that?” she asks, her eyes searching for answers in mine.

“Don’t run from me. Never run from me,” I try to soften my tone, but it still comes out as a warning.

“Don’t give me a reason to,” she fires back. Wiggling against me, I lower her to the floor, and she takes a step back. She crosses her arms, waiting.

“Allie,” I say after a moment, my voice more authoritative than I’d like to be with her, but I need her to take me seriously. “In my line of work, sometimes knowing all

the information only puts you at risk. I'll try to be more open with you, but for now, with this, you have to give me a bit of trust, baby. I know that's not what you want to hear, but let me keep you safe. Because I won't risk losing you."

She looks at me and I see her eyes warm slightly before she responds. "I do get that, James, but it's pretty hard to work or... spend time with... someone who shuts me out. I'm not asking for you to tell me everything, but I would like to be filled in on the basic details of what's going on so I know how I can help."

"I know. And I'll tell you everything, eventually. Just give me a bit of time."

"Come here," I say, grabbing her hand and making my way into the living room, settling on the couch. She follows, crawling onto my lap and nuzzling her face in the pocket between my neck and shoulder. She's a perfect fit, and I think about where else we'll perfectly fit together.

She pulls back and her hazel eyes meet mine once again. "What are your tattoos?"

"They're Celtic knots," I say, unwinding my arm from around her to undo another button on my shirt and show her the intricate patterns that wind around my upper arms, over my shoulders, to just the bottom of my neck. "They represent strength and wisdom and I felt like I could use all of that I could get."

"They're beautiful," she whispers. And when her eyes meet mine, I see them filled with heat; a heat I now feel an inescapable need to stoke.

"You're beautiful," I say, brushing a hand down her silky-smooth cheek before moving my hands up her thighs and gripping the globes of her ass. She lets out a little gasp and I press my lips to hers.

She tastes like heaven.

Chapter Five

Allie

The second James' lips meet mine I almost completely forget why I was ever mad at him. I know he's the first man I've ever truly kissed, the first man I've ever really wanted to kiss, but I still can't believe how wonderful it is, how wonderful it feels.

I pull back before we can go any further.

"I... know I accidentally mentioned it before," I say ruefully. "But, I've never been this intimate with someone, have never really wanted that with anyone, but I think I want it with you," I look back at him nervously, relieved to see that none of the warmth or want has left his eyes. If anything, they look more on fire for me.

"Baby, you don't know what that does to me, knowing I'm the only one who's been inside your sweet pussy." I shiver at his words, moisture soaking my panties. "I want this with you and I can promise I'll make your first everything well worth the wait. "

"Prove it," I say, emboldened by his words and more than ready to lose my V card. He pulls me in for another quick but heated kiss before I rise off his lap and grab his hand prepared to lead him through the back of the house to my bedroom.

Instead, he tugs me to him, still sitting on the couch. I fall into his lap, my hand grabbing onto him to help brace my fall. When I feel a twitch, I realized I've grabbed his thick, hard dick through his jeans. Gasping, I jerk my hand away, but James only chuckles. He grabs my hand, placing it back on him and moving my hand up and down.

I look up at him and find his eyes slightly dazed, his lips parted.

“Can’t let you stroke me for long, baby, or I’m going to blow before I can even take care of you.” He groans as my hand tightens; my eyes follow my movement, loving the way he hardens even more beneath me.

“Okay, that’s enough,” he demands, taking my hand and yanking my body against him. His mouth finds my neck, and he kisses then bites at the skin.

My body quakes, loving as the more domineering side of James takes over.

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“Take off your shirt,” he growls. I look behind me, noticing the blinds are open. Even though it’s dark, anyone walking by could see in. I briefly think about closing them, but then I turn back to find James with a smirk on his face.

“Let them see me give you pleasure.” I moan, the thought making me so wet I have to be leaving marks on James’ pants. I quickly peel off my white t-shirt to reveal the light blue lacy bra I chose to wear to work this morning. Despite my inexperience, I’m nearly always wearing perfectly sexy matching sets. They make me feel good, like I have a little secret. One I’m now sharing with James.

He stares down at my chest with pure want in his eyes and it makes me feel...powerful.

“You were wearing that all day?” he asks, bringing his hands up to knead my breasts.

“Yes,” I whisper. “I was hoping you’d get a chance to see it,” I admit.

“I’m glad I did. You’re stunning, Allie,” he says, leaning forward to plant kisses on the tops of my breasts, still molding them to his hands. “As much as I love this,” he says, pulling the strap of my bra forward before letting it snap back to my skin, leaving me with a delicious sting, “I think I’ll love seeing your tits more.” With that, he reaches behind me and undoes the bra with any easy twist of his hand.

Suddenly, I’m bare before him. I know my breasts aren’t the biggest, but the way he’s looking at me makes me feel like they were made for him.

“Perfect,” he says, leaning forward and wrapping his mouth along a peaked bud. The

scruff that's grown on his face through the course of the day tickles a bit, but as he begins twisting and sucking me in his mouth while his other hand lavishes the other side, I feel like I'm in heaven. I let out another moan as he releases me with a "pop" before switching sides.

I'm suddenly desperate for more... more of his mouth, his hands... just him. I feel myself mindlessly grinding against him. He releases me again.

"Gonna make yourself come?" he asks, pulling my mouth to his again. I quicken my pace, dying for any sense of relief.

"I need you," I whisper between kisses.

"I can give you better. Let me taste you," he says, meeting my eyes once again.

I am at a loss for words so I nod in response, feeling my cheeks burn as he reaches for my pants, undoing the button and slowly sliding them down my legs. I impatiently kick them off my feet, left only in my light blue thong, a clear wet spot formed in the center of my panties.

I don't have time to feel embarrassed before he says, "Sorry about this," and rips off my panties. My jaw drops at the display—almost like I'm not sure how to feel, but the surge of wetness down my core tells me I'm very into it.

"I'll buy you ten more pairs, I promise," he says, leaning over and planting another kiss to my lips. "Now, I need to feast."

Then he starts to lift me.

I steady my hands on his shoulders. This man is a beast, lifting me as if I weight nothing.

