



# The Deceived

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

**Description:** Billionaire Rex Dean was the man of my girlish fantasies as a child, even if he was far too old for me. He was always the most fascinating, intelligent, and handsome man in any room. Still is. That doesn't matter anymore. Now, I know the truth of who he is. How cunning, ruthless, and cruel he can be. He's a monster in a three-piece custom suit. A silver-tongued devil who will lie, cheat, steal, and crush anyone who gets in his way simply because he can. But I'm not the same naive girl I once was. I see him clearly now. I've clawed my way through Hell and back to pull myself out from beneath the destruction he buried me under. And I swore an oath. One I will honor even if it costs me my freedom. I'm hell-bent on retribution, and Governor Rex Dean won't even see me coming. I'll make him pay for his sins. He will beg for my mercy, but I will offer none. Because I, Winter Jensen, am the deceived.

The Deceived is a novel set in the Killing Hours World. This book is intended for mature audiences as it contains adult themes and situations. 18+ Only Due to Adult Content

**Total Pages (Source):** 45

# Page 1

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## CHAPTER1

### WINTER

I stand, arms folded, and stare at the plain garment. The white dress dangles from the satin hanger on the hook of the bathroom door, taunting me. Honestly, it is prettier than I thought it would be.

I used to have all sorts of beautiful things. Those days are long gone.

There's no reason to dwell on what was. That time has passed. My anger over the situation, not so much.

Reaching out with a shaky hand, I grip the fabric, allowing its softness to press against my flesh.

White. What a joke.

Its color is as pristine and bright as the moonlight streaming through my bedroom window. A full moon has never seemed as ominous as it does now. Worries for what this dress means and for what this night will bring, dance in the corners of my mind.

“You knew this could happen. You knew that you might be picked. It was always a possibility.”

I've repeated this to myself several times since the knock came and I opened the door to find one of the Manor staff holding the white box tied with black velveteen ribbon.

I knew when I came to Hale Manor that this was a likely scenario. I knew my odds of being picked were growing higher with each passing day. I just hoped that maybe, just maybe by some miracle, my time here would come to an end and I would never be subjected to putting on this dress. I should have known my luck wouldn't hold out.

“Suck it up, Winter. You've done way worse than this.”

That's the sad truth.

Ever since that day returned my life upside down twelve years ago, I've had to scrape and claw to survive every damn minute. I clench and unclench my fists at my sides as I inhale deep breaths, trying to calm down. Just thinking about him makes my blood boil.

But I'm no longer that smitten little girl with an unrequited crush on a man who was far too old to see me as anything more than a child. No, I was far from that naïve girl.

This current situation is a means to an end. It'll all be over soon enough. Then, I can do what I need to do because I will finally have enough money to move forward with my plans.

Revenge.

I smile at the thought. The one that keeps me going as I toss off my robe, letting it puddle at my feet. I snatch the dress from the hanger and unzip the side, stepping into the new concoction. I pull the dress up my body and yank up the zipper on the side, barely containing my fury.

Just thinking about him is more than enough to have me seeing red.

I rush through my room toward the vanity, where I settle onto the bench in front of

the lighted mirror. My things now take up the entirety of the marbled surface because my last roommate, Madeline, fulfilled her contract a few weeks ago. I've had this room to myself ever since and I've thoroughly enjoyed the privacy. I haven't had such fine accommodations in a while. Maybe I won't be paired with another roommate.

If I could only be so lucky.

I look at myself in the mirror, and I hardly recognize the angry woman who stares back at me. I still have the same long, snow-colored hair and silvery ice-blue eyes, thanks to genetics. But my happiness is gone, or as my momma used to say, my shine is dulled.

God, Momma, I miss you.

I can't wait to move on from this place. Not that it's been all bad. It hasn't. I've made some valuable, promising contacts during my time here and I fully intend to call upon them for help when the time comes. And I'd also be a liar if I said that I haven't enjoyed their company more than a time or two.

I grab my brush and pull it through my hair a few times before I set it down and pick up the tube of lipstick. Pursing my lips, I smooth on the burgundy color with expert precision, rubbing my lips together as I place the cap back onto the tube, and I assess my reflection.

If someone had told me even just a couple of months ago that I would be here, in this place, doing the things I do for money, I would never have believed them. It would have been laughable. I never would have considered this place as an option. But times were dire, and I was working as a waitress at a diner in town, barely making enough to eat. I was living in my beat-up car, scraping the bottom of the barrel. I had no idea what I was going to do to continue my meager existence.

I was cleaning a table after the lunch rush one day when I overheard a group of ladies gossiping and discussing the Manor. One of the women had just returned from time spent at Hale Manor. I couldn't help but listen as she discussed the lavish parties and the money she made in just one year spent within the Manor walls.

For years, the locals talked about Hale Manor and what went on here, but no one knew for sure. The Manor sits gated and hidden so far off the road that people can't see it. No one can get in unless invited.

I decided to investigate. I hid out in the bushes near the entrance and watched delivery trucks as they entered. A week later, I used that information to track down their liquor supplier and snuck onto a delivery truck headed onto the property. When the truck stopped to unload, I tried to sneak out and hide again, but I was caught by security and hauled into the main office.

I was terrified. I thought they would kill me, but they didn't, and after much begging, I was allowed to stay. I signed a nondisclosure agreement and started to work the next day.

## Page 2

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I, Winter Jensen, became a lady of the night.

I laugh to myself, though nothing about it is funny. It only serves to make me despise the man responsible for my predicament even more. But as twisted as this place may be, they took me in. They put a roof over my head, food in my belly, and gave me a way to get back on my own two feet.

A knock at the door pulls me from my thoughts. I stand, staring, unblinking, holding my breath.

This is it. It's happening.

Except that I don't move. My body is rooted in place. I inhale a breath, stealing my nerves as a second knock sounds.

Pull yourself together. You'll survive this, too. This is a cakewalk compared to the past decade.

I steel my nerves as I make my way to the door. Chin high, blood-red lips, kohl-lined eyes, and a trail of snow-colored hair. I am a fucking force, a storm of fury, an impenetrable fortress. I will own this Hunt just like every other obstacle that has been set before me.

If he couldn't fully destroy me, nothing but death itself can bring me down. I shake off those bitter memories and thoughts of the man that destroyed my life as I reach for the knob and twist it.

“Miss Jensen, we are ready for you.” The Manor employee raises his hand for mine, and when I accept it, he pulls me from the suite.

I nod once and step through the doorway, pulling it shut behind me. I follow him as my bare feet glide against the shiny, cold stone beneath them. The long, expansive corridor is empty except for us. Not a sound can be heard of the debauchery that is surely taking place a few floors away.

This mansion, Hale Manor, is a palace. I’ve been to many fine places in my youth, but I have never been anywhere that contains such wealth and opulence. It drips from every nook and cranny.

When we reach the elevator, I step in, and the attendant follows. I keep my chin high as he reaches for the button on the panel that will carry me down to my fate. I will myself to be strong as I stare at my reflection in the gleaming steel doors.

I am a force. I am unbreakable.

The elevator doors open, and I follow him out. We walk in silence as we make our way to the wall of doors. My escort stops at the exit to the gardens and turns to me. I realize not for the first time since I left my suite that I’m holding my breath.

“You may begin whenever you are ready, miss. The gentlemen are awaiting your entrance. As soon as you walk through that door, the Hunt begins.”

He bows slightly in my direction, then turns and stands with his back against the wall, opposite the door as he waits for me to exit.

I peer through the clear glass door and take in the flat expanse of lawn before me. I inhale a deep breath as I push open the door and the wind immediately blows through my hair. I close my eyes for a moment and my nerves fire through my body, causing

a tremble. I drape the length of this ridiculous skirt over my arm, and I run.

The night air chills my flesh as I sprint across the cold grass, my bare feet and shuddering breath the only sound around. Yard after yard, I fly into the night as I scan my surroundings. There's not a soul in sight. It's just me, the cold, the looming forest in the distance, and the massive moon hanging overhead. I push harder to get to the cover of the forest.

The farther I run from the Manor, the darker it grows. The lamp lights and up lights are beginning to be spaced farther apart until eventually there are no more lights. Just me, the eastern Tennessee forest, the bright moon, and this very primal sense of survival.

I can see why these rich assholes get off on the Hunt. They get to live out a fantasy. That's what the Manor caters to—fantasies. Almost nothing is too deprived or off the table here.

Chasing a woman through the woods to capture her and have your way with her? Sure. Why not? What man doesn't want to live out his caveman fantasy? I'd hate to see what they pay for this privilege, though. But, when you're that wealthy, money is no object. No wish is too big or off-the-wall extravagant.

I make it to the forest and duck behind a copse of trees. I take a moment to catch my breath and listen to what surrounds me. The crack of a twig echoes, and at once, I dart my head to the left toward the direct of the sound.

“Fuck, Vinnie, you dumbass. Anyone on this Hunt heard that. Watch where you step.” The harsh whispers carry on the breeze, and I try not to laugh because he's right. It is obvious that Vinnie has never been on an actual hunt, of any kind, in his life.

I think back to when I was younger and I would go fox hunting with my father. I'm assaulted with a memory of a flurry of fox hunters atop graceful steeds, sweeping across rolling green hills with mountains as our backdrop. Riders were clad in top hats, riding britches, and tweed coats. I loved the gear the most. It made me feel like such a grown-up back then.

Atop the horses, I felt like a warrior as we chased the speckled hounds who twirled and scampered, circling about in a frenzy with their pink tongues hanging from their mouths. They barked up a storm. Leading the charge as the huntsman, my father would blow the horn, the blast echoing through the lush valleys.

It felt like I was traveling back in time.

My father did, however, teach me actual hunting skills. Sometimes we'd take walks into the forest that surrounded our estate and track deer. I'll never forget the time he made me pick up deer poop barehanded to check its freshness. It was disgusting. I smile a little at the memory; I miss him so much. He taught me how to track and be as stealthy as possible, so for these Hunters, I won't be easy Prey.

I stay still and watch while the two blabbermouths continue to argue as they pass me by, hoping this bright-white dress doesn't glow under the light of the moon and draw their attention. Luckily, they are too busy bickering and clearly lack any true hunting skills since they continue past my hiding spot.

Once they are out of earshot, I take a second to listen to my surroundings. Only the hoot of an owl pierces the night. I scan the forest once more before I stand, lift the skirt of this dress into my arms, and run. I take off as fast as my bare feet and in this cumbersome dress allow, dashing deeper into the forest. No other sounds greet me besides the minute amount of noise I am making as I dodge branches overhead and tree roots beneath my feet.

I make my way out of the forest, and as I crest the top of the small hill, I see a creek, making a harsh gash in the landscape, as it meanders through the property. As I descend the grassy slope, the sound of moving water fills my ears. I am careful to watch my step as field stones peek out from the surface.

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Pausing at the edge, I look up and downstream, searching for a way to cross or go around it and find nothing. Shit, I may have to jump it. I need to get to the forest on the other side because I am too exposed here.

Too vulnerable.

My mind made up, I take a few steps back to get a running start. Only, I freeze where I stand once I look out across the stream and realize I am not alone.

“Fuck.” The whispered word forms a puff of fog in the chilly night air.

A large figure dressed in dark clothes emerges from the forest, looming before me. My breath catches in my lungs as he stops on the other side of the stream. Mere feet separate us. I never even heard his approach and that tells me I won’t easily shake this Hunter.

We’re both frozen in the moment, standing stock still as we take each other in. I can’t make out his features from here, but he is enormous—tall, broad, and imposing.

He steps back, and I don’t wait to watch him jump the stream. I hike my skirt up and turn to run.

## CHAPTER2

### REX

I emerge from the forest, stopping in my tracks, my breath catching in my chest. Just

on the other side of this stream, I see her.

My Prey.

She's stunning, a vision. Her long, white hair blowing in the breeze. She's otherworldly, practically glowing in the light of the moon, and I blink to make sure she's real.

A sense of possession overwhelms me, and I don't know if that's because of this game we now play or if it's merely the sight of this moonlight goddess before me.

Possibly both.

Mine. The word comes to me from deep within. A driving force that propels me into action. I won't lose her to another. Deans don't fucking lose. No fucking way. That thought alone, of someone else winning, has me taking a step back.

She anticipates my next move as she gathers her dress while simultaneously turning to race back up the hill and into the forest in an effort to escape.

Not a chance, sweetheart.

I leap the wide creek bed in one stride and land in a crouch, looking up in time to see the woman about to crest the top of the hill. She's faster than I anticipated she would be, especially in that huge dress.

I'm up and running, arms pumping, legs pushing as I climb the hill at a full sprint. My boots dig into the terrain as I propel myself up to the top and look around, but she's already disappeared into the forest.

Where are you?

I pause and listen. Only stillness greets me as I scan the forest. Then I hear a twig snap in the distance, and I'm on the move. Just ahead, I catch a glimpse of white fabric darting through the trees. I pick up my pace, ducking, and pushing low-hanging limbs out of my way as I give chase.

A noise to my right catches my attention, and as I glance in that direction, I see another dark figure headed toward my damn prize. I change course and head straight toward him.

Nuh-uh, motherfucker.

I rush the figure at full speed, taking him by surprise. His grunt rolls off my back as I lower my shoulder and hit him in the gut. My arms sweep around his legs, and I slam him down onto the ground with a brutal force.

All those years spent on the football field are finally paying real-life dividends. I chuckle at the thought. If only Duke Cavanaugh, my best friend and business associate for the better part of two decades, could see me now.

"Fuck!" the other man shouts as his back meets the cold ground.

I'm already moving up to my knees, hovering over his sprawled form. I punch him right in the nose before I connect three more successive blows, and I only stop because his head rolls to the side. Out cold.

Goodnight, motherfucker.

Shoving myself up off his body, I hop back to my feet, shake out my fist, and I'm on the move again. I have no idea where she's gone since my little detour, but I scan the forest as I go.

“Where are you, whore?” Another voice calls for her in the distance, and I stop at the sound not far from where I stand.

## Page 4

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Shit. Someone else has joined our party.

I don't think he knows that I am here. I crouch down behind a fallen tree, and watch as he comes straight toward my hiding spot. That is until a twig snaps, and both of us glance in the direction of the sound. A white gown ghosts between the trees, and our new friend starts to give chase. I hop over the log and make my way after them.

“No sense in dragging this out. It'll only make it worse for you when I catch you.”, says the newest guest.

His inebriated laugh echoes through the night, and I pick up my pace. The first Hunter to capture their Prey gets her for the night. I've spent a very pretty penny to become a member of Hale Manor because they cater to my darker desires. Desires that could never be discovered or acted upon in the real world, considering the position I hold. The cost of this membership also guarantees secrecy and silence by all who enter.

I have spent even more for the privilege of joining this Hunt tonight, and although the money is nothing compared to the vast amount at my disposal, after seeing her, I don't intend to let anyone else get their hands on my prize.

I watch as the man cuts toward where a shock of white hair disappears behind a tree. I bank left to close in on the opposite side. I dart around trees and clear them just in time to see the magical creature take the other man out with a tree limb to the face.

Damn.

He yells, briefly stunned as he falls to the ground. No doubt a broken nose and possibly a missing tooth or two. She turns on me then, and I stop short as she steps across the body of the man she just knocked out.

“I’ll kick your ass, too, dickhead.” She holds the limb up in the air like a baseball bat, and I’m not going to lie, her defiance turns me on.

A deep chuckle escapes me as I throw up my hands. “I don’t doubt you for a second. But you can put that limb down, come with me, and actually enjoy the rest of your night or...”

Suddenly there’s chatter in the distance, and we both turn to the direction of the sound, which is just over the next ridge.

“Or,” I continue as she turns her attention back to me, “you can end up with one of those bumbling idiots. Maybe both. I hear they share everything.”

She shakes her head; the long, white length practically floating around her form. “How about I just kick all your asses and head back to my room? I think I like that plan better.”

I can’t help but chuckle again. I love her fire. I smile, but it doesn’t reach my eyes. She has no idea that I love a fucking challenge.

“Have it your way, but just know that when I disarm you, I will do my very best not to hurt you.”

She sucks in a breath at my words, and I stride forward, laser-focused on her. She backs up, a single step, never taking her eyes off me or lowering that fucking limb.

“I’m not kidding. I will hit you.”, she growls.

“You’ll try.”

I step forward as she steps back, tripping over the man who lies unconscious on the cold forest floor. She lets out a yell as she stumbles and falls.

I rush to her side, and as I am kneeling beside her, she sits up and swings the limb at me. I deflect it with my hand, and the limb flies from her grip.

It’s over now, and she knows it.

She just sits there, looking defeated, while I stand and extend my hand to help her up. Staring at my fingers for a moment the disappointment curving her features, she reaches out and takes it. Her fingers, chilled from the night air, clasp against my skin. Her eyes finally meet mine, and a strange look crosses her face. Shock maybe and then what seems to be anger.

“You.” She practically growls at me.

I yank her up by the arm and she slams into my chest, her breath catching in her throat.

“You know who I am?” I ask, staring into her silvery-blue eyes, and if looks could kill, I’d be dead. But just as quickly as the emotion overtook her delicate features, it’s replaced with a fake smile.

“Yes, Governor Dean. I know exactly who you are.”

“I see.”

Her flirtatious words are a practiced mask, but I don’t care enough to call her out on it.

“Are you ready to go to my suite?”