“What- what are you doing?” I ask as my knees find the back of the couch, helping to support my body. James is now level with my pussy, and he inhales, taking in my scent.

Without another word, but with one more wicked grin my way, he dives in. He laps at my pussy in a mix of quick taps and long, lingering strokes. I’m moaning so loudly I worry the neighbors might hear me. When he moves to thrust his tongue fully inside of me, my hands whip to his mess of dark hair, tangling in the strands like I’m holding on for dear life.

“That’s it, baby, hold me right where you want me,” James says. “You taste like home,” he whispers more to himself than to me. I take in the sight before me, him eating me out like it’s his last meal, his hands wrapped around my hips, and my hands gripping the tendrils of his hair.

He was worth the wait.

I move my hands to the back of my couch, angling my body so it can press deeper into him. James moans and sucks my clit into his mouth. I scream, the sensation almost too much. I move my hips, jackknifing into him, unable to stop.

I sob – it feels too good.

He comes up for air, his dirty talk keeping me on the edge, “You ride my face so good. This pussy was made for me; your sweet nectar is all I need.” He dives back in, and I cry out, wanting more, more, more.

His tongue laps up all of me before he moves back to the sensitive bundle at the apex of my thighs and when he curls one long, thick finger inside of me, I feel myself tipping over the edge.

“Don’t... don’t stop, please, just like that,” I gasp as he inserts a second finger. With one more curve of his hand and a swirl of his tongue, I’m falling.

“James,” I scream as I feel myself contracting around his fingers.

“That’s it, baby,” he says as he keeps swirling his fingers within me. He moves his tongue to suck my clit and I’m falling all over again. My hips finally slow, and James’ fingers pull out only for him to suck them into his mouth, making sure to drink all of my juices. I slump down, and he helps lower me back onto his lap, placing sweet kisses in my hair.

“Gorgeous,” he says. “Still mad at me?” he asks before kissing me, letting me taste myself on his tongue.

“I think I’m getting over it,” I say, pulling him closer towards me. “I know I’ve never done... anything, but can I... take care of you?” I ask, eyeing where his pants are still tented beside me.

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“While I know you’ll be amazing, I’m saying no. Tonight was all about you, baby. Let me earn the rest.”

“Okay,” I say, feeling thoroughly worshipped and equally exhausted.

“Let me get you cleaned up,” James says as he kisses my forehead. He rises with me in his arms and carries me through the house. At my direction, he finds my room and gently places me on the bed before heading into the bathroom and shutting the door behind him. He returns a few minutes later, pants noticeably less strained.

He cleans my core with a warm washcloth and gently presses a light kiss to my center before tossing the cloth in the hamper.

He pulls the sheets back and then covers me, tucking me back in.

“Are you going to stay?” I ask, as he stands above me and strokes a hand through my hair.

“If you want me to,” he says, smiling down at me like I’m the most precious thing in the world.

“I do.”

“I’ll do whatever you want me to, baby,” he says as he removes his pants and places them on the chair over mine, leaving him only in a pair of navy-blue boxer briefs.

He rounds the bed and slides in beside me, pulling me into his arms. I can hear him

inhaling my scent.

“Perfect,” he repeats again, and before I know it, I’ve drifted off into the best sleep I’ve had in years.

The next morning, after having breakfast together, we’re in the car heading back to James’ place.

“Work is light today so how about we go shopping for those underwear I promised you?” he says, a wicked gleam to his eye.

“I’m supposed to be working for you, James,” I remind him.

“I know, and you will help me. But time together is more important than that.” When put that way, it’s hard to resist him. So instead of insisting otherwise, I let myself enjoy this new relationship.

Once we get to his place, he promptly runs off to change and I can hear him on the phone from where I lounge on his bed.

“What the hell! We had a deal, and now you’re going back on your end. Do you know what happens to people who break deals with me?” I’ve never heard his voice sound so deadly. Though I don’t know the specifics of his business, I know he’s a crime lord, doing business with others of the same nature. But hearing it feels different than knowing it.

What if I’m wrong? What if I’m in over my head? I think. My palms grow sweaty, and I slide off the bed, needing to pace. But then James appears, phone nowhere to be found, with a strained smile directed at me.

“I suppose you heard?” he asked, eyes dark and mouth in a thin line.

I nod, until to speak, unsure of his reaction. But I’m surprised as he sighs and runs a hand down his face, looking weary.

“Are you scared of me?” he asks.

I look into his eyes, feeling the deep attraction that pulled me to him in the first place. I think of how he’s taken care of me, worshipped me, and I shake my head.

“Let’s go shopping,” I say, realizing he needs this more than I do.

Not long after we step into the first lingerie store, James and I are in the dressing room, and I’m surrounded by panties, bras, and sexy lingerie sets. James insisted he needed to vet my options. As I prepare to try on the first set, his phone rings with an unknown caller. He hesitates but denies it.

“I am your secretary, you know,” I tell him. “I can take your calls.”

“No,” he says sharply. “I won’t let you speak with these people.”

“James-” he cuts me off by pushing me against the wall, his hand right below my throat. I swallow, alarmed and aroused all at once. His hand creeps up to the side of my neck, applying slight pressure.

“I said no, baby. Not these people. Can’t let my baby anywhere near them.” His voice has taken on an almost animalistic quality.

“You don’t command me,” I tell him, but my breathless words give away the lust I’m feeling. My nipples are peaked and my panties are soaked; I shouldn’t be turned on, but I am. His possession takes my breath away.

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“It looks like I do,” he responds, tweaking the hard nipple that’s straining through my thin shirt and bra.

I moan, my legs falling slightly open of their own accord. James takes advantage, pushing in between, his bulge indented on my stomach.

“James,” I whimper.

James takes my shirt in his hands, ripping it down the middle and then flicking the front clasp of my bra, my boobs spilling out.

“Fuck, your titties are hot.” His warm breath makes my nipples pebble before he takes one in his mouth, his hand tweaking the other. I move one of my hands to my clit while the other tangles itself in his hair. He drops to his knees, knocking my hand out of the way with his mouth, his tongue replacing my fingers on my clit.

“Ah,” I garble, unable to get any other words out.

“That’s right, baby, let me milk your pussy. It’s mine,” he growls, lapping all of my cream up as it gushes out of me, “it’s all mine.”

“It’s yours,” I writhe, knocking against the wall, knowing there’s no way others aren’t hearing what we’re doing.

“You taste so good. Your honey is all I need,” he groans, his tongue circling my clit before delving deeper, sticking it into my pussy.

My legs are barely able to hold me up. My hands move to my tits, my fingers tweaking my nipples.

“James, I need you to fuck me,” I plead.

“You need my cum, baby?”

At that point, a sharp knock raps on the dressing room door. James slows but doesn’t stop. My eyes widen, and I tug on his hair, but he only glances up with a wicked grin and reaches with one hand to unlock the door.

A surge of moisture drips down my thighs, and I force his face back to my pussy.

“Enter,” I say.

The knob moves slowly, and then the young woman that attended to us when we first came in, opens the door, her eyes widening at James’ face in my cunt and my breasts exposed. Her mouth parts before she quickly looks away.

“Excuse me, but you can’t be doing that in here.”

“He’s James O’Connor,” I breathe out, and I see when she recognizes the name. “I’m pretty sure he can do it anywhere he damn well pleases.”

I shriek, James finding my clit again with his teeth, and I throw my head against the wall in ecstasy. My fingers once again find my nipples and with a hard pull and James’ fingers digging into my ass, I finally find my release, screaming his name.

After our tryst in the dressing room, I didn’t try anything on. Instead, James took the pile we had and bought all of it. As we were checking out, James got another unknown call, this time answering it, leaving me to gather the bags as he took it

outside.

What are these calls about?

Am I in danger?

Why can't he be honest with me?

These questions are racing through my head as I come out of the store.

"Sorry about that, baby," he says, pulling me in and popping a kiss on the crown of my head. He looks more stressed than earlier.

"Anything you want to tell me?" I ask.

"No," he says. "Nothing other than I'm worried for your safety. Just know everything I'm doing is to protect you."

"Is someone watching me?" I ask, bluntly.

"No, and I want to keep it that way."

As we head back to his place, I can't stop thinking about what he's doing that could possibly be putting me in danger, and the question that continuously runs through my head, Is this worth it?

Chapter Six

James

I know I need to tell Allie what's going on, especially now that this gem deal has gotten so out of control. Not long after our shopping spree, my "friends" from Colombia let me know they have people tailing me and the "gorgeous blonde" I've had on my arm for the last few days. The thought of anything happening to Allie is enough to send me into a full-blown rage and I would just say fuck it to the gem deal—and all the extra money they're trying to squeeze out of me—if I didn't absolutely need these gems to take the jewelry store to the next level.

That didn't stop me from sending my own men out to find the fuckers who think they can tail me and my girl. Unfortunately, in the two days that has passed, my men have only caught glimpses.

Just thinking of anyone threatening Allie makes it hard for me to focus on the Italian food we ordered in for dinner tonight. When I realize she's speaking, I look up with an apologetic look on my face.

"I was just saying that I appreciate you taking the time to help me learn the business," she says, and I notice how her eyes shimmer in the candlelight.

She softly smiles across the table and that melts the rest of my resolve. I would risk anything in the world for this deal to go through, except her. She has become everything to me in the last few days, and nothing is worth losing her. I love her. The realization should hit me like a ton of bricks, but instead it washes over me like a

wave, and I know in that moment that she's it for me. It's time to tell her everything.

I take a sip of wine then dive in, "The legit side of the business."

"What?" she asks.

"I taught you the legitimate side of the business. The rest you don't know."

She looks at me expectantly, hopefully, and I'm overcome with fear at the idea of her walking out on me after I tell her this, but I think I'm risking even more by not telling her.

I power through telling her about the family business, how hard I've had to work to keep our organization running and how I'm trying to make the business honest.

I tell her about how the gem deal is going wrong, how they're squeezing me for money and I tell her how they've threatened her safety and how worried that makes me. As I finish running through everything, I'm relieved that she hasn't run out of the room but has instead wrapped my hand in her own, showing me affection in a moment where she should be scared for her life. I don't deserve her, but I'm going to do my best to keep her anyways.

"Wow," she says after a moment, lifting her hand off of mine and leaning back to tie her hair in a loose ponytail. I notice that she tends to run hot when she gets nervous, and I hope she's in my life long enough for me to learn all of her nervous ticks so I can learn how to ease them.

"That's... a lot. But I understand why you were keeping it from me. Although I wish you'd told me they were threatening me directly earlier, I would have been a lot more cautious."

“I know,” I say, pulling her hand back to mine. “But now you know, and I’m not letting you out of my sight again. I’m also adding some extra security around the house and will send some to your place to make sure nothing happens to your grandfather.”

“His bird watching trip got extended until next week, but thank you for thinking of him,” she says. “You really want me to be around 24/7? I don’t want to feel like a burden.”

I stare, shocked that she can’t see the depth of my feelings.

“Come here,” I command, my tone bordering on anger. Her eyebrows raise, but she stands and does as I say like the good girl she is. I pull her down on my lap and whisper in her ear. “Let me make something very clear. You’re my girl. I don’t want you here just for safety; I want you here so I can watch you moan as you eat your favorite foods.” I nip her earlobe, causing her to shiver. “I want you here to make you a cup of coffee that’s more milk than coffee.” I kiss her neck, and her head falls sideways giving me more access. “And I want you here, writhing under me as I put my fat dick in your sweet, tight pussy.” I bite her neck, eliciting a gasp, making sure to leave my mark. I soothe my tongue over the mark, then force myself to stand.

“Go get comfortable. I’ll just clear the table.”

After placing the dishes in the sink, I walk upstairs and find Allie lounging on my bed in a bright red lingerie set I bought here earlier, the color popping on her pale skin and somehow making her hair even more golden. I want to eat her up.

“Baby,” I groan, immediately feeling myself harden in the grey joggers I threw on earlier.

“Do you like it?” she asks, sounding a bit shy and I have to remind myself that she’s

never done anything like this before.

“Does this answer your question?” I ask, walking over to her on the bed and bringing her hand to my hardened cock. She palms me, exploring the feel of me. I groan when she lightly strokes me and suddenly lose any remaining shred of self-control.