She smiles, although nothing about it seems genuine, and nods in agreement. I take a step back from her and unzip my wool jacket. I slide it off my arms and drape it around her shoulders. It hangs off her slight form, and something about this feels familiar. I don't know why.

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“Yes, sir. I’m ready.”

Her easy agreement and manners excite me, and I hope that she’s as accommodating when she’s finally spread out before me. I take her hand in mine and pull her along beside me as we head back to the Manor.

I glance to the side and can’t help but notice how beautiful this woman is. “What’s your name?”

“Winter.”

Very fitting.

Her name rolls around in my mind, familiar though I can’t reason why. “A lovely name. I’m Rex, as you seem to already know.” I offer a smile, hoping that it eases the concern I see on her face.

“Yes, I know exactly who you are.” Her tone sounds accusatory, though I’ve no idea why.

Maybe who I am is no surprise but finding me here very well may be. Dipping my chin in her direction as an acknowledgment, I grip her hand a bit tighter and start to move back toward the Manor. She follows along.

What must she think of what is about to occur? Surely, she’s nervous. Who wouldn’t be? My hope, now that this Hunt is behind us, is for the rest of our night to end in mutual satisfaction.

Just get her back to your suite.

We make our way through the grounds in virtual silence. What's left to be said? We both know what's coming next. Maybe she doesn't know the specifics like I do, but we both know, nonetheless, where this night is headed. I plan to use her in every way possible. I will get my fill of her and every penny's worth that I paid for this pleasure.

The pleasure of having her at my disposal.

I love having control in all things and control of my partner. Her pleasure is the ultimate high.

We make our way back to the large stone monolith. She follows dutifully as we get inside and take the elevator up to my suite. A perk of being a VIP is that I have access to a suite instead of one of the many cabins that litter the grounds. Sometimes it pays to be the governor.

I look at her reflection in the doors just in time to catch her gawking at me. When our eyes meet, she casts her glance off to the side. I smile at the thought that she finds me almost as intriguing as I find her. Here in the light, I can see the delicate features of her beautiful face more clearly. Her alabaster skin, smooth and blemish-free, is nearly as pale as her hair. In the light, her eyes are more silver than blue, almost like glacial ice. She is stunning and I have always been a sucker for a beautiful woman.

As the elevator stops and the doors slide open, I take her hand again and lead her down the hall. My dirty boots leave muddied prints in our wake, and I have no doubt that a team of employees will be deployed and the floors will be as shiny as they once were. This place is monitored from one end to the other in public spaces and undoubtedly in some not-so-public spaces.

But with a place this large, the staff stays on top of everything, as does its owner.

Knox Bane is one man even I would have to give considerable thought to crossing. He has a way of making problems disappear permanently.

We reach the door to my suite, and I place my finger on the pad to disengage the lock, and I push open the door.

“Please, Winter, after you.”

I stretch one hand out before her as the other goes to the small of her back, ushering her inside. She looks at me briefly but then her attention returns to the room before her. She cautiously steps inside, her arms wrapped tightly across her chest to hold my jacket closed around her. Not moving beyond the entryway, she slowly takes in the space before her.

The best five-star hotels have nothing on this place. No expense has been spared. There is a sitting area, a dining area, a small kitchen, bedroom, office, and bathroom. All modern appliances and furnishings dripping with wealth. It's the type of luxury I am accustomed to and the perfect spot for me should I find myself here and actually need to work. But I rarely mix business with pleasure. Even I know how precious downtime can be.

I move to the corner, where a fully stocked bar of top-shelf liquors sits. “Let me pour you a drink.” I grab two glasses and a bottle of aged bourbon, pouring a couple of fingers into each glass. I cap the amber liquid, returning it to its resting place before I make my way to where Winter still stands.

“This will help warm you up.” I extend the glass to her, and she reaches out a hand to take it from my grip, our fingers brush, and she jerks her hand back as if she's been shocked. The motion sends amber liquid sloshing over the edge of the glass and onto the floor at our feet.

I watch as she recovers, lifting the glass to those pouty burgundy lips. I raise my glass at the same time and watch as she drains the contents. Not even a sputter escapes her as she swallows the spicy concoction. I'm enamored as the muscles of her throat work. Unable to imagine what it will feel like when it's my cock she's swallowing while my fingers grasp her throat to feel myself inside. A sense of anticipation fills me. Without thought, I reach out and push a strand of her hair behind her ear. Her eyes widen as I caress her cheek, but she doesn't pull away.

"Better?" I ask as I trail my thumb across her bottom lip, collecting a drop of bourbon that rests there.

"Yes." She whispers the word, her eyes locked onto mine.

I toss the rest of my drink back and pull the glass from her grip. I step to her side and set the glasses down on the entry table before crowding her personal space. "Do you need anything?" I ask as a courtesy before I set my plans into motion.

As if unable to speak, Winter shakes her head.

"Very well. Let's get cleaned up."

## CHAPTER3

## Page 6

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WINTER

Before I can blink, I'm scooped up in his arms.

Him. Fucking Rex Dean. The enemy himself.

Of all the damn people in this world, this is happening with him. I can't say no or a single damn word that I want to because of the fucking NDA I signed. No way in hell I'll forfeit my payday from this place once I fulfill my contract.

I'm not giving up another thing to this piece of shit.

I almost lost it out there when I finally realized who stood before me. Years of planning and going through hell so I could exact my revenge almost slipped through my fingers. Luckily, my mission took priority over just beating him to death with a limb in the middle of the woods.

I want to see him suffer like he made my family suffer. I want him to lose everything that he holds dear. I grit my teeth so hard in annoyance that I'm certain one might have just cracked. I inhale through my nose and slowly exhale through my mouth. A futile exercise because I'm not certain anything can calm this rage inside me. I'm wrapped in his coat, cradled in his arms, imprisoned against his chest. His spicy scent wraps around me like a death shroud. I tense to keep from reaching out and choking him.

His eyes dart to mine. The most beautiful shade of green that I once dreamed about looking at me, just like they are now, with heated interest. Childish teenage dreams

no longer occupy my thoughts where this man is concerned. That girl is gone because he destroyed her. He is only interested in one thing—himself. I can't forget that. How could I even begin to forget? This man took everything from my family. Everything. Just because he could.

Having already lost my mother to cancer, I made a promise to my father while he lay on his deathbed that if it were the last thing I ever did on this earth, I would avenge our family.

The Honorable Governor Dean stole our company from under us, and everything went downhill after that. We lost our business, our home, our friends, and then one by one, my parents lost their lives. When my mother fell ill, we were too poor for proper care, housing, or food after Rex Dean stole everything. My father only made it a year after my mother's passing. He was too tired and broken-hearted to live without her. I was seventeen, and I've been on my own ever since.

I lay my parents' deaths at his feet.

So, the fact that I am now forced to be in the same room with this man, and pretend to enjoy his touch, is disgusting. It's vile and reprehensible, but I will go through with whatever he has planned. I came here for money and connections so when I leave, I can use everything—every resource, every favor, every contact—to bring this man to his knees and restore my family name to the glory it once held. And Governor Dean is so powerful, I will need them all.

I won't stop until everything he holds dear is stolen and destroyed and he is broken in every way. He needs to know that his actions have consequences. Everything comes too easily for him and I intend to change that.

And to think, once upon a time, I longed to be in this very spot with him. Delusions of a child's imagination.

I remember when Rex first came to one of my father's parties. I had just turned fourteen, and I couldn't take my eyes off him. It was the first time a man had ever captured my interest in such a way. I gawked like a lovestruck fool from where I was perched in the corner of my parent's atrium on my favorite silk settee.

I had no doubt my mother had created that little corner just for me. The nook was partially hidden from the main part of the massive, two-story glass atrium by lovely potted palms and other plants my mother loved to tend to. A side table was stuffed with my favorite books, should the mostly adult party begin to bore me. I was painfully shy as a child, and she created a place for me to hide while still enjoying their parties. They were extravagant affairs; no expense spared.

My mother was always the most beautiful woman in the room. And while my features are so similar to hers, she held an allure that I have yet to possess. I could watch her and my father for hours as they would chat with their friends and gracefully waltz across the stone floor.

Smiling. Happy. Perfect in my eyes. And alive.

I remember watching Rex from my preferred spot in the corner as he entered the room. He was younger then, and from the gossips who stood just outside of my potted sanctuary, in town on leave from the Army.

They said Rex was quickly rising through the ranks, an impressive feat, no doubt his name, money, family connections, and ivy league degree not hurting his odds.

The crisp black tux he wore that night clung to every hard line of his body, and his facial features appeared to be chiseled from granite. A blade of a nose, deep-set green eyes, overly plump, full lips, and a square jaw. Topped off by the thick, dark hair he wore slicked back from his perfect face.

He was art come to life, and I fell smitten.

I watched his every move that night. I watched as he laughed with the men and flirted with the women, and a ball of jealousy took root in my stomach. Because I was too young for him to notice, let alone flirt with. I was a child, and he was all man.

But now, here in his arms, those childish notions are dead, and I am just filled with rage and vengeance.

He carries me toward the bathroom as if I weigh nothing, kicking open the door with one booted foot, the lights turning on simultaneously. As nice as my room may be, this one is far larger and far more opulent.

Nothing but the best for Governor Dean.

He sets me onto my feet, but before I am able to comprehend anything else, he spins me to face him.

Although slightly aged, his beautiful face is still entirely too perfect, too handsome, and too damn close. I lean my head back to create some space, but he doesn't seem to notice or care as he pushes his jacket off my shoulders and it drops to the floor at our feet. His hands leisurely move across my bare skin as if he has all the time in the world. He glides his touch from my shoulders down my arms, feeling, testing, tracing my flesh.

"Does this dress have a zipper?" His voice is husky, his eyes hooded, and I nervously swallow from being the focus of his intense stare.

"Y-y-yes, left side," I babble, stumbling over my words.

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He smiles, and then I see him the same way that I saw him when I was a girl—handsome beyond understanding, strong, and all-consuming. I see the man I used to think he was before he ruined my life and killed everything good in it.

Don't you dare fall for his façade.

I know better now. He's no knight in shining armor. He's the living embodiment of death. He crushes and destroys everything in order to get what he seeks.

His hand strokes across the fabric of my dress, and I close my eyes as my traitorous body breaks out into goose flesh.

This is too much. He's too much.

His large fingers of one hand grip the delicate zipper as his other hand gathers the material into a bunch. He slides down the zipper, and my senses are hyper-aware of his every move. His breath is a gentle puff against the top of my head as his height and large body crowd me in. I stare at his broad chest trying to gain my composure.

The sound of the zipper coming undone breaks into the near silence of the room. He tugs at my dress, and the strapless garment puddles around my feet. I stand in its midst like a daisy that's lost all of her petals. Bare to him now, I feel the weight of his stare as it presses in on my flesh. Despite everything this man has done to destroy me, I am still not immune to his presence. My nipples are peaked, my breathing is hitched, and not I really want to kill him for making my body react this way.

You're pathetic, Winter.

I berate myself behind closed eyes because I dare not look at him. For too many years, I have dreamed of this moment. Maybe not this exact moment, but being the sole focus of his ministrations. Once upon a time, I wanted that more than anything, even more than the air I breathed. But he killed that sweet girl, along with her entire world.

Get your shit together.

I open my eyes in time to find Rex watching me intently, biting his bottom lip as he drinks me in as if I'm the most beautiful thing he's ever laid eyes on and I won't lie it feels good to have him finally see me as a woman and not a little girl. I wonder if he recognizes me but I doubt it. Too many years have passed. I've grown and matured and clearly, he likes what he sees. His hands skim across my hip bones, and that's when I feel it... power. Endless power. Because right now, at this moment, he desires me above all others. I plan to use every single trick that's at my disposal to keep him exactly where I want him—begging for more.

A new idea begins to take shape. What if I was thinking of my revenge in all the wrong ways? Could it truly be this simple? Instead of trying to bring him down from the outside as I had planned, I will make Rex Dean fall for me and gain his trust and love. I will get inside access to his empire, learn every dark, dirty secret he keeps close, and then I will use it against him. I will bring his house of cards tumbling down.

Destroy him from the inside.

I look into his eyes, and a wicked grin lifts the corners of my mouth as I smile into the face of the devil himself, sin incarnate. He returns my smile as I thread my fingers through his thick hair, dragging him closer to my lips. I dart out my tongue, tracing at the seam of his mouth before he opens, allowing me access.

Instinctively, my legs lift to wrap around his waist as his hands cup my ass and lift. He squeezes my ass cheek tight and fuck me; it feels good. I hate him for this even more, but I use it to fuel my rage and this secret war he isn't even aware of is happening right now.

His hand moves to touch between my legs, and he practically growls at the wetness he finds there. Traitorous body. I tell myself it would feel as good—no, better—if it were someone else. My basest desires are being lit. That's all this feeling is. Maybe just maybe, I'm a little sick because having him bend to my will is a damn turn-on.

He walks us forward until my back hits the cold stone wall of the shower. The water turns on and I gasp at the unexpected sensation. His lips glide across my jaw, nipping and sucking his way down my neck as his fingers continue to stroke through the wetness of my pussy. I groan, disgusted with myself because it all feels so fucking good but he doesn't notice. He continues south, peppering kisses down my chest until he reaches my breast. He pulls my sensitive nipple between his sharp teeth, and I gasp at the alternating sensations as he sucks, licks, and gently blows across the taut peak while plunging two fingers inside me.

I've had enough. It feels too good, and before I forget who is giving me this pleasure, I grab a fistful of his wet hair and yank his face back to mine. His eyes simmer with heat and anger. I realize that he doesn't like that I'm taking charge. Too fucking bad.

I use his hair to pull him toward my mouth, as he slips a third finger inside my wet heat, and I growl. But before our lips can meet, he resists. The tendons of his chorded neck strain, stopping the momentum and his eyes narrow onto angry slits.

"You're not in control here, little girl." His fingers begin to move faster within me as his frustration and my climax build. "That's not the way this encounter is going to go. Understand?"

We stare at each other as both lust and anger swirl in a standoff between us. I release the grip I have on his hair because I have to remember my new plan. I can't blow this opportunity to annihilate him for some sort of quick, sexual form of payback. He can't ever know what's coming.

I smile my sweetest smile and respond, "Yes, sir."

He searches my eyes for a moment, and whatever he finds there must satisfy him. He leans back in to kiss me. Our tongues swirl as we drink one another in, and I can't help but laugh as I realize that the devil will be the one brought down by temptation this time.

## CHAPTER4

### REX

She laughs against my lips, the sound almost maniacal, just before groaning as my fingers trace her cleft.

"Something funny, Winter?" I whisper the words against her warm, wet flesh and can't help but gently trace the thrumming pulse that beats there, just beneath her alabaster skin.

Her small fist grips my hair tight and she gives it a defiant tug as her body shudders within the confines of my arms. I watch fascinated as her eyes close tightly and her head rolls back against the tiled wall, exposing the column of her porcelain throat in invitation.

The urge to bite her is so fucking strong that I can barely contain it.

Fuck it.

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My lips graze against her skin briefly, then I nip at her lightly with my teeth, much lighter than I'd prefer. I watch as her pale skin turns pink.

I don't want to scare her. She's young. Maybe too young but I know she's here of her own accord and is of legal age. The Manor makes certain of it. But still, I think she needs a comforting hand. Something about her seems almost familiar but that's ridiculous because I don't know anyone that's her age.

I brush those thoughts away as her moans of approval surround us within the confines of the shower before I lean back in, nip her neck again and suck the delicate flesh. My eyes shut as her pulse thrums against my lips.

Fuck. My dick is so hard, it's painful. I haven't wanted a woman this much in a very long time. The noises coming from her reverberate through me and go straight to my cock. This beautiful, much too young for me, woman has me ready to fuck her right here in the shower but it is not part of my plans.

No, not at all. Because tonight, is not only about pleasing her. Tonight, I get to forget Governor Dean and just be Rex Dean. And Rex Dean hasn't gotten to fuck like he's wanted to in a long goddamn time. I want to make this woman come in a hundred different ways, and what better time to start than now.

I drag my fingers through her slick flesh and since I already know she is wet and ready for me, I give her clit a little pinch. She gasps and bucks, clenching her thighs together, trapping my hand on her pussy and I know with just that one touch, she will be so fucking responsive. That makes my cock grow even harder.

“Spread your legs, Winter.” I practically growl the command. She whimpers softly as I stroke her but she obeys beautifully.

“Good girl.” I praise her by rubbing harder and faster.

“Shit. Shit. Shit. I’m going to come.” Her declaration has me working hard, moving my fingers faster but she still isn’t close enough to the edge for me.

“Come on my fingers,” I order as the need to drive her pleasure stirs something long dead within me. An old craving that I thought lay dormant. Something I’m not fully ready to recognize just yet.

She bites her plump bottom lip between her teeth and I focus on the way her perfect lip contorts with the motion. Her cheeks are reddened, her pale hair has darkened from the water and her dark eye makeup is streaming down her face in rivulets.

“Fuck.” I groan as I try to reign in my desire for her which is growing exponentially harder to fight by the second. I’m struggling for a semblance of control as my cock jerks behind the confines of my jeans. This overwhelming urge to possess her, and the beautiful goddamned mess that she’s become, is consuming my mind.

And there it is, the part of me that has been dormant; that I thought I’d long buried. The part of me that must remain locked away for the Honorable Governor Dean to exist. The part of me that loves to watch pretty things break.

My wet shirt is becoming heavy with water but I don’t let that stop me as I raise my arm and clutch her throat. She gasps as my grip tightens slightly; her black make-up smeared eyes widen. She bites her fucking lip and that’s all I can take before I shove my tongue into her mouth.

We’re a mess, a violent tempest pushing and tugging against one another; a tangle of

limbs and grunts; each fighting to be in control but that just won't do. I am always in charge and the sooner she learns that fact, the better. I break our kiss and squeeze her throat tighter.

"My little storm." I nip her bottom lip, pressing my teeth into her soft flesh for a brief second before releasing it. "The sooner you realize how this works; the happier we'll both be. I am in charge of your pleasure. I will tell you how to come. I will tell you when to come. Do you understand?"

My blood hums beneath the surface of my skin with newfound excitement. My cock is rock fucking hard as it presses against my water-logged pants. I'm fighting hard for control of her, control of this situation, control of my fucking self because I'm about to come in my pants like a teenager seeing tits for the first time. It's been far too long since I've indulged in my dominant tendencies.

Being the Governor I can't fuck just anyone. If the press catches wind, then it's front-page news. I definitely can't indulge in my darker tastes. That makes The Manor the perfect place for me to unleash these old locked-up desires. The public doesn't want a politician that enjoys dominating women.

Winter whimpers as my fingers pinch her clit while I give her throat a gentle squeeze.

"When I ask you a question, Winter I expect an answer."

"Fuck." She moans, her eyes nearly rolling back before closing. "I understand. Let me come."

Her defiance is damn erotic. "That's not how you answer me and that's not how you get to come." She's pushing my fucking boundaries and I fucking love it.

Her eyes fly open and turn into angry slits. "What the hell do you want me to do?"

I practically growl, a low rumbling sound in my throat emerges in answer to her tone. My grip tightens even more on her throat and my other hand squeezes her swollen clit tighter. Her tiny whimper fuels my desire for her.

I'm going to come in my fucking pants.

Trying to keep some semblance of composure, I respond. "Sir. You may call me Sir and you will ask me kindly what it is that I want you to do. Is that understood, Winter?"

She huffs before replying; "Yes." But it quickly turns into a moan as she moves her pussy back and forth against my fingers, her clit still trapped within my grip.

I allow her to have her way this time and make note that any future encounters with this young woman will be vastly different.

A loud knock sounds at the entrance to the suit, pulling my attention unwillingly away from Winter.

"Governor Dean, it's urgent."

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“Fuck.” My assistant, Tori, knocks relentlessly and yells through the door. I know it has to be urgent for her to interrupt me here. She was given strict instructions to stay in the limo unless something urgent arises.

The staff here are well aware of who I am and after signing an NDA they’ve allowed her and one of my security team access to The Manor in the event of an emergency, so I know this has to be something I cannot ignore.

“I’m sorry my little storm,” I kiss her lips softly, “but I have to see what’s going on.”

I reluctantly step away from her and grab a couple of towels off the warmer. She looks away from me, to my outstretched hand that’s holding a towel and then back to my face as though I’ve lost my mind.

“Take it,” I whisper as I push the towel towards her. She takes it and wraps it around herself. I pull off my sodden shirt and a loud intake of breath has my eyes landing on Winter. Her gaze peruses my torso and I can’t help but smile at her before I swipe myself with the towel.

“Like what you see?” I smile smugly as her molten gaze locks onto mine. I don’t wait for an answer before turning and making my way to the door, my pants dripping water onto the pristine marble floor as I go.

When I open the door Tori stands there flanked on both sides. I can tell she is entirely uncomfortable and out of sorts because she’s had to come into The Manor. She’s no fool. She knows why I’m here. As my right hand, she has complete, unfiltered access to me.

A man dressed in a navy suit, no tie and a white shirt unbuttoned showing off his heavily tattooed flesh, stands to Tori's right. He's leaning against the wall as he smiles at me, "Good evening, Governor."

"Good evening..." I trail off, waiting on him to supply me his name as he smiles before me. He's imposing and he isn't just some random security for The Manor.

"Lazzaro. You can call me Lazz, your majesty." I bristle at his tone but I let it slide, for now. It isn't important at this moment. Why Tori is here is much more imperative than punching this smug shithead in the face.

"Just walking this little lady up to make sure she and your" he glances, finding him lacking, at Steven, head of my security team, "security detail gets to where they need to be and back."

I draw on years of pulling on this fake persona. It's so easy now to get into the character of the Governor, like pulling on an old comfortable suit.

"Thank you, Lazz. I appreciate your concern for the safety of my staff."

I turn my focus to Tori, my childhood friend, and the one person that I've always been able to rely on to have my back.

"What's going on?"

She takes a deep breath before laying out the facts. "Landcastle in Holcomb County was hit by an EF3 tornado. It's nonexistent now. The battery plant, the main source of revenue for the community, has been wiped off the map."

"Ah hell. Okay. Did you bring my clothes?"

Tori snaps her fingers at Steven, and he presents me with a leather overnight bag. I take it with a nod. “Thank you, Steven. Tori, give me about twenty minutes and meet me at the car.” Tori and Steven turn to leave but that guy, Lazzaro, remains.

“Was there something else?” My tone is clipped. I don’t know what this guy’s deal is but something about him is getting under my skin.

“Yeah, Gov. I’ll need to see my girl back to her room since you’re leaving.”

Shit, he’s right, I guess my night is over. It is likely I’ll be tied up for days dealing with this disaster.

“Excuse me.” Soft fingers touch my shoulder blade, her touch a brand to my skin. She’s gotten redressed into the now dirty, torn dress and all I want to do is shut the door on this guy’s face and fuck her against it.

“I’m not finished with you yet,” I whisper grabbing her wrist as she passes.

She leans into me again, pressing her lips to mine, briefly. The moment is sweet, almost tender then I get that feeling again, familiarity.

Before I can gage it further, she breaks our nearly chaste kiss then rests her head against the door. A devilish smirk contorts her features and fuck is that sexy on her.

“I’m not finished with you either, Governor.”

“A threat I hope you intend to keep.” I laugh but I mean every damn word.

“Oh, I absolutely will.” She smirks before pulling the door shut between us.

## CHAPTER5

WINTER

## Page 10

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 4:39 am*

I cannot believe my shitty luck. Just when the opportunity I have waited on for years magically falls into my lap, it's yanked away just as unexpectedly.

Damn it. I shouldn't have expected anything less. Just look at my track record.

I follow Lazzaro off the elevator and take him in as we travel down the hall toward my room. My bare feet and his combat boots are the only sounds. He's huge and covered in tattoos. His very presence is intimidating, but it's his easy smile that unnerves me. He is such a handsome guy, but I get the feeling he'd just as soon kill you as look at you.

"So, the Governor won you." Not a question. He glances at me as we continue to walk the long hall. I suppose he wants an answer.

"Yeah, seems so." I shrug my shoulders. I'm not about to share the fact that I want to destroy the man.

His eyes cut to mine as he chuckles and shakes his head at my smart-ass reply. Honestly, I'm a little on edge and I need to remember who the hell runs this place. I once watched Knox Bane, the owner of this fine establishment, knock a man out cold with one punch for yanking one of the servers down onto his lap. That guy hasn't ever been back. Rumor has it he never made it off the Manor grounds.

"You're a firecracker, huh? Well, Sparky, it seems our Governor took a shine to you. Just know I'd consider it a favor if you made sure to show him a good time if he comes back."

So, this just got interesting.

“Yeah? What’s in it for me?” I ask as I flick my eyes up to him. Maybe I’m dumb for asking but I guarantee you this man doesn’t offer favors in return for nothing. Why the hell should I?

“Ah, Sparky. You learn fast, huh?” He laughs, this deep grumble of a sound, as he runs a hand over his beard. Then he stops walking and turns to look at me.

Ah,shit.I screwed up, didn’t I? Me and my big mouth pushed it too far. What the hell was I thinking? You don’t gamble when the only thing you have to lose is your life.

“How about you get to keep your room to yourself for the remainder of your time here? That’s about all I can offer you as far as perks go.”

Interesting.Relief floods me that this man isn’t about to help me meet my maker.

I don’t hate being alone.There’s no one else here that I even really spend time with, besides, Lila. Don’t get me wrong, everyone that I’ve met here has been super kind but after the shit show of my teenage years, I’ve gotten used to a sense of solitude. But really, why does Lazz think Rex would even be bothered with seeing me again? Regardless, I will still exact my revenge somehow. At least now I have a way in with Tennessee’s dear Governor once I leave here.

“Deal.” I extend my hand and Lazz takes it in his much larger one before raising it to his lips and placing a kiss on the back of my hand.

“Sealed with a kiss.” He winks at me before letting my hand go and I already know this man gets his way in pretty much everything. How could you fight him? Better yet, why would you? If it weren’t for the fact that I have a life to ruin, I might try to work my way into Lazz’s good graces and then some.

We spend the last few moments walking to my door in silence. I push my finger against the lock and the door opens, but just as I'm about to go inside, Lazz breaks our silence.

“Winter, keep the Governor happy but don't let him walk all over you by any means. You feel me?”

I chuckle, because like hell would I ever let that happen. “Didn't plan on it, sir.”

“Sir. Oh, I like that. Good night, Sparky.” Lazz turns and whistles as he walks away and I can't help but watch. He's hauntingly handsome and honestly, I'm a little unnerved by him.

I close the door behind me and head straight for the bathroom. I need a shower and I need to wash this filth off. I'll probably have a drink or two because I'm still pissed off.

I can't believe I was forced to make out with Rex freaking Dean.

I yank the filthy damned dress off and shove it into the clothes hamper. It should probably just go into the trash but I wasn't provided with details on what to do with it after it's been worn, so hamper it is.

I open the door to the large glass shower and the water automatically comes on. I adjust the settings to my preferences and step into the warm spray closing my eyes and leaning my head back under the fall of water and then I see him.

Rex.

Rex whispering to me to come on his fingers.

Rex grinding his jaw, the muscle pulsing with determination as he pumps his thick digits in and out of me in a maddening rhythm.

Shit.

What the hell? I mean, I guess it's okay to be attracted to him. I've always been attracted to him, haven't I? I can't be upset with myself for enjoying the things he did to my body. It's normal to enjoy that. Clearly, he is an older and skilled lover. He certainly knows what he is doing.

I keep telling myself this as I wash my hair and my body. Even as my hand finds its way between my legs. It's not because of him, I'm just too worked up to not have gotten a climax.

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Absolutely not. It's just the way that he worked my body.

I swirl my fingers through my most intimate of areas, gasping at my own touch as I'm assaulted with visions of Rex. I need this release. I need this to calm myself and my overworked nerves from seeing him again so unexpectedly after all these years. I twirl my fingers faster against my flesh.

The way his hands traced my pussy.

The way his eyes focused solely on me.

The way I wanted to explode all over his fingers. Exactly as he commanded.

Why am I thinking of him? Why in the hell did his touch feel so damned good?

“Shit! Shit! Shit!”

I turn the shower off, my own moments of intimacy shattered as I storm out, grabbing a towel on my way, wrapping it around me as I make my way toward my closet. I grab the first thing I see and throw it on. The black jogging pants stick to my damp flesh as I yank them on.

My hair is dripping water onto my gray t-shirt as I shove my feet into my house shoes. I grab my favorite cardigan, and I head out of my room and straight toward Lila's.

She's got the night off so I'm hoping she's in her room and not in what we call the

library. The library is the common area of the house reserved for the ladies that live here. It's the only communal space we have to hang out.

Really, I'm in no mood to be around a bunch of people.

You can't have this many women cooped up for a year and not give them any place to go. The Manor has truly thought of everything.

I knock on her door and I'm practically holding my breath until the door opens and I see Lila's dark brown eyes.

"Winter? I didn't expect to see you tonight. Weren't you on a hunt? Everything okay?" She moves to the side, ushering me in and shutting the door behind me.

"Hey. I'm okay. My night was... insane," I reply.

"Why? What happened? Tell me everything."

She curls up on the sofa, waiting patiently for me to join her but I can't sit. My mind and heart are racing. I pace, wringing my hands as I recount the night.

"The Hunt began and it was this weird, almost ceremonial type thing, you know?"

I look over at her, and she fingers one of her perfectly bronzed, ringlet curls. Her attention is fully focused on me as I take a breath and continue to pace.

I've never had a real friend until Lila. That should make me sad except that every moment of my life has been laser-focused on revenge. I'll be sad about it later when I have time to reflect.

"And I just ran like crazy into the forest. It was scary but it was also thrilling and I

know that makes me sound like I'm insane. Maybe I am, but it was kind of powerful knowing that all these men paid who knows how many hundreds of thousands of dollars for the privilege of hunting me. Me."

I take a deep breath. The details of the night are still clear in my mind as I gaze out Lila's window.

"Anyway, I'm running through the woods in this huge fucking dress and there are a couple of drunk guys that were working together."

Lila gasps, her finger stills, she's no longer twirling her curl. "Wait. What? They can do that? They can work together on a hunt? Were they going to share you?"

I inhale and exhale slowly. As much as I despise Rex, I'm thankful those two men didn't catch me.

"I think they can pretty much do whatever they want on a Hunt. I just knew I didn't want to end up with them."

"Jesus, Winter. This is insane."

"I'd have to agree.", I reply. "I took a moment to look around me, to get my bearings and to try to figure out my options. There was a stream in front of me and it was like out of nowhere; there he was."

Even now, thinking of him at that moment, my heart thunders against my chest. I would have never guessed in a million years that fate would place Rex before me. Here, of all places.

"Who?" Lila gasps as I pace another lap, back and forth trying to wrap my mind around this night.

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“Lila, he was huge and his presence, even in the dark, was imposing and overwhelming to me.” I was scared and angry and had I known who he was then, maybe I would have knocked the hell out of him and I damn well should have.

“I ran as fast as I have ever run in my life while holding up that humongous dress, trying not to trip and fall. I could hear him right behind me.” Chills scatter across my arms as I recall his heavy footfalls closing in. “I bobbed and weaved through the forest trying to lose him. I knew there was no way I was going to outrun him. He was so fast but then suddenly, I was facing another man.”

“Oh hell, Winter. What in the world did you do?” Lila asks as she clutches her comforter in one hand.

“I stopped short and he immediately started telling me his plans for me. How he was going to fuck me. His laugh was terrible, Lila. I couldn’t imagine a worse fate than being at that man’s mercy.”

How wrong I was.

“So, I hit him with the nearest thing that I could find; a big tree limb.” Had I known what fate had in store for me, I should have just gone with the jackass.

Lila gasps again, my eyes cut to hers, dragging me out of my thoughts and back to the events of the night.

“So, I turn and there the hooded stranger is, just looming over me. I yell that I’ll kick his ass too. I was walking backward trying to put some much-needed distance

between us while I tried to formulate a plan. And then I tripped over the guy that I had just knocked out.”

“Oh no! You didn’t?” Lila cuts in.

“Oh yes, I sure did. So, I basically screwed myself over.”

“Then what?” Lila asks.

I take a deep breath, composing myself for the truth of the matter that haunts me now, that will continue to haunt me.

“He rushed to my side and I sat up, swinging the limb at him but he deflected it with his hand and I lost my grip on it. I knew then that he’d won.”

It was over then and I knew it.

Lila is patiently waiting on me to gather my thoughts and finish this story but when I tell her how I won, I can’t imagine what she’s going to say. Lila is the only person in this world that knows my truth. She’s the only one that knows what I did to me and my family.

“It was him, Lila. It was Rex Dean. And worst of all, he didn’t even recognize me by my name.”

And maybe that fact bothered me the most.

The man had ruined my life and I wasn’t even a blip on his radar.

CHAPTER 6

REX

“And that’s how we keep the great state of Tennessee on track. Thank you for coming out today and remember your vote matters!”

I smile and wave to the adoring crowd as they shout and chant my name.

They ate that speech up.

As I exit the stage, I am rushed by my constituents like I’m a fucking rock star.

“Thank you for coming out. I appreciate your vote!”

Men clap my back and shake my hands and invite me to have a beer. Women kiss my cheek and whisper raunchy things in my ear as they sneakily slip me their phone numbers. Mothers hand me their babies and I fucking pose with them for pictures. Fake smile after fake smile and I hate every fucking minute of it.

This part of my job is exhausting and just drags the fuck on. Don’t get me wrong, I enjoy being the Governor. I’m fucking good at being Governor but I hate the fucking schmoozing side of politics. Not that the voters aren’t worth my time, but there are so many better uses for it.

Like fucking Winter’s tight pussy.

There it is. The one thought, or rather the one person who seems to occupy my every waking moment now.

“Governor Dean, is it true you’ve got your eye on the presidency?” A reporter asks as he shoves the microphone in my face, waiting for a reply.

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“Wouldn’t you like to know?” I laugh and everyone laughs with me but fuck this is a nosey-ass reporter.

It is true, I do plan to run but I’m not announcing my candidacy in a podunk town with a handful of reporters who typically only write about local carnivals and church bake sales. No, it has to be announced at the perfect time and precisely in the right way. I’ll need all the momentum that I can get for such a large run, and the right people behind the scenes to run the campaign.

I smile and kiss the chubby baby, giving her a little bounce so she’ll giggle and of course, she does. The cameras all around me start to go off. I smile as I hand her back to her mother, whose perfect tits are pushed up and on display. Her tongue darts out wetting her bottom lip and she winks at me before taking back her daughter from my proffered arms.