“God, you make me crazy, Allie,” I say. I swiftly peel off my own pants and shirt and when she lets out a light gasp at the sight of my length, I know she’s about to ruin me for all other women.

“I hope that’s a good gasp, baby, because there’s no chance of me holding back tonight.”

“I don’t want you to ever hold back again,” she replies, eyes still on my cock.

I join her on the bed, making quick work of removing her set. “I need you bare.” I pull her on top of me and our kiss is nothing short of consuming. She lowers her hips down and I feel her folds sliding over me, her wetness already covering my stiff cock. “That’s it, baby, you’re so wet for me already.”

“James,” she moans as I reach a hand between us and play with her clit. I lift her a bit and quickly insert two fingers inside of her, wanting her to be nice and relaxed before I take her completely. My mouth never leaves hers as I work my fingers into her depths and at the first flutters of her orgasm, I lift her even further and settle her over my face, slurping up every bit of her release.

After I’ve thoroughly cleaned her with my tongue I flip her so she’s on her back on the bed. “Do you think you’re ready for me?” I ask, planting kisses on her cheeks, down her neck, across her perfect tits, and on her pussy while I wait for her answer.

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“Yes,” she says confidently and that makes me want her even more.

“Good because I’m not holding back. I’m going to fuck you until you can’t walk straight,” I threaten, taking her mouth in a hard kiss.

“I’m going to rawdog you, baby.”

“I don’t want anything between us, James,” she says as her nails slide down my back, leaving their own marks. I slide the first inch of my cock inside her, and I strain, forcing myself to go slow.

“Relax, baby, you can take me.”

She nods and lets out a deep breath, and I plunge the rest of the way in. She gasps, and I swallow it with a kiss while letting her adjust to the feel of me before I start slowly stroking in and out of her. She begins to let out soft moans and I pick up my pace, eager to make her come again.

“You’re being such a good girl, taking all of me like that. You were made for me. We’re a perfect fit.” My eyes peer down to where we meet and the sight of me sliding in and out of her is enough to make me certain I’ll never want this with anyone else for as long as I live.

“Ah, baby, take my cock.” My pace quickens, becoming almost erratic, Allie’s nails dig into me, her hips arching to meet my thrusts.

“I want it. I want it all,” she cries, linking her feet behind my back.

Holy fuck.

I fuck her hard, hands planted beside her head, the sound of my dick thrusting in and out of her sopping wet pussy filling the air around us.

“Gonna give you my cum. Put a baby inside you.”

“Do it, James,” she yells and then clenches around me, her orgasm squeezing my cock and sending me over the edge. Her pussy continues to milk me until the very last drop, and I collapse beside her, completely and totally spent.

God, I love her.

Chapter Seven

Allie

James was well worth the wait.

We’re in the shower together, cleaning up after our second round of the evening. I feel like I’ve been electrified, brought to life by this handsome, dangerous man. I understand the more time I spend with him that others—his staff, his rivals—are scared of him, but he’s never made me feel anything other than safe and wanted. I think this is what love feels like.

I turn to face James, stopping him from washing my hair. He looks gorgeous, his muscles rippling and wet, his hair swiped away from his face, brown eyes alight with wanting, like they always are around me.

“I want to taste you,” I whisper to him, suddenly desperate to experience him in my mouth.

“You sure, baby?”

“Yes,” I say, pressing my lips to his and sucking his tongue into my mouth, hoping to get him riled up again. It works. I feel him hardening where his cock meets my stomach and I laugh into the kiss, surprised it was this easy.

“Whatever you want,” he mumbles against my lips and I promptly lower to my knees, taking his hard, thick length into my hands before swirling my tongue around his already leaking tip.

I’ve never done this before, but it feels instinctual to me, like I already know exactly what he likes and how he likes it. The guttural moan he lets out as I take him down my throat tells me I’m on the right track, and his hands tangle in the wet strands of my hair.

I continue stroking him with my tongue, fitting as much of him down my throat as I can and using my hand on the rest of him. I swirl my tongue as I work down, and when I feel his spine tighten beneath my grip, I only work harder, desperate to taste more of his salty release.

“Allie, I’m almost there,” he groans out, hands tightening in my hair to give me the most delicious sting. I swirl my tongue once more and feel him burst in my mouth. I swallow every last drop as he holds me against him.

I can’t wait to do this again.

He pulls me up and slides to his knees, kissing every inch of my body on the way down to return the favor. I know we’re not getting much sleep tonight.

I wake in the morning sore and desperate for more of James. It's still slightly dark out and I look at the clock, seeing that it's just before 5 a.m. Though part of me wants to stay here and explore him in any way I can, another part of me knows I need to get my thoughts in order and there's only one person who can help me do that: Katie.

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I know James said that I'm in danger, and I'm more than happy to oblige him by spending my nights by his side, but there's no way I'm at risk as much as he thinks. I know Katie is working the morning shift, so if I head to her house right now, I'll be able to catch her before she leaves for her 7 a.m. shift.

I quickly dress and head downstairs, grabbing the keys to the Mercedes SUV James said I could use since we left my car back at my place. I leave him a note on the kitchen counter, telling him I've run out to see Katie and will be back around 7:30. I also jump on my phone and share my location with him, wanting him to know I'm taking precautions.

When I pull up in front of Katie's house ten minutes later, I catch her sipping coffee and scrolling on her phone at the kitchen table. When I walk in she looks shocked to see me, but quickly recovers and pours me a cup of coffee, filling it to the brim and adding some caramel creamer, just like she knows I love.

"Okay, I know what happened with the airport—hilarious, by the way. I haven't talked to Jim since, but he didn't seem too peeved by it. What's been happening the last few days?" she asks, sipping from her mug and settling in for a good gossip session just like we have for countless mornings over the years. It's comforting to talk to Katie like this.

I fill her in on everything from James offering me a job and having me over for dinner, to the kiss that first night and then everything in-between. I blush recounting the way we made love last night, leaving out some of the spicier details, of course. And then I fill her in, vaguely, about the danger James has said that I'm in.

When I finish, I let out a deep breath, feeling a bit winded from how much I just unloaded on Katie.

“Do you think you’re in any real danger?” she asks after a moment. “I’m so, so happy for you, but I also don’t want you to be in a situation where you’re not safe.”

“I know,” I say, reaching across and grabbing her hand, just like we’ve done to comfort each other so many times over the years. “I don’t think James would let anything happen to me, but I know I need to be cautious. That’s why I came to see you at the crack of dawn. I feel like gem dealers don’t keep early hours,” I say with a laugh. Katie laughs, too.

“Then I think I’ve never seen you this happy before and you should be with him as long as you feel safe with him. And as long as he keeps being honest with you, I don’t see any real reason for you to worry.”

“Thanks, Katie, I needed to hear that.”

“Anytime, babe,” she says, squeezing my hand before looking at the clock. “Shit! It’s almost 6:45, I have to run.”

“I’ll clean this up for you and lock up—sorry for keeping you!” I say, rising to give her a hug before she runs out the door, blowing me a kiss and asking me if I remember the door code. I do.

I quickly clean up our coffee mugs and run a cloth over her kitchen table, noticing the family picture that hangs over it, along with a variety of photos of us and other friends. I spot who must be Jim, sporting a dark mop of hair, matching dark eyes, and swirling tattoos that are so different from the beauty of James’ Celtic knots. I wonder what would have happened if I’d picked him up instead of my James, but I can’t even begin to imagine the very possible reality where I had never met the man I’ve fallen in

love with.

I drop the cloth over Katie's drying rack before heading out the door, remembering to type in the lock code. I turn to leave, and by the time I hear footsteps behind me, it's too late. Everything goes black.

I wake slowly, sitting in a very uncomfortable chair. My head throbs, and I can feel that my wrists and ankles are tied. I let out a moan as I feel the fog in my head beginning to lift. Once I'm able to open my eyes, I see nothing but a blank concrete room. It looks like some kind of storage unit or something, but there's no hints of sunlight or anything for me to get my bearings. The only light in the room comes from a single lightbulb with a string for a switch situated in the center of the room.

I take another pass around the room, the panic starting to bubble inside me. I move my wrists, but all that does is saw the rope further into my flesh. I cry out with pain and frustration and rock my chair, doing anything I can think of to lessen my restraints. Again, my movements only seem to tighten the bonds around me.

Taking a deep breath, I close my eyes and think of James. He'll come for me. I know he'll come for me. I can't believe I didn't take this seriously. I'm so sorry, James. A tear leaks out of the corner of my eye, but I will the rest of them away.

I hear the muffle of footsteps, and I take another deep breath, remembering that I had turned on my location on my phone. I just hope it'll be enough for James to find me in time.

Chapter Eight

James

I wake with a smile on my face, hoping to be able to slide into Allie once again. I'm desperate to feel her quake around me, desperate to see myself bring her to the edge. I need to tell her I love her, that I would be totally and completely lost without her at this point. When I roll over to tell her just that, my smile falls immediately when I realize she's not there.

"Fuck!" I shout, jumping out of bed and rushing downstairs, hoping to find her there. I run through each room, my heart pounding faster and faster as I find each of them empty before arriving in the kitchen to see she left a note on the counter telling me she went to Katie's and should be back around 7:30. I glance at the clock. 8:07. Fuck.

The bottom of the note lets me know she shared her location with me for safety reasons, and I head out to the security hut to the side of the house, ready to get answers. I had it built after my last close call, and the men inside should be watching the cameras, guaranteeing 24 hour a day constant surveillance.

When I get there, I find the man on watch completely passed out and the second officer nowhere to be found.

"Get up!" I bark at the sleeping officer, and he jolts in his chair, his eyes filling with shock and fear at the anger in my voice. Good. He should be terrified.

"Why the fuck are you sleeping on the job, Tony? I told you someone had to be on watch 24/7. Allie is missing and so is your fucking deputy. So why don't you tell me when exactly you fell asleep and where the fuck you think this other guy is?"

"I'm so sorry, sir. We just had another baby and..." he takes one look at my face and must realize now isn't the time for excuses. "I must have fallen asleep around 5:45, Luis was here then, I know that. How long do you think Allie has been gone?" He gets on his walkie and starts mumbling that he needs all hands on deck.

“She left me a note saying she would be back around 7:30, and as you can see, it’s well past then. I checked my phone and her phone’s last known location was at her friend Katie’s house, about ten minutes ago,” I tell him, my voice still seething as the hut starts to fill with the rest of the security team pouring in from other locations.

“Allie’s missing,” I shout. I point at three of my men. “You, go to Allie’s house and stand guard in case her grandfather returns.” They take off, and I turn to the rest. “The rest of you, with me. We’re heading to her friend Katie’s house where she was last seen. Let’s go.”

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We hop into my fleet of black SUVs and race the few miles to Katie's house. When we pull up, I see the Mercedes I told Allie to use parked out front. I breathe a sigh of relief, hoping that means she just lost track of time with her friend.

I approach the front door, and it's immediately opened by a red-haired woman dressed in scrubs and looking like she has been crying.

"Oh my god, are you James?" she asks, her voice quaking with each word.

"Yes. Katie?" I ask and she nods.

"Allie came over here to tell me all about you this morning, and I asked her to lock up because I had to run to work. I had just pulled into the hospital when I checked my doorbell alerts and saw her being knocked out by some man in a mask. I rushed back here as quickly as I could. I was just about to call the cops."

"No cops." These fuckers were mine to deal with. "Can you show me the footage of her being taken?" I ask and she nods, pulling out her phone and replaying the scene. I see Allie plugging a combination into the door lock, and my chest tightens when I see a masked man walk up behind her, knocking her on the head with the butt of his gun. A moment later, a silver van pulls into the driveway and I immediately know how to find these fuckers. The idiots didn't even bother to cover their license plate, fucking useless.

"Can you send this to me?" I ask Katie. She says yes and I rattle off my phone number before quickly dialing the head of my security team. He's former FBI and no stranger to pulling plate numbers. He sends me an address along with pictures of the

warehouse the van is registered to. I know then and there that's where they've taken Allie.

As I'm turning to leave, Katie stops me.