I bet I could get her to suck my dick after this rally if I wanted her to. It wouldn’t be the first time that’s happened, but there’s only one mouth that I want on my cock right now. Winter’s.

Fuck, I need to see her again. I can’t wait for the southwest Tennessee leg of this rally to be over with so I can get back to the Manor.

I hate that I can’t just see her at my leisure, but with my campaign and her being contracted to the Manor, she can’t leave the grounds. I wonder how long she has left on her contract? I make a mental note to check on that very fact. I’m losing my tightly held control and I need to fuck this woman out of my system.

I'm assaulted with the memories of the taste of Winter's kiss and an image of her as she slides down my body to rest by feet.

She eagerly pulls me free from my trousers before she skillfully teases the head of my cock with her tongue. Her blue eyes meet mine and I cup her cheek in awe and approval as she takes the length of me to the back of her throat, like the good fucking girl that she is.

My fingers twine in her hair, using her mouth for my pleasure, guiding her as she takes every last inch of me until she can barely breathe because she's stuffed too full of me as I fuck her face. The sounds she's making, small appreciative moans, wrap around my cock and drive me to move faster; my cock sliding into her wet mouth, across her pink tongue, and down her throat.

Fuck.

"The things I'd let you do to me, Governor Dean." My eyes shoot open as the mother of the baby leans in to whisper in my ear.

Oh, fucking hell. I look around at the crowd still gathered around me as my daydream is broken.

"Thank you, everyone, for your support, but the Governor isn't taking any more questions today. We'll see you next stop on the campaign trail which you can find at [RexDeanreelection.com](http://RexDeanreelection.com)."

Tori interrupts my thoughts with her impromptu announcement to the crowd as she steps in front of me, gently tugging my arm, guiding me to the back of the stage.

I'm trying to wrap my mind around the fact that I lost all fucking control of myself, and the situation out there, as she pushes her way through the crowd to get us behind

the stage where my campaign bus is parked.

I'm not scheduled to wrap up this stop yet so something urgent must be happening if Tori is calling off the schmoozing. You won't hear me complain. I can't believe I got so lost in a fucking daydream.

She stays to my front, so close her ass is only millimeters from my crotch, as she continues to steer me by the arm, up the steps and into the bus where a handful of staffers wait.

"Everyone out." Tori yells and the staff scurries to evacuate the area like their asses are on fire. Once the last staffer is off the bus, Tori finally releases my arm and turns to face me.

"What in the hell were you doing out there?"

Her red hair is tied up in an elegant bun and her expensive cream pant suit hides all the curves that I know are there. Her slender blade of a nose is scrunched up in annoyance and her eyebrows are drawn down into angry slashes.

"Schmoozing. What the fuck did it look like? Why did you drag me back to the bus?"

I yank at the knot of my tie to loosen it. I don't understand the reason for her question or her annoyance with me. Everything was going according to plan, and the crowd was eating out of my fucking hand.

Tori huffs a mirthless laugh before she hangs her head, grabbing at that spot between her brows like she's done since we were kids, anytime she's really annoyed.

"What's this all about, Tori?" I don't understand and the longer she drags this out, the angrier I'm getting. Her gaze meets mine.

“You’ve got a fucking hard on Rex! You were out there looking at the mother of that baby and your dick was getting hard while she whispered in your ear!”

What? I look down at my crotch and sure enough, she’s right. “Oh, fucking hell!” I pull my jacket off and toss it onto the nearest bench seat before yanking at my tie and pulling it off over my head.

“I had to get you out of there before the press saw what was happening.” Tori waves her hand at my crotch again before stomping off toward the bar area that we have set up in the kitchenette of the bus. She wastes no time grabbing a glass and pouring herself a drink.

I look down again and mutter, “Fucking hell.” I’m hard as a rock and didn’t even notice it. I turn from Tori and push on my cock, trying to rearrange my hard-on to make it less noticeable.

“Christ. Thank you, Tori. You just saved my re-election campaign.” Had the press noticed this situation they would have drawn the same conclusion that Tori had, that the woman with the baby was turning me on.

Once I get myself under some semblance of control, I turn to Tori in time to see her throw back two fingers of my priciest scotch. She definitely earned that today. Fuck. What a nightmare.

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“Do you think anyone else noticed?” I ask as I make my way toward the bar. Tori fills up a glass before she slides it over in front of me.

What a mess. I could have just ruined everything that I’ve been working towards my entire life.

She pours herself another and downs it, shaking her head as the soothing liquid goes down. “I think I controlled the situation, Rex but what in the world were you thinking to let that happen out there? If anyone noticed, it could ruin us.”

I throw back the drink, guzzling the contents down. Fuck. I messed up. I put everything that I’ve worked for, that my team has worked for, on the line but I still can’t turn off the thoughts of Winter. I need to get back to the Manor; back to Winter and I need to fuck her out of my system. I can’t let thoughts of her and my slight infatuation with her ruin my goddamned campaign.

“When can I go back to the Manor?”

Tori’s face scrunches up in confusion. “Is that what you were thinking of? Sir, I have to say that this is inappropriate,”

I cut her off. “Don’t give me that Sirshit, Tori. We’ve known each other too long for that.” We know almost everything about one another and if I were interested in Tori in any sort of sexual way; she’d be my perfect match. But I do not and will not ever harbor those feelings for her. She’s like a kid sister. We’ve been friends since our freshman year of high school.

“When can I get back to the manor?” I grab the bottle and pour myself another, my desire to see Winter, is approaching a need at this point.

Tori sighs, catching my attention as she pushes a strand of hair that has fallen from her perfect bun behind her ear. “We have a couple of weeks left on the trail before we return home. Do you want me to schedule anything for you before then?”

I chuckle, “You think I need a prostitute, Tor?”

Fuck, maybe I do. My old ways are starting to resurface and it’s been a long time since I’ve indulged them.

“Clearly, you need to blow off some steam, Rex.”

I laugh at her comment but she’s not wrong. The sooner I get this need for Winter out of my system, the better for my cock and my career.

## CHAPTER 7

### WINTER

I glide on my favorite shade of red lipstick, pursing my lips at my reflection in the mirror of my vanity.

The shade is very similar to my Momma’s. Red was her favorite. Though her reasons for wearing it were far more glamorous and less, shall we say, sluttier than mine?

I’ve come to learn that men tend to love a red lip or at least the fantasy of smearing said color in certain ways. I like to wear it while I work although the look is quickly growing on me.

Speaking of work, I work on the casino floor tonight and I have to admit, it's one of my favorite jobs here. It's almost like going out to a fancy nightclub, or what I would guess a fancy nightclub would be like, since I'm not old enough to get into one around here and never have been.

I have about half an hour before I'm required to be on the floor, so I have a bit of time to get dressed. I look at myself, turning my face from right to left and I barely recognize the woman I've become. I clip a jewel-encrusted barrette into one side of my hair, sweeping my pale locks away from my face, then dragging the other side down over my shoulder.

I barely recognize this version of me.

I'm no longer that sweet, naive girl. Sometimes I miss her though. Her innocent view of the world anyway. I have Rex to thank for ruining her life and her bright future.

I wonder where I would be now, had that man never darkened my family's doorstep?

A knock sounds at my door drawing me from my darkening thoughts. I push my chair away from the vanity and stride toward the door. My breath catches in my throat when my eyes land on the person who stands on the other side.

"Winter?" His deep voice wraps around every syllable of my name. He's just as imposing as he was the first time that I met him, but he is one of the most handsome men I've ever seen.

"Yes?" I hate the waver in my voice, that little tinge of fear that makes my words quiver as I reply to Ace.

"I'm Ace." He smiles and I'm so momentarily mesmerized by his looks that I don't realize he holds out a pink box tied with a large black velvet bow.

“What’s this?” I’m not sure what to make of it as I take the proffered box from his hand.

“Normally we don’t allow patrons to send our staff gifts, but this one was a little special so I decided to make an exception.”

“Thank you. I appreciate that.”

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What in the hell? Who would send me a gift?

No one immediately comes to mind, but I can't wait to see what is inside this box and why in the world Ace is making this an exception to their rule.

"Have a good night, Winter." Ace turns and walks down the hall and for a moment I watch him, just enjoying the view before I shut the door. No harm in looking. I can guarantee you there's harm, though, if you cross that man.

I place the box on my bed and tug at the ends of the velveteen bow then lift the top off of the box.

"Oh my God." I gasp as I take in the crystal mesh bikini that rests inside. I pull out the small black envelope that lays on top, and run my finger under the edge of the envelope before pulling out the card.

Wear this tonight.

That's all the elegantly written scrawl says but I have to hope this is from Rex. It wreaks of wealth, luxury, and power. I don't see Ace breaking the rules for just anyone. It makes sense that it's from Rex given the last conversation that I had with Lazz.

I have to hope.

It's been two long weeks since I've seen the Governor. Two weeks of me questioning my every move, every angle, every available avenue. How do I even see him again?

He may not return here. Then what? I'd just have to wait out this contract with the Manor. Then I'd be free to pursue him, just like I had originally planned.

Nothing will stop me from getting my retribution.

I drop the note onto the bed and pull out the bikini. The crystals slide through my fingers, twinkling in the light as I take it in, holding the brassiere up to my chest.

He sent me crystal lingerie.

I lift the bottoms and that's when I notice the design is an intricate swirling pattern. There's a chain that acts like a thong running from what you would call the panty that will clasp around my waist.

What's this?

I lay the items off to the side and pull out another small pink box. I gasp, my hand shooting to my mouth as I take in what is before me. Inside, rests a pair of diamond earrings.

"Are these real?" I turn them this way and that as I inspect them. It certainly appears that they are real. Each stone is easily two carats.

Tonight, suddenly got very interesting.

If there's a chance that Rex is coming in tonight, I have to look my best and I have the perfect thing to wear over this crystal bikini.

I place the earrings down on the bed and amble my way toward my closet. I begin to shuffle through the gowns that hang there until I find the one that I'm looking for.

“There you are.” I practically purr as I slide the dress from the hanger and grab a pair of rhinestone-encrusted shoes. I head back toward my bed to get dressed. I’ve been dying to wear this gown and now with this bikini; it will look perfect.

I ease myself into the bra, the cold metal pebbling my nipples as I hook the clasp on the side. Then I slide my legs into the panties.

“Oh fuck.” I hiss as the cold metal touches my most intimate parts. I pull the chain up around my waist, fastening the clasp onto my hip. I turn to the mirror and inhale sharply when I see my reflection. This fits my curves perfectly.

How did he know what size I am?

I turn, gazing at my reflection from every angle and I have to say even I am impressed with the way this flatters my fuller, hourglass figure.

I’m definitely feeling myself.

I stride back to my bed and pick up the dress. I’m extra careful as I slide the delicate, sheer material over my head. The plunging neckline and back showcase this brazierre perfectly and the slits to my waist on each side of the dress showcase the crystal-encrusted panties underneath.

I secure each diamond on my ear and spritz myself lightly with my favorite vanilla and jasmine scent before making my way down to the casino floor to start my night.

Once on the casino floor, I take a lap around the room. Allowing myself to be noticed as well as to see if a certain Governor may be here. I don’t see him and honestly, I’m a little disappointed. But before I can dwell on that disappointment for too long, a handsome gentleman calls me over to the table that he’s gambling at.

“Hello, I’m Winter.” I greet as I walk up. Extending my hand.

His dark brown eyes scan me from head to toe causing me to have an involuntary shiver. I don’t know who this man is, but he puts off one hell of a dangerous vibe. He shakes my hand, kissing the back, I can’t help the little giggle that escapes me before he releases my hand.

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“Krasivaya zhenshchina, blow on this.” He addresses me in Russian and English, his accent wrapping around each word spoken in both languages, the English portion heavily accented. English is absolutely not his first language.

“I’m sorry?” My brow wrinkles with disgust and confusion and honestly, I’m slightly offended. Sure blowing him could happen but he doesn’t need to be so brazen. At least introduce yourself.

“Here, my dorogoy.” I smile then, laughing before blowing seductively on the dice that the handsome man holds out before me. He winks at me, then hands me a poker chip before he turns back to the table and tosses the dice down the table. We both watch as the dice tumble across the surface until they land.

“Winner!” The croupier calls. The handsome man winks at me again. I cheer for him, smiling before I kiss his cheek, pressing my tits against his arm. The rich guy hands me a five-hundred-dollar poker chip.

“We make a good team.”

I’ll stand here and do this shit all night.

It beats the blow job I gave the night before last to a man who is old enough to be my granddad. Gross. But the federal judge from New York liked the way I played with his balls while I went down on him. The old me might feel bad for thinking and doing these things, but the old me died along with my parents. Whatever the cost, I’ll pay it to seek my retribution.

If only the Governor would return, I wouldn't have to carry on fooling around randomly with the patrons of this fine establishment. I could lock him down and get him exactly where I need him to be.

"What did you say your name was?" I ask as I twirl the poker chip between my fingers.

"I didn't. Okay, one last roll. I'm ready to take a break, see what else this place has to offer."

The guy raises the dice to my lips.

No name it is. I'm okay with that, too.

I already know where this is headed, but the man is handsome, smells good, and tips like crazy. It could be worse I suppose. I blow on the dice and while he rolls and I take a moment to look around the expansive room.

I spy Lila sitting on an equally as dangerous-looking man's lap in the corner. I'd be worried but she looks like she's enjoying it as his hand races up the slit in the side of her dress.

I turn my attention to the entrance and hold my breath as the crowd parts for Knox Bane to amble through; looking as deadly as they say he is and right behind him is Rex fucking Dean.

He's back.

My heart races at the sight of him and I stalk his every move. Fuck. He looks magnificent in his black tailored suit, looking every bit the part of the Governor. The fabric clings to every muscle perfectly and as much as it pisses me off to admit it, he

looks as fantastic as he always has. That's part of the reason I was drawn to him in my youth.

The man has always been able to pull off wearing a suit and a uniform.

Rex scans the room from side to side almost like he's searching for someone as Knox heads off to the bar. And when his eyes land on me, a pompous ass smile crosses his face. I know right then that I've managed to hook this piece of shit, even if it is momentary. I will use every advantage that I can gain.

I wink at Rex before stepping up on my tiptoes to kiss the Russian's cheek. He just smiles as he charges a gaming assistant employed by the Manor to gather his winnings for counting, and cash them out in on his behalf.

"Here's one more, dorogoy." He hands me one more five-hundred-dollar chip making my tip total about one thousand dollars so far tonight. Not bad for just a few minutes' worth of work. And by work, I mean kissing this man's ass.

"Thank you." I glance in Rex's direction as I take the chip from the gentlemen just in time to see a muscle ticking in Rex's jaw.

He's pissed that I'm with the Russian. This just keeps getting better. I slide my arm around the attractive stranger's neck and lay my head on his shoulder.

Time to bait Rex into action.

## CHAPTER 8

### REX

Kirill Volkov also known as The Wolf, the King of the Volkov Bratva wraps his arm

around Winter's back and mother fucker do I want to break that arm.

Every piece of intelligence that I ever saw regarding his dynasty, and his father's before him, flashes through my mind. Intel on their operations not only in Russia but also on several continents throughout the world. Trafficking guns, nukes and humans, money laundering and, I'm certain, even more than our intelligence could gather.

His reach knows no bounds. The Wolf isn't someone that you want to cross, but neither am I.

I want to break every single one of his fingers that are slowly gliding across the outer edge of her breast, daring to touch her perfect fucking tit and the lingerie that I sent her.

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I sure as fuck didn't buy that for him to enjoy.

I almost can't blame him. Almost. She looks goddamned amazing.

When I sent that lingerie set to her, I'd hoped she'd wear it tonight and realize that I'd been thinking of her these last couple of weeks while I've been away. I wanted to let her know I had thought of her. And fuck have I thought of her. I've jacked off thinking of her more times than I care to count. I knew when I had that set made that it would look sexy as hell on her and I can't wait to peel those scraps of fabric off of her. It'll be like unwrapping a present.

I have plans for my present tonight and those plans sure as fuck don't involve the King of the Volkov Bratva.

My teeth grind, my jaw clenching so fucking hard it's bordering on pain, as I watch Winter kiss Volkov's fucking cheek.

Stop fucking touching her.

The Wolf is one of the very last people on the planet that you want to fuck with, and I know that. But my inner monster doesn't give a fuck. It's howling with the need to possess Winter and destroy anything that stands between me and achieving that goal. I haven't felt this need to possess, to fucking dominate, someone in a very long time.

I flex my fingers then make fists, repeatedly, willing myself not to go over and show the Wolf what happens when he touches things that do not fucking belong to him.

“Everything okay Governor?” Knox Bane asks as he hands me a whiskey. I toss it back, not even taking my eyes off of Kirill as I relish the warmth of the booze. It does nothing to calm my nerves though. I know Knox isn’t one to play games and right now, neither am I. My next move needs to be stealthy, or I risk being barred from the Manor. From being barred from Winter and I cannot risk that.

I’m banking on the fact that Knox Bane is looking to be in my good graces.

The Wolfe has to be removed. Immediately, or I’m going to do something irrational.