"Jim... my brother, I think he's caught up in something shady. He's who Allie was supposed to pick up from the airport the other day, when she accidentally kidnapped you. But it was weird, he didn't even seem upset to not have a ride when I told him what happened. He seemed almost relieved?" She pauses before swallowing and continuing. "I'm not sure if this means anything to you, but he was on a 'business trip,'" she puts the words in air quotes, "to Colombia and has been acting so shady ever since he got back, just total silence which is very unlike him. I'm worried."

Fuck, if he was coming back from Colombia he could very well be involved in all of this.

"Thanks for telling me," I say to Katie, not wanting to confirm her suspicions in case I'm wrong. "I'll let you know as soon as we find anything." She nods, and I jump back into the SUV, once more racing to my friend's girl.

Chapter Nine

Allie

Please let James get here soon. I need him.

Those thoughts keep racing through my mind as the door finally creaks open. The man who enters looks vaguely familiar to me and I can't quite place him until he comes closer, and I notice the eyes that match his sister's perfectly. Jim.

My stomach drops, but I try to hide the recognition from my face. I fail instantly. He

catches the look of knowing and stops in front of me.

“I guess you know who I am, huh, Allie?” he asks, his voice deeper and more menacing than I was expecting. How can someone like this be related to someone as sweet and wonderful as Katie?

“Yes, Jim,” I sneer back at him, not wanting him to catch even a whiff of my fear.

“To think, none of this would have happened if you hadn’t got mixed up at the airport. A shame really, considering I saw you right outside. But as soon as I saw you go up to him I knew I had to watch it play out. When his driver showed up to pick me up after you’d taken off, I thought there was no way I could be that lucky.”

He looks down at me with a grin that doesn’t reach his eyes, and I’m suddenly quite scared of him. But I can’t let him see that, can’t let him see even a second of vulnerability from me.

“But I was,” he continues, “and my luck didn’t run out there. When I asked the driver for O’Connor’s address to “thank him” for the ride, he gave it out willingly—O’Connor may want to look into getting rid of him if he’s so concerned with security, by the way—and when I pulled up later that night, I was shocked to see the blonde my sister described was still there. That’s when I knew we had some leverage in this deal.”

I gasp at the revelation; no wonder the gem deal was causing James so many issues.

“How did you even get involved in this?” I ask him. I remember Katie mentioning he does something in finance, but I’m finding that hard to believe at the moment.

“My company handles the deals of several, shall we call them, elite enterprises. I was dispatched to help with the gem deal in Colombia when the team there determined

they would be able to get a better end of the cut. My one goal was to work your little boyfriend to get him to pay more by any means necessary. So here you are, Allie.”

I hate the way my name sounds on his tongue. He is vile and money hungry and everything wrong with this world. I hate that my mistake has led us here, but I’m happier than ever that I picked up my James instead of this asshole.

“Now,” he says after a moment, “why don’t you tell me why exactly his family needs access to these gems?”

I remain silent, suddenly feeling very glad that James never told me the full details of the gem deal because I can’t even feel tempted to tell this asshole anything.

“We can do this the easy way or the hard way, Allie. It’s up to you,” he says, stepping even closer to me. I notice then that his hands are wrapped in black gloves and a shiver of fear courses through me.

“Come on, Allie, a beautiful woman like you should have no trouble getting men to spill their secrets.” He strokes a glove covered hand down the side of my face and I’m instantly repulsed by his touch. I lean back. His lips curl in disdain as he leans closer, his hand starting to move lower.

I rear back before his hand can wander further and do the one thing I can think of to get him out of my face—I spit right into his eyes. He jerks back as my saliva hits him, letting out a laugh that doesn’t have a hint of humor in it before wiping the spit away.

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“Hard way it is,” he says before landing a smack on the side of my face so rough I can feel my head rattle. Despite my best efforts, I let out a moan of pain before my head lolls to the side.

“Now—” he pauses as we both start to hear voices in the hall, followed by the sound of gunshots. All the color quickly drains from Jim’s face and I feel hope for the first time in hours that maybe help is on the way.

Please be my James, please, please, please.

Before I know it, the door bursts in and I see him, looking sweaty and exhausted and as handsome as ever. His eyes light up as soon as he sees me, and I breathe my first sigh of relief all day.

He came for me, just like I knew he would.

James moves in and before Jim can move, he lands a punch to his face. Jim stumbles backward into the wall, and James keeps moving, placing a hand around Jim’s throat, choking the life out of him.

“You thought you could squeeze me for more cash by kidnapping the love of my life you fucking piece of shit,” my James sneers in his face. If I was more together, I would be swooning at the “love of my life” comment, but all I can do is stare as he towers over Jim, leaning into him and instilling such fear that I don’t even know how he’s still standing.

“You know you were underpaying. My client deserved better,” Jim gasps out, but I

can hear the slight quiver in his voice. Good. He should be fucking terrified.

“Oh really? And did your client authorize you to kidnap an innocent woman in an effort to make a few extra bucks?”

Jim winces, letting us know he’s totally and completely fucked for what he’s done to me.

“That’s what I thought. You know they’ll be hearing about this, and with their connections in Colombia, I know they can do much worse to you than I ever could. Still, I’m tempted to kill you myself.” James’ hand clenches tighter around his throat, Jim’s face growing redder by the second.

“James, don’t,” I plead. Not for Jim’s sake, but for Katie’s.

“You sure, baby?” he asks.

“Yes. He’s Katie’s brother. And I need you beside me, not in jail.”

James chuckles darkly, “Oh baby, no way I’d let them put me in jail for this asshole.” He finally lets Jim go and jerks his head toward his security team that followed him in, “Get him out of here.” They pick him up and carry him out.

James crosses the room and kneels in front of my chair. He pulls a knife from his jacket pocket and starts slicing away at the restraints at my ankles and wrists. The second my wrists are free, I launch off the chair and into his arms, taking us both to the ground. I immediately burst into tears at the feel of his touch.

“It’s okay, baby,” he says softly, stroking a hand through my hair and down my back in an effort to soothe me.