The last thing that I need is a war with the Wolf. The man is the head of the Volkov Bratva for fuck’s sake. I take a breath, willing my nerves to settle. I need to be smarter than my urges. I’ve spent decades honing this unflappable façade. There is no reason to let this mother fucker have an opportunity to unravel it. I’m fucking smarter than these base desires and I need to act like it instead of thinking like Volkov is touching my favorite toy.

I inhale a deep breath, calming myself, then exhale before replying. “All good, Mr. Bane. I’m going to take a walk around the floor. Maybe play a game or two; find some company for the night.”

I am not going to go over there and punch Kirill in the fucking face for daring to touch what’s mine.

“If you need anything, Governor Dean, just ask. Drinks are on the house.”

Kirill’s fingers touch the side of Winter’s breast again and I watch as she tries to move out of his grip. Her big blue eyes cut to me briefly before scanning the room and that fucking does it. I need something all right and I’m going to go fucking get her.

“Thanks, Mr. Bane,” I say as I sit my glass down on the table beside me, and without taking my eyes off my prize, I make my way straight to where Winter sits with The Wolf.

Winter looks up as I approach, her mouth hanging slightly open in shock that I’m daring to approach, but she quickly recovers. Her cool, unflappable façade sliding back in place.

She’ll find out soon enough that I don’t fuck around with what’s mine. And by the end of this night, she will be mine.

The Wolf eyes me as I approach but he leans over, speaking to his associate. His goon gets up and stands between Volkov and me before I can get too close.

“Winter.” I wink at her and she just tilts her head, staring at me. I focus on the goon before me. The massive wall of Russian muscle in a suit.

Mr. Volkov isn’t in the mood for company.” He crosses his arms across his broad chest, trying to strike an imposing figure. Too bad for him that I don’t find his bull shit intimidating.

“Mr. Volkov has something that belongs to me. So, I’ll just take the lady and be on my way.” I take another step into Volkov’s lap dog’s space, standing toe to toe.

The Wolf stands up, grunting something in Russian under his breath, nudging his associate out of the way. The fact that I cannot understand what these two assholes are saying between each other pisses me off even more than the fact that this buffoon believes he has some sort of claim on Winter.

I make a mental note, right then and there, to learn Russian. I’ve changed too much, come too far in my life, to not be on top of my game at all times; in every fucking

situation.

The lack of knowledge can be the difference between life and death.

I'm nose to nose with Kirill Volkov.

"I don't think the lady is too interested in you, and what you have to offer, mudak." Volkov looks me up and down as if he finds me lacking. "She seems to be enjoying my company just fine."

I don't need to speak Russian to know this piece of shit just called me some sort of name. I step deeper into his space.

"You may intimidate others with your bullshit Mr. Volkov, but you'll find, I'll not be easily intimidated."

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I didn't do two tours of Afghanistan and then carry out missions with the Special Activities Division of the CIA for a decade to be intimidated by the likes of The Wolf.

"Is that so?" Kirill pushes me, but before I have a chance to fully draw back my hand and punch this smug piece of shit in his mouth, Knox Bane appears between us.

"Gentlemen, this isn't the place for this type of interaction." Knox, Ace, and Lazz slide into the small space between us. Ace directs Kirill and his associate off toward the bar, leaving Lazz to usher Winter over to the bar.

I don't take my eyes off of her as he leads her, one hand on the small of her back. She turns, her eyes meeting mine.

"Sorry, Governor Dean. Mr. Volkov is used to getting his way. Can I get you anything?" Knox tries to smooth the tension and slowly the room returns to its activities now that the tense situation has been diffused.

"Actually, I'd like to ask a favor." Here we go. This is what the red-carpet treatment boils down to. They want to be in my good graces, and I might as well use that to my advantage.

"Just ask." Knox crosses his massive arms and nods his head once in my direction as a sign to continue.

"I'd like to have Winter accompany me tonight."

“Of course.” Knox says without hesitation.

Okay, that was easy enough, so I continue, “I also need your help with a few things.

“Just ask, Governor and we’ll do our best to accommodate you.”

I can barely contain my smile as I tell Knox everything that I need to make this night one that neither Winter nor myself will forget.

## CHAPTER9

### WINTER

I can’t believe Rex was about to get into an actual fight over me. I can’t say I wouldn’t have loved to see that beast of a man bloody up Rex. The thought of watching the handsome Governor get beaten to a bloody pulp brings a smile to my face.

Turning, I glance over my shoulder, giving Rex one final look as Lazz walks me to the bar.

Rex’s eyes connect with mine and shivers race down my spine. There’s always been something dark about him, just beneath the surface. Even through his finely cultivated exterior, it’s visible. Just there, lurking. I can see it in his eyes tonight. It’s terrifying and sexy as hell.

“You okay darling?” Lazz asks, snapping my attention to him as he walks around the corner of the bar to get me a glass of water. How this man knows I only drink water is beyond me. Well, and an occasional sip or two of sweet tea. Nobody can make it like my Momma’s though. I pull myself from that old memory and focus on the now.

Lazz slides the water over the bar top to me while the bartenders work in a hurry, dodging around Lazz's huge, tattooed form to get all the drinks out.

"I'm okay." I sip the drink slowly.

"You look gorgeous tonight. So gorgeous in fact that you caused two powerful patrons to almost come to blows. That's some bikini darling." Lazz chuckles and I sputter with the drink at my lips before setting it back down.

"I didn't mean to start a fight." I wasn't certain that was regarding me, but now that Lazz is confirming it I can't help but delight in the distress that I must be causing Rex. But I am not happy to have drawn Lazz's attention. I have a feeling this is the last guy you want to piss off.

"I'm just teasing you. Men are complete idiots once a beautiful lady gets involved. Trust me, I know." He winks and I'd be lying if I said that the man wasn't attractive.

A form-fitting black dress shirt hugs his every muscle, a couple of buttons left unbuttoned, exposing tattoos that trace up his neck. Lazz has rolled up the cuffs of his sleeves, showing off his tanned, muscular, tattooed forearms. He must have hundreds or maybe even thousands of tattoos. His long, wild brown locks are tied up into a half up half down style.

Simply put, he's a rugged work of art.

Lazz grabs a shot glass before reaching under the bar to pull out a crystal glass decanter. The crystal seems too delicate for his massive hands but he deftly pours himself a generous shot of what I can only assume is whiskey.

He tosses the drink back before placing the items back under the bar then smiles at me radiantly. "Well, I've got rounds to make. You have a good night Winter. Try not

to start anymore fights.” With that Lazz walks from behind the bar and disappears through a door that is hidden within the paneled wall. I marvel at the fact that I’ve never noticed it before, and I’ve been to this very bar hundreds of times during my stay. It makes me wonder how many more secrets, hidden doors, and rooms there are in this old house.

“Winter.” I turn and can’t fight my triumphant smile as I come face to face with Rex.

I guess I had expected him to leave after that little fiasco. His feathers were ruffled and if I know anything about the man, he likes things to be in order. I remember at one of my mother’s dinner parties, he had to have his cutlery lined up perfectly, and his water and wine goblets as well. I was fascinated by it. It was his way of controlling the situation, one small thing, but he had control over it.

“Governor Dean.” I flip my hair seductively over one shoulder and Rex’s eyes take me in from head to toe. No doubt appraising how his gift clings to my curves.

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“You look stunning tonight. I knew this would look amazing when I had it tailored for you.”

Shit. He had this made for me? I must say that’s a little surprising. I could see him sending someone, one of his lackeys maybe, to buy this for me. But the fact that he took the time to have this designed and crafted screams volumes about where his attraction for me stands. My plan is going far better than I ever realized.

“Thank you. I love it.” I stand a little taller kick my hip out a little bit, push my tits out a bit more and of course, his eyes zoom right in on that very spot.

“I hoped you would. Would you like to take a walk with me?”

Hell yes, I do. A chance to get him alone and weave a tighter web? Absolutely.

“I’d love to.” He extends his arm and I take it, allowing him to escort me from the casino floor. We walk out through the double doors, and he nods at the Manor security that stands there, before pushing his way through a set of double glass doors that lead into the garden. I get a chill as I recall the last time I stepped foot outside these doors. It was the night of the hunt, the night I was unknowingly captured by the very man that I am now trying to bring down.

It’s a beautiful fall night. There’s a slight chill in the air and I can’t tell if the shiver wracking my body is from the cold, or the anticipation of my plan finally coming to fruition.

I’ve waited years for this moment, and now it’s finally here.

Rex believes I'm chilly, so being the gentleman that he believes himself to be, he removes his jacket and drapes it around my shoulders.

"Are you cold?", he asks. "Thank you. Yeah, just a bit. This sheer dress doesn't offer much warmth against these chilly nights." I can't help but to discreetly sniff his jacket, the scent of warm spices and him wrapping around me.

"It won't be much longer before the weather will turn even colder. You can already feel it in the air."

He drones on about the weather as we walk through the gardens and down a path toward where the rows of cabins light up the darkened forest around them. I really couldn't give two shits about the weather.

"I love it when the trees around the Governor's mansion are covered with snow. It's surreal."

"Uh-huh," I reply. I'm not even listening as we make our way down the illuminated path. I've been to the cabins a few times. Mostly it was with a couple of patrons who enjoyed watching and putting on a show, but tonight the pathways are extra crowded.

"You've been here before." Not a question.

"Yes." Rex doesn't ask for any details, but I can tell by the set of his muscular jaw he isn't pleased by my answer.

Of course, I've been here. I've been at the Manor for months now. Does he think I get to stay here and not keep up my end of the contract? It doesn't work that way. At my luckiest, I'd be thrown out onto the street or I could just disappear. I'm not about to ask. I'm fulfilling my contract. I have enough troubles without having murderers pissed off at me.

He continues to guide me down the path and I can't help but glance into one of the windows as we pass. Amelia, a beautiful girl that I went to boarding school with, is in one of the cabins, her huge white gown telling me that she was chosen for The Hunt.

The top of the gown is peeled off of her torso, exposing her breasts, and the skirt of the dress is carelessly tossed up and resting on her ass. I watch as the Hunter pummels her from behind. Her eyes are closed, and her mouth hangs open as she comes. I haven't spoken to her in my time here other than a brief hello. Neither of us revealing what tragedy occurred in our lives to take us from pampered princess to bordello entertainment.

Rex squeezes my hand tighter and I turn, his attention momentarily fixed on Amelia before his pace picks up. I follow him as he leads us up onto the porch of the next cabin. He pushes his finger against the lock, and a few seconds later, it disengages and he's pushing the door open.

Dim lights automatically turn on as we enter and I can't help but gasp when I see everything that's laid out for this experience.

He planned for this.

A bed draped in fine red silk is placed in front of the darkened window. Candlelight casts the space in an ethereal glow. An assortment of instruments are spaced out precisely on a small table that is nestled beside the bed. A riding crop, mask, rope, wand, and a butt plug.

I turn to find Rex smiling at me as he pushes the door shut with one hand and loosens his tie with the other. The lock clicking into place sounds like thunder as it rings through the room and my head.

This is it. While things between us were intense last time, to say the least, we didn't

have sex. It wasn't this intimate.

"Are you okay with this?" Rex asks, walking in slow circles around me, sizing me up. He straps the tie off his head and tosses it onto a nearby table. His eyes blaze a path across my skin I swear I feel it like a phantom touch.

"Yes. You do understand that I work here? Of course, I'm okay with it." The words escape harsher than I intend but he's caught me off guard again tonight.

He doesn't care about me. I remind myself. This man destroyed my life. I don't owe him anything. Now it's time for his comeuppance.

His laugh is a dry, throaty and humorless sound as he unbuttons a couple of buttons on his shirt. "Such a smart mouth." He murmurs, more to himself, as he walks toward me.

We size each other up. I follow his every move as he circles me. I'm startled when he traces a finger down my spine and even over the top of the sheer material of this dress, I can feel warmth washing over me, in the wake of his touch.

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“I have something for that smart mouth.” His breath tickles the shell of my ear. My body trembles and I’m not certain if it’s out of anger or anticipation. I’d be a liar if I said I wasn’t turned on right now. The fact that he holds that power over me, to affect me in such a way, pisses me off. But I couldn’t shut off my body’s reaction to this man even if I wanted to. I’ve craved this intimacy with him for too long.

“Do you want it?” I do and I despise myself for it. But I don’t answer. I won’t satisfy his ego with a response.

He wraps an arm around my waist from behind, pulling me back against his chest. I’m shocked by his crass words and the swiftness of his movements. His fingers curl into my stomach, almost painfully. But something is reassuring in his touch, as if he is strong enough to shield me from the worries of the world. But I know that to be a lie. I know better than anyone what Rex is capable of. The hurt, the destruction, and the carnage.

I know first fucking hand, and I’m not stupid enough to forget it.

Unable to stop me, this damned curiosity, I whisper into the stillness of the room. “What is it?” I’m pretty certain that I know, but this is all a game to him. And I’m here to win so I’ll take the bait.

Rex moves my hair, grazing my neck with his fingers as he does, draping it across my other shoulder. I hate myself for the tingling sensation I am enjoying from his touch. His proximity is sensation overload.

“Oh, my sweet girl. I’m so happy that you asked.” He whispers sensually against my

ear and my eyes close of their own accord. As he spins me in his arms, I stumble over my heels, but he doesn't let me fall.

“What in the hell, Rex?” I practically screech, but when my eyes land on his, the lust that I see reflected at me is my undoing.

“Shhh, my little storm. We have a show to put on.” He reaches into his jacket pocket and pulls out a tiny remote. With a flick, I notice the darkened window turns transparent.

He places the remote back into his pocket, and my nerves are on end. My stomach is in knots because I don't know what I am supposed to do or what to expect. “What's happening?” My voice shakes and my palms sweat.

“Just a little game.” Rex grips my dress at the shoulders and pulls the top of my sheer dress down over the sparkling bikini and I exhale a shuddering breath. I'm disgusted with myself for this sick attraction, yet so fucking aroused and needy for this man. But I steel my fucking nerves. I can do this. I can exact my revenge and ruin this man and his empire.

I will leave him standing in the ashes of his destroyed life. Just as he left me.

“This looks amazing on you. I'll have more made, soon.” He runs a finger under the strap of the brassiere and I try my best not to let that single touch affect me. I focus on the promise he's made to see me again. He is already planning it.

Weirdly, it's like he sees me as his sex doll. Of course, Rex would consider women nothing more than playthings; something to own and use; to bend to his will. This is something I can use to my advantage. I slide my hands up his chest, pushing his jacket off his muscled shoulders, and let it fall in a puddle at his feet.

“Let’s get you out of this suit Governor.” I say as my hands glide down from his shoulders to his buttons. I undo one button at a time while he stands stock still, his eyes never leaving mine. His eyes are blazing with intention and I can see he’s doing everything he can to keep himself in check.

Rex Dean is coming undone, and I love it. I feel sexy powerful as everything I’ve dreamed of falls into place. This is it my revenge starts now.

If the governor wants to put on a show, then I’m here for it. He works on unbuttoning the cuffs of his shirt while I finish the last couple of buttons. Once he’s finished, I push it off allowing the shirt to land at his feet. I take in the expanse of smooth lean muscled flesh before me.

Rex Dean may be older, but he’s in the best shape of any man I have ever seen. He’s utter perfection. The fact that I even think that pisses me off.

“I’m ready for whatever you want to do Governor.” Rex leans in close to me, his lips pecking softly at the corner of my mouth, the action causing a needy little moan to escape me.

“I like the sound of that. Come, lay on the bed.” He takes my hand guiding me across the space and then he helps me get up onto the bed. I sit, waiting for his next move but I can’t help myself and allow my attention to drift to the window. From my vantage point, I can see several couples watching us. Some kiss and lightly fondle one another as they wait for us to begin. I watch wondering who they are. What prominent man or woman is out there just waiting to watch the Governor of Tennessee fuck me. Facing him, he comes to stand between my legs.

I can’t help but look outside again and see a small crowd gathering around our window. Suddenly I feel nervous. It’s not that I mind that these people can see me in the throes of passion and whatever else the governor may have planned, but it’s the

fact that this is so real. My revenge is here. I've waited for this moment for so long it's almost surreal.

"Look at me, please." I do as Rex instructs. I forget myself for a moment and just get lost in the commanding presence of this man. I enjoy having a man, a real man take control, especially this man. He's always had this type of pull over me.

His square jaw ticks as the rough skin of his fingers grasp my chin. He may have a cushy job in politics, but he worked with his hands in some capacity, he's a former soldier after all. As he grips my chin tighter, his thumb strokes my bottom lip. I can't stop myself. My tongue darts out for a taste. Rex plunges his finger into my mouth, his lust-filled eyes trace every movement. He strokes my tongue and I suck on it briefly before releasing it with a pop. He raises my head with the grip he still maintains on my chin.

"This experience will be very different than our last. Do you understand?"

His voice is a barely contained growl as I answer, "Yeah."

"No, that answer will not do. You will reply with yes sir or no sir to any commands or questions that I ask you. Do you understand, Winter?"

His green eyes blaze with barely contained lust and I squirm under his intense, smoldering gaze. Fuck this man is hot. "Yes, sir," I reply, my jeweled panties becoming so wet, it's embarrassing. I never realized that Rex is a fucking dominant, but it makes total sense now. So do all the toys that are laid out by the bed.

"Close your eyes my little storm." I do as he instructs and in just a few moments, the cool silk of the blindfold brushes against my skin.

"Such a good girl."