“I know,” I say through tears. “I knew you’d come for me. I can’t believe how dumb I was to think I could go to Katie’s when you warned me of how much danger I was in. I am so, so sorry. I’ll never doubt your warnings again.” He reaches an arm up and wipes the tears from my cheeks.

“It’s okay, baby,” he repeats. “I didn’t give you enough information to believe me, and trust me, I’ll never do that to you again. Ever. I love you so much, Allie. I went crazy thinking I was going to lose you today and that it was going to be all my fault. I thought I would never get to tell you how much I love you.”

I start laughing through my tears, so many emotions taking over my body at once, I feel like I’m losing my mind.

“I love you, too,” I say. “Thank you for saving me. I love you so much,” I repeat, stroking his cheeks.

“Forever,” he says gruffly. “Now, let’s get the hell out of here. I need to show you how much I love you.” He sits up so I’m in his lap and kisses me quickly but passionately before rising and carrying me out of this horrible place.

The ride back to James’ place was quiet, but his hands never left my body from the moment we left the building. They still haven’t left my body as he guides me up the stairs to his room and into his bathroom.

He turns on the shower before wordlessly helping me undress. I lift my arms over my head and he removes my sweatshirt and sports bra before lowering to his knees and peeling down my leggings. After he’s successfully slid them off, he presses quick kisses to the insides of my thighs and the center of my core.

Without thinking, I bring my hands to his head, tangling them in his dark strands and holding him against my pussy. His espresso eyes look up at me, asking for permission to taste me further. I give him a wordless nod, suddenly desperate to feel the pleasure of his tongue, to feel alive.

“Gonna show you how much I missed you today, baby,” he says, before leaning forward and absolutely inhaling the scent of my pussy. He leans back and sticks his tongue out, poking at my clit before suctioning his mouth to me. The pressure is so good, I feel like I could come just from that. He tickles a hand up my inner thigh before swiftly curling two fingers inside of me. I moan as he begins thrusting, maintaining his delicious sucking on my clit.

This must be what heaven feels like.

“You taste like heaven,” James says, echoing my thoughts as if he was in my head. God, I can’t believe this hot, gifted, brilliant man is all mine.

“I love you,” I moan as he increases his licks and my eyes nearly roll back in my head. With a quick nip at my clit and a curve of his fingers, I’m falling apart around him and he’s on his knees before me licking up every. Last. Drop. It’s a sight I’ll never get enough of.

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“I love you more, baby,” he says, rising and revealing the protruding hardness pushing at the soft fabric of his black joggers. “Now, let’s get cleaned up.” He turns me and presses a light slap to my ass as he nudges me towards the shower, eliciting a light cackle from me and helping the trauma of the day further disappear.

Chapter 10

James

I can’t believe I almost lost her, I think as we’re wrapping up in the shower. We’ve taken turns washing each other’s hair and bodies, both of us eager for every shred of intimacy and affection we can share after the fear we experienced today.

As we step out of the shower, we quickly towel off and before Allie can make a move to walk out of the bathroom, I scoop her into my arms and seal my mouth to hers before walking us back into my room. I sit on the bed with her in my arms and she promptly flips so she’s straddling me. I run my hands up her silky-smooth thighs before pressing a thumb to her clit.

The emotion, the want and need, is so present for both of us. I dip a finger through her folds and find her already soaking for me. I’m hard beneath her, ready to sink into this beautiful, brilliant woman who I intend to keep forever.

Without a word exchanged, she lifts her hips and slowly lowers herself down my length. We both moan as she seats me fully inside of her. Her pussy is so tight, so wet, I know that she was made perfectly for me. She begins to swirl her hips, my thumb still working her. I lift my hips to meet her thrust for thrust and within

moments, we're both falling apart for each other. I explode inside of her as she pulses around me, riding me through the final shreds of her orgasm.

I hold her on top of me long after we finish. And when we go to sleep that night, I hold her extra close, not willing to lose her ever again.

I wake the next morning to Allie stirring where she rests on my chest. I moan and run a hand through her golden hair, marveling at how the strands feel like silk in my fingers. She turns her head and presses a kiss to my chest, and suddenly I have an idea for a new tattoo to add to my collection.

"Morning," she says, propping herself up on my chest.

"Morning, baby," I reply, lighting up as she smiles back at me. I don't think I'll ever not be struck by how she's the most beautiful woman in the world.

"We need to talk before I keep you trapped in my bed all day," I tell her, brushing a strand of hair from her face. She swallows deeply before letting out a resigned "okay."

"After we left yesterday, my team brought Jim to where the Colombians were staying and made them tell him everything he had been doing to try to get the extra money out of me. As it turns out, all of those calls weren't from my associates in Colombia, but rather from Jim's rather incompetent assistant, which is why the negotiations went so south. I left Colombia thinking we'd made a rather solid deal, but it turns out Jim, being the slimeball that he is, heard the terms and thought I was just going to be a pushover about paying more. I've left them to take care of him, but I've instructed them not to mess him up too badly because I know how important Katie is to you and I don't want to be responsible for harming someone you love."

She looks at me with warmth in her eyes, but her words reveal she's still a bit cautious. "I can't believe how messed up everything got. If I had just picked up the right person at the airport, then none of this would have happened."

"Baby, none of this is your fault. And, if you'd picked up him instead of me, we wouldn't be here right now. Happy and together. Jim will be taken care of but left out of grave danger. Just know, no one will ever be able to take you like that again. I'm closing down any aspects of my business that could put you in harm's way."

"I don't want you to have to change your business just because of me..."

"I'm not," I say firmly. "I've been wanting to turn the family business fully legit for a while now and I think it's the perfect opportunity. The Colombians are legit, despite what Jim's actions showed, and they want to work together."

"I'm glad," she beams at me, and I know I've made the right decision.

I kiss her lightly and then turn away, opening my nightstand drawer, and pulling out a deep blue velvet box.

"For you, my love," I say, handing her the box as her eyes widen with curiosity. She sits up, leaning into where I open my arm for her. She opens the box and gasps, finding the emerald necklace I caught her admiring on her first day with me.

"James! Oh my god! How did you know?" she asks, pulling the necklace out of the box and running her hands over the gems.