Of all the things I've ever known about this man and believe me, I've studied him for years, I can't believe this, but at the same time, it makes sense.

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Rex Dean is a fucking dom.

### CHAPTER10

#### REX

Fuck, I can't take it. The way she responds to my touch is a pleasant surprise. She's so fucking receptive. "Lay back on the bed."

She begins to slide back, and I grab her calf to stop her.

"What the hell?" She squeaks, a little bit shocked because I've stopped her from doing the very thing that I have just instructed.

"What did I just tell you? How are you supposed to respond to any commands or questions that I ask you?"

Her bottom lip sticks out in consternation and coupled with the blindfold; my cock stirs behind my zipper.

"I respond with yes sir or no sir."

Hearing the words come from that pouty mouth makes me want to shove my cock past her perfect fucking lips and right down her throat. I'd love to see her mouth stuffed full of me. "Good girl. I am in charge of your pleasure tonight. When it happens, where it happens, and how often that I allow you to come. Now, lay back on the bed and raise your arms above your head." I let her leg go and she pushes herself

further back onto the bed, settling herself before raising her arms above her head.

“Spread your legs wider,” I command, and she does as instructed, showing me how wet that little scrap of fabric is that’s covering her pussy. I can’t seem to stop myself as my hands trace up to her thighs, grabbing the sides of the material at her hips.

She jerks momentarily and is startled since she can’t see a fucking thing that I’m doing to her.

I am a sick bastard because that gives me a little thrill. That thought alone has my cock ready to explode in my pants. I tug the scrap of wet fabric down and bite back a groan as her perfectly pink pussy comes into view.

“Look at you. Laying on this bed with your dripping wet cunt on display for anyone that wants to look at it. You’re such a naughty girl, Winter.”

She writhes on the bed, eager for action as I reach over to the table and grab the riding crop. I trail it from her ankle, slowly making my way up the side of her calf, past her knee, and to my delight she shivers with anticipation.

“Do you like that, Winter? Do you like that there are people outside watching me touch you? Do you like that they can see how wet I make your cunt?” I ask as I trace the riding crop leisurely the last few inches up her alabaster, gorgeous thigh. I can’t wait to have my face buried in her pussy. I slap her clit lightly with the riding crop. The wet slap reverberates through the sparsely decorated room.

“Fuck.” I groan as Winter gasps and writhes. She brings her arms down to touch her aching pussy. I allow her a moment of indulgence.

Once she’s rubbed her clit a few times, further working herself up. I smack her hand with the crop. I smack her hand again, lightly for good measure. “Arms above your

head. Leave them there until I instruct you to move them.”

She whimpers but raises her arms. I take a moment to look at her before grabbing the length of rope from the table and walking around the bed.

She looks amazing.

I pull the length of hemp rope through my fingers. Rope play is something I once loved but haven’t been able to indulge in for quite some time. Being a high-profile politician doesn’t allow for much privacy. That’s why I was more than thrilled to receive the invite to The Manor. A place where I can let go. A place where I can once again indulge in some old interests.

“I’m going to bind your wrists.” I wrap the length around her right wrist and admire the view from this angle. The jeweled top sparkles in the candlelight but her bare pussy is the star of this show.

I can’t wait to taste her.

Winter’s wrists are secured in a simple one-column tie that she could very easily slip her wrists from, but I won’t tell her that. I trace my fingers slowly down her chest as if I have all the time in the world before simultaneously pushing down both cups of her bra. Her nipples are already pebbled but I work both of them at the same time anyway. Gently rolling the taut peaks between my fingers.

“Oh.” She breathes the words, almost a whisper. I love how receptive she is to my touch and how pink her pale flesh turns from where my fingers have touched her skin. It’s like a roadmap of everywhere I’ve been.

I’m not certain how much more of this foreplay I can bare.

She moans and writhes on the bed yanking at the ropes that bind her arms above her head, but she doesn't lower them.

Shit, that's fucking sexy that she remembers to obey me.

I walk back around the bed and stand at Winter's feet. Reaching out, I swipe a finger through her folds. "I think you're ready for me. Are you ready for my cock?" She's so beautiful it just feeds the monster inside of me. I should be disgusted with myself. Fuck I'm old enough to be her father. But tell that to my cock as I make quick work of toeing off my shoes before dispensing with the rest of my clothes. I stroke myself from root to tip before I move in between Winter's spread legs. Leaning into her, I blow on her cunt and she jerks from the surprise.

"Are you sensitive?" I whisper against her flesh but I don't wait for an answer as I swipe my tongue through her folds. Her flavor is heady and I can't stop the groan of delight that rises from me. I circle the bud of her clit feverishly before sucking it into my mouth.

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Her hands come down, grasping at my hair for purchase as she rides the ever-loving fuck out of my face. I hate to even stop her but stop her I must. There are rules in place after all.

“Mind your hands, Winter,” I whisper against her wet flesh and she moans her protest.

I flick her clit relentlessly with my tongue and a few moments later I’m rewarded with her climax.

“Fuck!” Winter shouts as her torso lifts from the bed, her muscle straining as I lick every last bit of her. I have the desire to dirty this woman up, so I swipe my face across her inner thigh before biting the tender flesh and crawling my way over the top of her. The brush of her soft skin against mine and her scent of bergamot is intoxicating.

“Do you think your tight little cunt can handle my big fat cock?” I whisper in her ear as she bucks her hips up into mine in response.

I support my weight on one elbow grasping my cock and brushing the head of it against her clit. With a hard press, she moans pushing her needy little cunt up try to force me to slide my cock into her pussy.

“Please. Oh God please fuck me!” She cries.

I can’t help but chuckle with delight. “Are you begging for this cock, Winter?”

My dick is rock hard and I'm barely hanging on. One pump inside her and I'll likely explode.

"Yes! Fuck yes!" She calls out as I rub the tip of myself against her clit in fast, hard circles. Her pussy grows wetter. She's writhing against me, meeting me stroke for stroke and I've had all that I can take of this foreplay.

I need to feel her.

I slide my cock in and we both moan as she stretches around me.

"Son of a bitch.", she hisses and I stop, daring not to move a muscle.

"Did I hurt you?" I wait for her answer, afraid to move. Afraid I've ruined this experience for both of us.

"No. Keep going." She breathes heavily and begins to move underneath me, coaxing me back into action. I hesitantly start to move, slowly sliding a little more of my cock into her snug cunt with each new thrust.

Fuck she feels amazing.

We quickly establish our pace and soon I'm on the edge of coming. I push myself up so I'm on my knees and I grasp Winter's ankles holding them in the air to use as leverage while I piston in and out of her.

"I'm going to come." She grits out between panting breaths before she bites her bottom lip. That's my fucking undoing. I reach out tugging the blindfold up and over her head. Her eyes lock with mine. She is stunning.

Her pussy grips me like a vice and after a few more thrusts I'm coming with her. I

pump mindlessly into her a few more times before I release her legs to one side and sadly pull out of her and roll to the other.

Fuck. That was amazing.

Out of the corner of my eye, I see movement and when I turn to face the window, I see three couples outside fucking.

“I forgot they were out there,” I say as I turn on my side shielding Winter from their view.

She rolls onto her side to face me peeking over me at the window before laying back down, propping her head on her arm. “Seems we had an audience.”

“They must have liked what they saw,” I say as I tug at the ends of her hair before twisting the soft pale strands between my fingers.

I definitely liked what I saw.

## CHAPTER 11

### WINTER

This feels unnatural to be laying here in bed beside the monster that destroyed my life. I am sated, boneless, satisfied even. I'm disgusted with myself. Every fantasy that I've had about this man, and believe me I've had a lot, they never prepared me for the reality that is Rex Dean. Being the sole focus of his attention is like staring at the face of the sun. You know you will get burned but it is just so warm, so beautiful, and comforting and you just can't help yourself.

Seeing him come undone because of me, well that was the highlight. Knowing that I

can affect him.

But now as he slumbers soundly beside me, the onlookers have long gone after he darkened our window; I need to get back to my plans. Bringing this piece of shit down. I slip out from under his arm, careful not to wake him. I slowly rise from the bed, The candles are long burnt out, only a dim light from the cracked bathroom door provides any illumination to the room. I sneak as stealthily as one can sneak while being naked and in an unfamiliar space, and finally I find his pants amongst the scattered remains of our clothes. I rifle through his pockets and find nothing. Not even his wallet. Shit.

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I search around the floor until I come across his jacket. The weight of it as I lift it tells me I'll have better luck searching there. His phone is tucked away in the same pocket as the remote for the window.Bingo.I take a seat at the foot of the bed on top of one of the discarded silk sheets and try my luck at his four-digit passcode.

0523.His Birthday. I type the digits and receive the notice for the incorrect PIN.

I tap my finger against my lip and think. It would be something of importance to him but what? Maybe the day he won the race for Governor. I try that date, but it doesn't work.Shit. What is this pin?

"1007. My grandmother Gennie's birthday." I gasp and slide around on the floor and come face to face with Rex where he kneels on the bed towering over me.

"You scared me."Busted.I laugh trying to by myself some time to think of a convincing lie. My heart is thumping within the confines of my chest so loudly I'm afraid he can hear it in the near silence of this cabin. I don't know how he will react to this, but I know it can't be good.

"Care to tell me why you have my phone in your hand, Winter?" He moves with a quiet sureness off the bed. The same predatory grace he had that night that he cornered me on the Hunt. This is a man used to getting answers when he asks questions and right now, I have none. I didn't plan on getting caught, I just wanted to see if there was anything on this phone that I could use against him. People almost always have some type of incriminating shit on their phones that they hide away from the world. He comes to stand over top of me. Naked. It is intimidating despite his nudity. Like a fucking fool, I can't seem to stop myself from ogling his perfect form.

From his lean muscled torso down to his thick thighs. His humongous dick is the star of the show though. I blink up at him as his stare penetrates my very soul.

“I was going to take a picture of you. You looked so handsome while you slept and I wanted to give you something to remember me by.” Sounds good to me. He doesn’t need to know I plan on fucking his world up so severely he can never come back from it.

He tilts his head to the side his gaze never wavering from mine. Assessing me before he extends his arm, palm out. I place the device into his waiting hand. He punches in his code, the light from his phone illuminating his disgustingly perfect features.

“I can’t have any pictures of me taken in this place. But would you be okay if I took some photos of you?”

What?He smiles and it is so sexy and so devious that I can’t tell if he is sincere or not. There is no way this man bought my line of bullshit. He isn’t dumb. I might not have known the pin to his phone, but I do know that Rex is extremely intelligent.

I smile up at him where he still stands, tall, muscled, and nude. For whatever reason, Rex isn’t calling me on my shit and I am more than happy to play along with the Governor. It’s time to put on a show. I smile up at him seductively and flip my messy hair over one shoulder before leaning back, one hand behind me.

“Snap away,” I say as I allow my knees to fall out to the sides, spreading myself open for him.

His eyes land exactly where I expected that they would and I reach down, to trace a finger against my folds. I’m tender from our earlier encounter, but I don’t let that detour me from helping him forget that he caught me trying to break into his phone.

“You’re stunning. Do you know that, Winter? Too beautiful for your own good, the kind of beauty that makes powerful men greedy want to possess it.”

His words spur me on. I bring my finger to my mouth and suck on it, tasting myself briefly. I blink up at him and can’t help but notice his dick is getting hard. He snaps pictures and I give him my best seductive look. His eyes blaze with lust as he comes in close to me, taking another picture. He steps to straddle my legs, caging them in between his, then bending at the waist, he lowers his face near mine. His warm breath brushes against my mouth.

“Let me have a taste.” Bringing my fingers that were just playing with my pussy up and into his mouth, I watch fascinated as he licks and sucks on them briefly, releasing them with a twirl of his tongue.

“Fucking delicious.” He grabs the back of my head and crushes his mouth to mine, his tongue twirling and exploring. I reach up and grab a handful of his hair, holding him to me. He is kissing me so thoroughly that I feel breathless and dizzy when he finally releases me.

“Let’s fix your hair.” He moves my hair to the opposite shoulder, and I freeze as he begins to lick and nibble at the shell of my ear. I can’t breathe as he nibbles on my earlobe. I try my best to turn my head, to move away from him and the possibility that he will see the very noticeable, very memorable birthmark that rests just behind my left ear. It’s a red, heart-shaped birthmark that he commented on when we were on the balcony of my parent’s house the night of that party so many years ago.

I recall how handsome he was and I was as happy as could be when he walked outside onto that balcony alone to get some fresh air. Of course, I followed him. I remember every moment of it.

Did you need some air too? I ask, as I walk up placing my hands on the railing.

He looks out over my parent's garden and, wow, he is the most handsome man that I have ever seen. A straight blade of a nose, mysterious green eyes that seem to pierce my heart. His jaw is so sharp it could cut glass and he has the fullest, most kissable lips that I have ever seen. I long to kiss this man, to know firsthand how that would feel. If I could have one wish, kissing Rex would be it. A thrill runs through me being on this balcony all alone with Rex. I've dreamed of a moment alone with him. His scent of leather and gunpowder fills the air between us and I inhale a lungful as discreetly as I can, committing it to memory.

"Little stuffy in there for my taste. I'm not used to being around so many people now."

And I suppose he isn't. He's just returned from a tour of duty in Afghanistan. And I can tell he's not the same person that he was before he left. His eyes seem different. The way he looks at the world seems different.

I study his face, his very handsome face and I will him to see me in the same light as I see him. Perfection. But he doesn't see me that way. He won't because I'm too young, for now. But one day I won't be. And maybe one day he will see me as more than the daughter of his acquaintance. It is quiet between us for a few moments. I have so much I want to say to him, but I'm too young, too shy, and too scared. He won't take me seriously.

"I saw you before," I pause unsure if this is a safe topic, but I decide to press on. "Before you went to Afghanistan."

He turns to face me then and I practically melt under his gaze. Some girls idolize teenage heartthrobs or musicians, but my idolization has always been for this man. From the moment I met him, I've been besotted. Even when I was away at boarding school last semester, I kept a picture of him that I found in our local paper. He was accepting an award for Outstanding Citizenship, and it came with a scholarship. He

looked so handsome in the photo.

“That was almost 2 years ago. I don’t recall seeing you, I’m sorry.”

That’s stings more than it should, but I was even younger then. The summer breeze feels good against my now overheated flesh and it blows that leathery scent of his in my direction. I try another tactic to get him to speak with me. Just hearing his deep voice is satisfying enough. I could listen to him talk all day. I could just stand here and watch the way his Adam’s apple bobs in his muscled throat.

“You came here, to visit my father?”

“Augustus and Summer are your parents?”

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“Yes,” I answer but the wind whips around us and blows my wrap off of my shoulders, and before I can grasp it, Rex snatches it mid-air.

“Good save!” We both laugh and as he walks toward me, I wish so badly that I were older. I want this man to see me as a woman. But I’m not. He bundles my wrap around my shoulders and I stare into his eyes like a love-struck fool. He takes a step back from me and I could cry from the loss of his closeness. Crush is right because that’s how I feel, crushed. I pull my long pale hair out from under the shawl, fighting this breeze with every movement.

“Is that a bruise on your neck?” I turn to look at him and he looks almost mad. His posture has gone stiff, his fists are clenched by his sides. “Did someone hurt you?” he asks and I’m not certain what...oh wait, my hand shoots to the exposed side of my neck, my mother had my hair styled in a side-swept style tonight.

“Do you mean my red heart-shaped birthmark?” He assesses me for a moment then his demeanor softens. “My mother said all the women in our family have one. She has one too.” I get the impression that he doesn’t like it, so I keep my hand on my neck, shielding it from him.

“May I see it?” He asks, his voice soft now. I realize I like that voice. It makes me feel warm and fuzzy.

“Of course, you can.” I want to make him happy again. I don’t like this sad look on his face. I walk the couple of steps that separate us and turn my head so the lights from the balcony can give him a better view.

“Well, look at that. A unique birthmark for a unique young lady.”

I smile up at him excitedly, because I think he thinks I am special?

“Rex, there you are. Do you have a minute?”

My father calls to him and I’m immediately upset that he’s pulling him away.

“It was a pleasure to see you. Hang on tight to your shawl, since I won’t be here to catch it.”

“Okay.” I say as I smile like a lunatic.

As he walks off with my father, he smiles at me one last time and I totally melt. “Don’t stay up too late tonight, Winter.” My father calls to me before wrapping his arm around Rex. And now I’m mad at my father for stealing him away and for making our age gap obvious.

“I have some people for you to meet Rex, my boy. Great connections for your bright future.” My father says clapping Rex on the back as he guides him back inside.

I reel myself back from that old memory and pull my hair free from his grip, tugging it over my shoulder and hiding my birthmark. Do I think he’ll recall that moment all those years ago with a young girl on a balcony? No, I don’t, but I sure as hell don’t need to push my luck. I’m not taking any chances.

“Come here.” He says as he takes my hand and pulls me up, helping me off of the floor. “Let me get a good picture of you.” He walks me over toward the bed and I get pissed at myself that when he drops my hand, I miss the warmth of his touch. It’s just because I was thinking about my old crush on him. Maybe some of those old long-dead feelings have bubbled up to the surface since we were just fucking. I’d guess

that's what it is.

He straightens out the silk and the pillows before he goes to the table filled with a row of candles. He picks up the lighter and relights them as the room once again becomes cast in a seductive glow. He makes his way over to the bathroom door and opens it further so more light spills into the space.

"Lay on the bed, Winter." His voice is soft and almost kind, and I feel a little compelled to do as he instructs. So, I make my way to the bed and I make damn sure when I crawl onto it, he has a perfect view of my unobscured backside.

"Fuck." He whispers under his breath, and I don't hide my sly smile as I turn over and lay on my side. I drape my arm along the lines of my body as I prop my head up on my hand. I make damn sure that my hand is covering my birthmark.

"You are beautiful." I can't help the flutter in my belly at his words. I'll worry about what that means later.

"Take your picture." I sass and smile since he is just standing there staring at me with his camera hanging in his hand.

"Right." He chuckles as he raises his camera and it is the sound of pure happiness. It throws me off for a moment.

"Say cheese." I smile and he snaps away. Stopping to look at his phone, he says, "I got some great pictures. But I don't think there could ever be any bad pictures of you." My heart hammers in my chest at his words and I will it to calm down as he makes his way over and sits on the bed beside me. It dips with his weight and I roll a little bit into his side. He drapes his arm around me to steady me and I am immediately consumed by that leathery scent of his, just like I remembered all those years ago.

“Careful now.” He laughs as he tosses his phone onto the table that holds all the instruments we played with earlier. He wraps me into his strong arms and rolls us over onto the bed where he lands on top of me.

“Thank you for tonight. I needed that more than you know.” Those are some sweet words pouring out of the mouth of a lying monster, but I smile anyway.

“Will I see you again?” I cup his cheek and he so easily leans into it. Hook. Line. And Sinker.

“You can come to see me.” His lips brush against mine and damn him they are soft.

“I can’t leave the Manor grounds; I have a contract.” I am seriously regretting that contract right now. I don’t know how many more times I can expect him to show up here, and I still have a few months left before I am released from my obligations here.

His lips brush mine and his hard cock slides against the seam of me. I moan against his lips. It feels so good and I hate both of us for it.

“I’ll see what I can do. I am the Governor after all, and that has to hold some sway.”

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“Surely it must.” I chide and his is cock now grinding into my clit while he is pressing soft kisses against my lips.

“Please,” I beg half-crazed with building lust.

“Please what my little storm?”

“Please fuck me,” I whisper before swiping my tongue past his lips.

“What are you supposed to say?” He mumbles as the tip of his cock pushes just passed my entrance and then stops. This mother fucker.

“Please, fuck me, sir.” And so help me he does and I enjoy every disgusting second of it.

## CHAPTER12

### REX

I walk into the temporary east Tennessee campaign office conveniently located half an hour from the Manor; and therefore, half an hour from Winter, and I’m greeted with a flurry of activity.

Volunteers running the phones and my staff are hustling around the room. It’s organized chaos.

I walk over to where Tori stands talking to Steven Holland, the head of my campaign

security. They stop talking when I walk over and Steven nods his greeting before he gets on his radio to ask about a security check as walks off to the back of the building.

“You’re here early. Things are crazy in here today, but in a good way. The latest polls came out and you’re ahead twenty-eight points. We’ve gained four points.” Tori hands me a bottle of water and follows me to my office. Her heels clicking against the tile.

“What about Sheldon County? Any movement in our direction?” I really need Sheldon County on board to sweep the eastern portion of the state. Last time it was an easy victory, this time around is proving to be a bit harder, but I also have a stronger competitor.

“No, not yet. It seems we need to campaign harder there. Hewitt has a firm grip on that county since it is so close to her hometown.”

Of course, she does. I’m used to fighting to get what I want, so this won’t be anything new. I pull my jacket off and hang it from one of the hooks on the coat rack by the door before making my way to my desk. I spin my chair around to face the window and have a seat. The morning sun shines across the small patch of lawn behind our rented space and I wonder what Winter is doing right now. Has she fucked someone since I saw her last? That thought pisses me off and I have to push it from my mind. If she has, it won’t matter. For now, that is her job. I can’t be mad at her for doing what she needs to do in order to make a living. It’s a thought that doesn’t stray far from my mind since I last saw her. I have many other thoughts about her as well. Visions of her laying on red silk sheets assault me and I can’t seem to stop myself from pulling my phone from my pocket, entering my pin, and pulling up her photo from a folder where I have it hidden. There you are. My distraction. Pale hair draped over her shoulder and a smile that could ruin my life. I sigh and tuck my phone back into my pocket. She’s already ruining my life. She’s definitely ruining my focus. This

election is a crucial step for my future. I need to be focused and she is a massive distraction. I have to win this term as Governor and then I can make a run for the White House. I spin my chair around toward my desk and straighten my notepad and ink pen.

“We’ll need to work on that. Maybe we should devote an extra day or two to the community.” I straighten the edges of a stack of papers until they are all in a perfect line.

Tori eyes me from her position by the door. I try to ignore the questioning look in her eyes.

“What is going on with you? You’re off.”

That’s the problem with her. She knows me too well. No one else would notice

“Nothing.” I hedge as I grab my planner and randomly flip through it to give myself something to do.

“I know when something is off with you. Don’t try to lie to me. Tell me what it is so we can fix it before it becomes an issue.”

I sigh because really, this is something I need for myself and my cock isn’t and shouldn’t be Tori’s concern again. “I’m fine, Tor.”

“You don’t think I haven’t noticed your urge for straightening things lately?”

“I’m fine Tori.” The muscle in my jaw ticks. I’m becoming more flustered by this conversation by the second and I hate the fact that Tori knows me well enough that she can see that as well.

“Fine. I’ll drop it but you know I am your friend. I won’t judge.” I know she won’t judge, but talking with her about these urges and feelings that I have for Winter seems like a violation of Winter’s privacy. I don’t want or need Tori’s opinion on where I stick my cock. Speaking of, I look at my watch. It’s almost time.

The intercom on the phone on my desk beeps and I press the button.

“Yes,” I answer. Hoping it’s the very guest that I came in to meet with so early.

“Governor Dean. Um, there are some gentlemen here that say they have a meeting with you. Steven is having a fit because they refuse to go through the security checkpoint.

I look to Tori; her brows are bunched in confusion. “What meeting? I didn’t have anything down for you this morning.”

I release the intercom button before replying. “I know. I set this one up.” I press the intercom button again, “No need for security to check them. Send them in.” When I called Knox Bane and scheduled this meeting, I hadn’t considered he would bring company. But that’s okay. I can handle it as long as I come out with what I want in the end.

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I stand up from the desk, straightening my tie with one hand as I push my chair in just so, being sure that it lines up perfectly before I walk off. Tori isn't wrong my straightening habit has intensified but it isn't anything new or anything that I can't handle. Besides a little tidiness never hurt anyone.

"Rex, what's going on? Who's here?" Tori seems worried and once she realizes who is here, I know that worry will only intensify.

I reach around her for the doorknob. "It's okay, Tor. Get me a meeting with the Mayor from Sheldon County set up. We'll try to work our way into her good graces when we head to west Tennessee tomorrow." I open the door to usher Tori out, but she stops in her tracks when she sees who my meeting is with.

"Rex?" She questions, but I put my hand on her lower back and move her forward.

"It's okay, Tor. Really, it is okay."

She whispers. "I'll send Steven to stand outside of the door." I don't say if these three get pissed off no one in this office could stop them from doing whatever they liked. Possibly not even me.

"It's a pleasure to see you Mr. Bane, Mr. Mondragon, and Mr. Alexander. I appreciate you taking the time out of your busy schedules to see me." I shake the hands of each of the three large men as they pass by and file into my office. Tori turns back to look at me with a skeptical look on her face, but she turns around swiftly and marches right over to Steven.

I shut the office door as I take a breath, composing myself before I walk over and take a seat behind my desk. I look upon the faces of some of the most dangerous men that I have ever met. They have a seat in the chairs across from my desk; chairs that suddenly appear to be too small for their bulky frames. I have no doubt that they each have several weapons strapped to them. I could tell by the looks on the faces of my security detail that they were on the verge of having a shit fit when I waved them through without being searched.

I am also certain that Steven is now standing guard outside my office door while this meeting takes place, thanks to Tori. Not that he poses any type of threat to these men. I don't think I'm in any danger, either, and I can handle myself. I wasn't just a soldier and I'm not fucking stupid. Plus, I'm deadly as fuck, too. So, there's that. Even if only a few people are aware of that fact.

"Let's get down to business, shall we? I have a wife at home that needs me." Knox says as he knocks Lazz's feet off of my desk with one hand as Ace punches Lazz in the arm. "You guys are dicks." Lazz says as he rubs his arm and honestly, it's a bit comical to see these three interact. They seem a bit like brothers. It makes me miss my friends and the camaraderie that I only have with Duke Cavanaugh and Seven Mason.

I straighten the small stack of papers off to the side of my desk before continuing. "Yes, right to the point. I can appreciate that. I am very interested in spending time with Winter." Naked and in various positions sounds like a brilliant use of time. Just thinking about her tied up and spanking her makes my cock twitch. This is not the time or place for that.

"I can see that. She is gorgeous, funny, a smart, sexy woman. She is one of the favorites at the Manor. I guess you could tell after Kirill Volkov wanted to rearrange your face over her." Lazz laughs and Ace bristles beside him, but Knox is unfazed. I try not to feel jealous of the fact that he seems to know her better than I do.

“Yes, she is stunning, but as you may know, this is an election year and I will be on the road campaigning. I’m finding it harder to get away, discreetly.” I adjust the papers on my desk and straighten my ink pen to align with my notepad. “The eyes of the public and the media are on me. I’d hate to draw unwanted attention to myself, and your fine establishment, by disappearing behind the mysterious gates of The Manor.” Fuck, if they don’t agree to this I don’t know when I’ll be able to see Winter. That thought alone pisses me off. I have two weeks on the campaign trail coming up soon. I’m not sure that I can go that long without soothing this ache since that has only grown since the last time that I saw Winter. I smooth a hand down my tie and sit back in my chair taking in the three stony faces that stare back at me.

“I can appreciate your dilemma, but this isn’t something that we have ever done in all the years that we have run our establishment. It is an unprecedented move and it goes against our own rules. The ladies don’t leave the Manor. Ever.” Ace sits back in his chair and I can tell he is the take no shit type. There’s something darker there, just under his exterior. I know it all too well. He doesn’t strike me as the type to go against the rules. From what I’ve been able to gather, he is running the Manor now, especially since Knox got married. I’m guessing owning a brothel, being a hired gun, and being a husband were just a bit too much on his plate.

“I’m willing to pay. Allow me to buy her out of her contract.”

“That’s not how this works. We aren’t human traffickers.” A muscle ticks in Knox’s jaw.

I raise my hands, “I’m not trying to offend anyone. I’m just trying to find a reasonable solution to a problem. One where all parties benefit.”

“We will consider your offer and get back to you.” Knox stands up, Ace and Lazz following suit and then they all file out of my office.

“Fuck that didn’t go as planned.” I push a pen out of place on my desk and only slightly cringe as it lands askew. Fuck it. I don’t bother to straighten it.

Steven sticks his head in the door after the men leave, “Everything okay, sir?”

I sigh and lean back in my chair. “All good.”

Except it fucking isn’t.

## CHAPTER 13

### WINTER

It’s been a week, a long, stressful week, since I last saw Rex. He hasn’t sent any lingerie, no flowers or perfume, not a single fucking thing.

My nerves have been on edge every night that I go down to the casino floor to work. I find myself pathetically scanning the crowd for him most of the night. Of course, he’s not there. Why would he be? He’s already gotten what he wanted. I was stupid. I played this all wrong. I gave in to his needs too soon and now, he’s done.

I sit at my vanity staring at my reflection with disgust as I brush my long straight hair and I realize I’m a fucking idiot. I traded my revenge away for orgasms.

Way to go, Winter. Great job avenging your family.

I threw it all away for what? How did it come to this? How was I so close, my revenge within my damn grasp, only for it to slip through my fingers?

I toss my brush onto the vanity, and it clatters across the surface knocking over my perfumes. I’m too annoyed to care if they are broken.

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Like me. I don't care if they're shattered. Like I am.

A knock sounds at my door dragging me from my thoughts and it's a welcome reprieve. It can't be Lila because she's already on the casino floor and I wasn't expecting a visitor tonight.

I get up from my vanity, smoothing my black dress down with my hands as I make my way to the door. I swing it open, and I am a little startled to see Ace and Lazz standing on the other side.

"Sweetheart." Lazz croons, reaching out and grabbing me by the shoulders, he hauls me in to kiss my cheek before he releases me. Ace stands beside him just as cool and handsome as he was the last time that I saw him. His black suit is tailored impeccably. It showcases his ripped body, and his slightly disheveled hair looks sexy as hell; like he ran his fingers through it multiple times throughout the day. If I had any fucking sense at all, I'd be trying to land his ass. But something about his demeanor tells me he doesn't fuck with employees. Not that he thinks he is too good for us, but maybe that is a professional line that he won't cross.

These two are polar opposites and my eyes don't know where to look. These men are too handsome for their own good, and mine. But looks aside, the fact that they are here at my suite, together, is terrifying.

"Hi. Did I do something wrong?" I hate the tremble in my voice that little touch of fear because you do not want these two to show up at your door. Nothing good can come from it. As far as I know, there's no reason for them to be here.

This is bad.

“No, it’s nothing like that. Do you mind if we come in?” Ace asks as Lazz leans casually against the door jamb; his hands stuffed into the pockets of his jeans.

“Um, please come in.” I stammer as I open the door wider and motion for them to come inside. They seem to take up all of the space in my room. They’re huge, intimidating and I am fucking worried and scared shitless for what their presence here tonight means for me and my future.

All my plans and plotting my revenge flash before my eyes. I’m never going to get revenge on Rex, now. Something big is happening for them to be here.

“Sit, please.” I motioned toward the tiny apartment-sized couch in the little living room area of my suite.

The two behemoths make their way toward it and once they sit down and are shoulder to shoulder. I hope the piece of furniture can support their combined weight. You can’t even see the couch underneath their large forms.

“Sorry, we bothered you. We know you’re getting ready for the floor tonight, but we have something we need your help with.” I look at Ace and his gorgeous chiseled face. He could make a God envious of his looks. He’s that beautiful and that perfect.

“What is it? I’m happy to help if I can.” I lean against the dresser across from where they sit on that poor couch. It creaks underneath them every time one of them moves.

Shit, I’d do anything they want. I don’t doubt that they could kill me in the blink of an eye. My body would never be found. So yes, I will absolutely do whatever it is that these two wants. What other options do I have?

None. That's what.

"This is a little unorthodox. It's not something we would normally do, hell it's not something we have ever done, but we feel this could be beneficial for us as well as perfectly safe for you."

Ace watches me, his cold beauty terrifies me. It's totally the opposite from when I look at Lazz. He's positively beaming with a radiant smile. His teeth are perfect. His long hair is pulled up in a half up half down style and I won't lie he is mesmerizing to be around. He has one of those magnetic personalities. He seems so happy like he doesn't have a care in the world. But I've heard that's all a front, a cover for how dark he is or can be.

"What do you need from me?" I ask trying to hide my panic and my growing impatience. The unknown of this is terrifying me.

"We need you to pack a bag. You're headed to the airport in an hour." Lazz beams that megawatt smile at me. The one that makes me even more worried.

Holy shit. What the hell is this about? The only thing I can think of is the Russian. Shit. Am I going to be sent to the Russian?

"Can I ask what this is about?" I hope that I am not overstepping my bounds but I'm freaking out a little bit. No one leaves the Manor so why are they making an exception this time and why is it me who is the exception to the rule?

"I think you'll be pleasantly surprised. Lazz gets to his feet and Ace stands up right behind him. "So pack a bag sweetheart." Lazz opens the door and they shuffle out into the hall.

"I don't even get an answer?" The words come out panicked and a little harsher than I

intend.

“I’m sorry not this time. But you’ll be back soon and then we will owe you a favor. How’s that?” Ace levels those intense eyes on me and suddenly, I don’t have any more questions. But they would owe me a favor. I like the sound of that.

“Can you at least tell me what I need to pack?” Hopefully, that will give me some clue as to where in the world I’m headed.

“Pack for the same temperature it is here, that should be fine. A town car will be out front waiting once you’re ready. You get in and don’t ask questions. The driver will not answer you because he doesn’t know and when he pulls up to your destination you will get out and someone from there will direct you.”

Jesus, what the hell is this?

“Okay, thanks. But I don’t have a bag to pack.” I shout to their retreating forms. Kind of hard to bring a bag when you’ve snuck onto the property.

“I’ll get one sent up.” Ace shouts as they turn the corner and vanish.

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I shut the door and lean back against it, dazed. What the hell can this be about? It doesn't make any sense. I worry my lip between my teeth, my thoughts racing. Then I realize I only have an hour to pack and get ready for whatever this is.

I head to my closet and start pulling out clothes. I don't even know how long I'll be gone. Or what I'll do once I get wherever I'm going.

A few minutes later there's another knock at the door. I'm almost scared to open it because who knows what could happen next but despite my fears, I make my way across the room and open the door. One of the Manor staff stands on the other side with a small high-end suitcase.

"Madam." He extends his arm holding the suitcase out for me.

"Thank you." I take the suitcase from him and as he turns to leave and I shut the door and walk back to my bed, placing the suitcase on top of it. I open it up and begin to pack.

The hour ticks by far faster than I realized and with just over five minutes left to spare, I hustle my way to the front door. I practically run through the halls, my high heels clicking and echoing every step that I take.