"You were basically drooling over it when I came out of my meeting. I scooped it up when you went out to the car, knowing I wanted to save it to give to you on a special occasion. And today seems as good a day as any."

“Oh yeah, why’s that?”

“Because it’s the day I’m asking you to move in with me,” I say, taking the necklace from her hands and clasping it around her neck. The green of the stones perfectly pulls at the slight green tones in her hazel eyes.

“Are you serious?”

“Yes, baby. I never want to spend a night away from you again. What do you say?”

“I want to say yes, but I don’t think I can leave my grandfather alone...”

“I already thought about that. With his bustling social life,” I say with a wink, “I thought he could move into the guest cottage here. I have been fixing it up, and I think it’s perfect for him. He can come and go as he pleases, have his own space, but still be close by and have dinner with us whenever he wants. What do you think?”

“Oh,” she says, tears forming in her eyes, “that sounds perfect. Thank you for thinking of him. For wanting to take care of both of us.”

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“Always.”

She looks away then back at me, her eyes dropping to my abs. as she suddenly asks, “Do we have any plans for the rest of the morning?”

“No,” I say. “What did you have in mind?”

“You making love to me while I’m wearing nothing but this gorgeous necklace?” she says, hopping on top of me and peeling off her nightgown.

And when she begins kissing her way down my body, the gems on her necklace leaving little scratches as she goes, I can’t think of a better way to start the day.

Thank god I got into her car at the airport.

Epilogue

Allie

Five years later...

“Woahhhh, Pickle! Watch where you’re going!” I say to the loose golden retriever running through the halls of my animal shelter. As much as I love this place, these dogs have gotten a little too comfortable and have started to roam the halls as if they’re members of the staff. I’d be more annoyed if seeing these rescue pups feeling safe enough to intrude didn’t make me so happy.

I spent the year after meeting James working as his assistant, helping him create a thorough business to set up the jewelry store as a legit enterprise. As it turns out, our town was desperate for a jewelry store that sold actual high-quality gems, and the business took off from there.

Jim is another story. After James' security team dropped him off with the Colombians, they decided that the worst punishment for him would be turning him into the authorities, which they promptly did. This led to a domino effect of his entire financial services company being investigated for fraud and corruption, making Jim's scheme of extorting my husband seem even dumber. He still has five years left in prison, but from what Katie tells me, he's working on being a better person. It still blows my mind that someone as perfect and kind as Katie could have such a rat for a brother, but we live and we learn, I guess.

After James proposed to me while we were on vacation in Antarctica—finally crossing off his seventh continent—we decided it was finally time for me to make a career change. I wanted to do something that combined my first love, working with dogs, and all of the business skills I picked up from my perfect partner. He was so supportive and I've now been running the non-profit shelter for the last two years. Every day is different and the work we do saves so many pets who would otherwise be out on the streets, or worse.

Six months ago, we got married in our backyard with just a few friends and family members. Grandpa walked me down the aisle with tears in his eyes and told me how glad he was that I met James, how much better he's made all of our lives.

For our honeymoon, we elected to go on a kind of world tour. We began in Colombia where, in a roundabout way, our relationship kind of began. From there, we hopped on the plane James chartered for our entire journey and went on a safari in Kenya before jetting off to Europe and spending the rest of the month eating our way through Italy, France, and Spain. I still haven't hit every continent, but I'm close.

And we'll get to redo all of our adventures when our new addition arrives later this year.

Our new addition that I need to tell my husband about tonight. I just found out in the bathroom at lunch, and between running an adoption clinic this afternoon and getting caught up in meetings, I haven't had a moment to even process the news. That's how I found myself almost tripping over Pickle on my way to grab my car keys and head home.

As soon as I get home I hear my husband yell "Baby?" from his office down the hall, like he does every day when I get home from work, always so eager to see me.

"In the kitchen!" I shout, placing the gift bag down and waiting for him to join me. I hear his footfalls and smile when he walks into the room, scooping me up in a sweeping hug. It's amazing how the spark between us hasn't dimmed at all in the last few years. In fact, I think it's only grown brighter. I hope it stays that way.

"Hi," I say, wrapping my arms around his neck as he looks down at me.

"Hi, baby, missed you," he says, nuzzling my neck. I take the opportunity to grab the bag, leaning back from my husband and lifting it to him.

"For you," I say, suddenly feeling a bit nervous. Our lives are about to change forever, in the best way.

"Oh yeah?" he asks, reaching into the bag. When he pulls out the test wrapped in a bow, his jaw drops to the floor.

"Are you serious?" he asks, beaming at me. I already know he's going to be the best dad in the whole world.

“Yes! You’re going to be a dad!”

“And you’re going to be the best mom.”

Without wasting another second, he pulls me into his arms and seals his mouth to mine.

“I can’t wait to do this with you,” he says between kisses. “God, this makes me want you even more.”

“Then take me.”

“Gonna take you on the counter,” he says, lifting me up and laying me down on the marble island.

He lifts my skirt, slides down my panties, and has his face buried in my pussy in record time.

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“So wet for me already. Taste so sweet,” he says between licks, and I’m already squirming beneath him. I must be extra sensitive today because by the time he slides a finger inside of me, I’m already pulsing around him.

“Oh my god,” I moan as he grumbles against my clit, the vibrations from the sound sending me even further into oblivion. By the time he rises, I feel totally satisfied and yet desperate for more. Desperate for him. I’ll never stop feeling this way.

“Need to be inside of you,” James grumbles from beyond the counter.

I hear his belt unclasp and before I can even open my eyes, he’s sliding inside of me in one easy stroke. I’m letting out moans I didn’t even know were possible as he grips my hips to drive further and further into me. It feels deeper, somehow more intimate than ever and before I know it, I’m tumbling over the edge again.

“That’s it, baby. I think you can give me another,” he says as he changes his pace to pound into me. I’m slipping and sliding around the counter, hanging on for dear life and hoping that this never ends. I explode around him just as I feel him explode in me, both of us totally and completely lost to the ecstasy of each other.

As we come down from our release, breathing each other in, James softly and tenderly kisses my stomach. I thread my hands through his hair and smile, my love for this man growing every second of every day.

I am so glad I picked him up at the airport.

~The End