It somehow feels wrong to exit through the front doors, but the guards outside pay me no mind as the driver of the town car opens the door to the backseat for me.

This is all surreal.

The driver takes my bag as I slide across the black leather into the back seat. He shuts the door before depositing my borrowed bag into the trunk of the town car. I watch, practically holding my breath, as he walks around and gets in behind the wheel.

I peer up at the Manor, the massive stone monolith, and wonder if I'll make it back here. The driver starts the car and a few moments later we are on our way.

It's odd to pass through the gates and be heading back into the town that I haven't seen in months.

We pass by the diner where I last worked, and people come and go as if everything is just fine and as if no time has passed at all as we drive out of town. I crane my neck from left to right, everything still looks the same since the last time I saw it.

It's me that's different now.

We drive along in silence and I'm almost certain that this driver can hear the pounding of my heart. I hear its every beat in my ears.

Am I having a panic attack?

I inhale a deep breath, stealing my nerves for what must be the hundredth time within the last hour. I take another deep breath as we turn into the small airport just outside of town and I release it slowly.

I'm going on a flight?

That's the only thing that makes sense as we pull up to where a sleek, pristine white private jet sits waiting on the tarmac.

What the hell?

There's another car here, a limo and as the driver gets out of my town car and opens my door, I almost pass out as I see Rex step out of the back of the waiting limousine.

Oh my God!

Of course, the guys at the Manor wanted me to come. They want the Governor of Tennessee to owe them a favor. I can't say that I blame them. That's a very powerful card to have in your pocket when you're running an underground brothel and casino.

Damn it. Rex looks amazing in his gray three-piece suit. I can tell from here that it is cut to fit his physic impeccably and I hate him even more for daring to look so damn good.

The driver opens my door and I step out, my black high-heeled shoes clicking on the tarmac as I try to keep my composure. I don't want Rex to see that I'm a little off guard that it's him, but I'm also very happy about this turn of events.

The wind blows my hair into my face and as I brush it out of my line of sight with my hands, an arm wraps around my waist.

I squeak in surprise as Rex hauls me against him, my hands coming up to rest on his chest.

"My little storm." He breathes the words onto my lips and then his mouth is moving against mine.

Game on.

I break the kiss and hold my hair back with one hand. "What are you doing here? What am I doing here?" I giggle and swat at his chest acting the part of an infatuated lover happy to see him again, but my mind is reeling.

What is happening?

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“You’re going with me on the campaign trail as the assistant to my assistant.” He laughs like this is the greatest idea in the world and he kisses me again, this time so thoroughly I enjoy it and am immediately disgusted with myself. He takes my hand and pulls me toward the steps of the jet.

“My bag!” I shout trying to pull away from him. There’s a picture of me with my parents inside and I don’t want to lose it. It’s the only thing that I brought with me when I snuck onto the grounds of the manor. It’s my only keepsake until I leave there for good. My driver hands off my bag to another uniformed man, but Rex squeezes my hand stopping me. “It’s okay. They’ll load it on the plane.”

He keeps my hand as he leads me up the steps and onto the jet. “It’ll be fine, Winter. You can trust me.”

I trust you about as much as I trust the devil.

## CHAPTER14

### REX

I walk into my hotel suite, my home away from home. I don’t enjoy the campaign trail. Don’t get me wrong, I enjoy meeting the people I represent. That is the best part of the job, knowing that I can help. I do take this position seriously and I’d like to think I’ve done a damn good job so far. I keep my professional life separate from my personal life because I never want my personal life to reflect poorly on the great state of Tennessee and its citizens. No matter how much of a deviant I may be, I do care for the welfare of my state.

But the campaign trail can be long and hard and as a single man, and it can be lonely. Especially so while trying to run the state and make a bid for re-election at the same time. This pace, it turns out, can be grueling.

I check my surroundings, the clean, spacious rooms and I find it is well worth my while to stay in a nice space while out on the road. I have room to breathe and enough privacy at this pricey hotel to whet my tastes. It's a comfortable space and it feels more like a home and less like a typical unwelcoming hotel.

The valet shuffles into the suite behind me as I walk over to the balcony and push back the sheer curtains. A nice little cast iron bistro set sits outside on the small space that overlooks the woods. I can see myself fucking Winter as I bend her over that table. The valet carries my bags in behind me.

"Would you like me to put your things away for you, Sir?"

"No, thank you. Just place my bags in the closet. I'll put my own things away." I can't stand the thought of the chaos it would cause my mind if someone else put out my clothes, shoes, and toiletries. I imagine how out of place they'd all be and practically shudder with anxiety just from the thought.

I wait impatiently, raking a hand down my face for the older man to finish up and leave. Get the fuck out. Taking his sweet ass time, the valet ambles back out of the closet and I practically toss his tip at him.

"Thank you, sir." He says as I place my hand on his back, steering him toward the door.

"You're welcome," I open the door and practically shove the poor man out of it, and then promptly shut it. Probably lost that vote. But I don't give a fuck. Not when my cock is getting hard. I ignore the insistent pull to go straighten my suitcases, just

knowing that they were left out of alignment. But strangely I can't bring myself to care right now. Especially not when I have more important plans.

I make my way over to the door that opens into the adjoining suite. My staff will stay in the three-bedroom suite next to mine, but one very important person is sneakily coming over to my side to stay. Unlocking the locks on my side of the door, I raise a hand and I am just about to knock on the door when I notice that the door drifts open ajar. It is already opened on the other side as well.

It's Tori, shouting at someone that pulls my attention. What in the world? She seems pissed, really fucking pissed. What could have her so upset? We just got here. I push open the door between our rooms and no one seems to notice as I slip inside the other suite. I don't even bother to shut the door behind me.

Like my suite, the adjoining door is in the hallway that spills into the main sitting room. All though the space is smaller it is still just as nice as my accommodations.

I walk the short hall and turn to see Tori has Winter cornered by the refrigerator in the kitchenette. Before I can intervene, Tori continues her rant.

"You're not going to ruin everything that I have worked so hard for with your whoring fucking ways. Do you understand me? Your time here is short and insignificant. You're scratching his itch. You are one of many. A hole to pump his dick into. Got it? You are nothing and no one special to him. You mean nothing."

Winter is smiling and that's just making Tori even madder.

"Tori. That is quite enough." Both women turn to face me, and Winter picks up her bag and walks around a seething Tori and makes her way toward me. And fuck is she beautiful. The fact that she was just unflappable makes me appreciate her even more. I really know now that this was a good decision. Winter knows and respects

discretion. Even in the face of anger, she couldn't be swayed to engage.

"Winter, please go to my room. That is where you will be staying. The adjoining door behind me is open. I'll be with you in a moment. I just need to have a word with Tori. Please make yourself at home."

"Yes, sir," Winter mockingly replies with a smirk in my direction. She seems nonetheless worse for wear and I swear my cock twitches. That woman did that on purpose. As Winter passes me by, I grasp her arm to stop her. "Are you okay?"

I need to make sure that she still feels safe here. She doesn't know any of us and I didn't have very much time to do anything to prepare her for the time she will be spending with me. I don't want her to feel singled out since she just met the unwelcome party.

"Yes. Thank you for stepping in. I'm sorry if it puts you in an awkward position."

I lean in brushing a soft pack to her lips. "I'm sorry that I wasn't here to stop her from saying such terrible things to you." I chuckle softly where only she can hear, I whisper, "I've got some positions in mind to put you in, later." Winter snorts a laugh and she just clucks her tongue and rolls her eyes at me before exiting the suite. Fortunately, she seems no worse for the wear.

I hope she didn't take anything Tori said to heart.

I tuck my hands into the pockets of my pants and walk the final few steps over to the kitchenette. Tori doesn't look at me as she stands with her hands on her hips and a disgusted look on her face. Tori is on edge lately and I'm not sure why. She used to confide in me but I am finding that to not be the case lately. Maybe she has someone else to turn to. Maybe she's feeling the mounting pressures of this re-election campaign. I think we all are.

A lot of people are counting on me. But that doesn't excuse what I just heard.

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“Can I speak frankly with you?” Tori asks as she spins around facing me. She’s agitated and I’m not quite certain why. But there was no need to take that out on Winter.

“Of course, you can. I always want you to speak your mind. We’ve known each other far too long for anything less.”

Tori huffs and begins pacing the length of the small kitchenette; back and forth. I wait her out. She always does this. She has to figure out her every move, or in this case, her every word before she says it. She stops before me then leans against the counter.

“We’ve known one another for most of our lives, Rex, so I know you, the real you. Hell, we were kids when we met. I knew you before you became the man that you are today. But I cannot for the life of me, figure out what is going on with you and Winter. She’s too young for you and if the press catches wind of the real reason that she’s here\_\_ to be your fuck toy, it will ruin you. I cannot stand the thought of that. The thought that you would lose everything that we worked so hard for.”

“Tori,” I try to interject but she cuts me off with the wave of a hand.

“Just let me finish Rex, please.”

“Far be it for me to stop you.” I try to joke but she shoots me a dirty look but keeps going.

“And if news of this leaks, it doesn’t just affect you, it affects me. I know that sounds selfish, but it does and I have followed you for years. I’ve done every little dirty deed

that you needed to be done. You needed a blow job on the trail. Done. Found somebody to give it to you. You needed to get laid to blow off some steam. Done. Found somebody to do it for you. You wanted to party with a couple of women. Done. Set it up for you. Not to mention all of the other multimillion tasks that I do every damn day to keep the Governor machine going.”

“Tori, I get that you’re worried. I appreciate it, I do.” She has done a lot for me and yes, she has gone above and beyond at times, but she is also paid fucking handsomely to do so. “Yes, I am aware that this not only affects me it affects you. It affects everyone that is a part of this campaign. I am aware. But at the end of the day, it’s my campaign. These are my decisions to make, and I guess if you don’t like the decisions that I make, maybe we need to discuss another position for you.” It’s a hard truth, but if Tori is unhappy with the situation, we need to change it. I own many other businesses that she could go to work for. I’d happily let her transfer.

Tori scoffs. “So, you would choose her over me? All of the years that I’ve stood by your side, helped you to win elections for mayor and state representative, mean shit to you? I have helped build up your image. I have helped do every sort of little dirty deed that you needed to have done and this is my repayment?”

“Tori, that’s not fair at all. You’re my friend. Of course, I care what happens to you, but if you’re asking me to choose between you and Winter, I’m afraid that you might not like the answer.”

I will not be given an ultimatum, not even from one of my oldest friends. Tori was there when I was young and lost and she stayed true through some of the darkest parts of my life but that doesn’t mean she has control of me and my decisions. Tori seems to forget who the fuck I am, who I was before I ran for office. She is only thinking of this persona, not the real me. But who I fuck and how I fuck them is no one’s fucking business.

“If this situation were to be leaked to the press, then so be it. Everyone involved is an adult. I am not ashamed of Winter. Is her current employment a bit of a problem? Sure. But I will deal with shit if and when it comes my way.”

Tori scoffs. “I’m just tired. It’s been a long, few days.”

I can see the worry and stress on my old friend’s face. “Have some dinner and some wine and get a good night’s sleep.” I pat her arm but she captures my hand.

“You’re wrong to trust her.” Tori states, looking up into my eyes. She squeezes my hand, tightly. Looking for some sort of assurance but I’ve already said all that I plan to share with her on the subject of Winter.

“Once upon a time people said the same thing to me about you.” She flinches at my words. Tori was strung out on meth when I pulled her out of that topless bar and got her cleaned up. “What if I would have listened to them?”

I pull my hand from her grasp and head back to my suite.

“It’s not the same thing and you know it,” Tori calls after me.

No, maybe it isn’t the exact same thing but the point of the matter is that I don’t listen to anyone, not anymore. Not since all those years ago when I freed myself from the hell that was my childhood and took control of my own damn life. I do what I fucking want and so far, that’s made me successful beyond my own wildest dreams.

## CHAPTER15

### WINTER

I can’t believe Rex just stood up for me. I never expected out of all people in the

world that I thought would have my back, he wasn't even on the list.

I hover by the door, listening for anything that might be useful to my cause, but I don't hear anything of importance. Just a bitter, jealous woman who is too scared to go after what she wants.

I move to the kitchen and grab myself a bottle of water. That Tori sure is a piece of work, but I don't think she buys my bullshit for a second. You can't bull shit a bull shitter or so they say and that woman; is as full of shit as I am. I don't need her to believe me, but Rex is as blind as a bat if he doesn't realize Tori has feelings for him. She sees me as competition. She might as well have just peed a circle around the man, and I think if she thought that would help her cause she'd do it in a heartbeat.

But she hit the nail right on the head when she said that I could expose him. I could expose his dirty little secrets. I could go to the media. I could give them my story and I could bring him down. It would be so easy and I would finally have my revenge. It might feel good to finally be rid of this weight that I have carried around for what seems like an eternity.

But then where does that leave me?

By exposing him, I'd be exposing myself. Exposing myself for the spiteful, vengeful whore that I currently am, and I would be dragging my family's good name through the mud.

I'm not sure that's the best idea. I'm not sure revenge against him is worth that, destroying what my father worked tirelessly for decades trying to build; his legacy our fallen empire, and here I am considering destroying what's left of it.

I just don't think I can do that.

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I think about my sweet parents and how much they loved each other, how much they loved me, and if I exposed Rex in this manner, it would ruin what's left of their memory. I can't do that to my family. Plus, I'm pretty sure if I outed the Manor, I'd end up dead for sure. I definitely do not want that.

Rex walks in pulling me from my thoughts. He shuts and locks the door between the two suites, and I can immediately tell that he's angry. Normally I would enjoy his misery, but I find that I am struggling with the thankfulness that he stood up for me.

Huh. That's fucking new.

Maybe it's weird but it's the first time in a very long time that somebody's had my back. And how odd is it that person would be my enemy?

Rex comes over to where I lean against the counter in the kitchenette, sipping a bottle of water that I snagged from the refrigerator. I notice for the first time that he looks tired as he scrapes a hand along the stubble on his chin. Maybe he has more on his plate than being an asshole and fucking.

“Winter, I'm sorry about Tori. I had you go into that suite with my staff because that is our cover for you being here, so it wasn't obvious that you were here for me. I won't make that mistake again.” He turns his head away from me to look out the doors to the balcony. I watch the muscle flex in his jaw, as he looks out at our view of the woods beyond.

“I don't know what her problem is. I think maybe this re-election campaign is just a little bit harder on everyone than we all realized.”

Yeah, that and Tori is just a jealous bitch who wants to fuck you, too. But I don't say that.

"It's okay. Thank you for standing up for me." Which I'm sure he wouldn't if he realized just how right Tori is in her assessment of me.

Rex nods his head, looking as if he has more to say but any further discussion is left unsaid as a knock sounds from the main door to the room. He checks his watch before looking at me. "Are you hungry? I ordered dinner for us when I checked in."

My stomach grumbles in answer and we both laugh. The previous moment's tension diffused just a touch. "Maybe a little bit," I reply.

"A bit," Rex responds as he heads toward the door.

He exchanges pleasantries with the hotel staff at the door and I take the time to grab a couple more waters; another one for myself and one for Rex, before I head toward the dining table. The table is massive, and I finally take a moment to look around. As far as hotel suites go, this one is luxurious, but I wouldn't expect anything less from a man who must consider himself a king.

"Here we go. Only the finest feast for m'lady." I laugh but I really want to roll my eyes. Of course, he ordered for me. He probably ordered a salad assuming that's what every woman around him eats.

He pushes the cart over to the table and he has a seat as I hand him one of the waters.

"Thank you." He smiles at me and there's a lightness to his face now that wasn't there earlier. And like an idiot, I find myself smiling back at him.

"What's for dinner?" I dare to ask as he lays a silver domed plate in front of me

before he pulls the other one off of the cart and sets it before himself.

“Voilà” he says as he removes both domes from the plates at the same time.

“Your cheeseburger is served. I got all the condiments on the side and hopefully, you aren’t a vegetarian because I did not consider that until just now. I’ll get you something else.”

I can’t help but genuinely laugh at his expression. He seems sincere and upset that he didn’t consider the possibility that I might not eat meat, before he ordered. I decide to put him out of his misery.

“No, I’m not a vegetarian and this looks delicious. I’m starving. Thank you.”

Points for Rex.

“So, tell me about yourself.” He asks as I layer on ketchup and then add lettuce and tomato.

“Not much to tell. I had a great childhood. The best, most loving parents, and they were taken away from me far too soon. So now I am on my own.” As I say it out loud for what I think is the very first time and it hurts, but it’s also cathartic in a way. Yes, I miss them, and I would rather have them here with me but I have made it. Maybe I have struggled my ass off but I’m still here. I’m still fighting.

I am a fucking force, a storm of fury, an impenetrable fortress.

I cut my eyes to him and as he lifts the hamburger to his mouth he stops in midair.

“Your parents are gone?”

“Yes.” I breathe trying to tamp down my anger and my resentment for this man. I’m on the verge of exposing myself by just telling him exactly what I think of him.

“No brothers or sisters?”

“No one. My mother got cancer and died. My father lost everything trying to care for her. He trusted the wrong person for help and that person stole his company and our legacy out from under him. Then my father died.” I bite into my burger and it tastes like ash on my tongue. I am no longer hungry.

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Rex is quiet for a moment, looking contemplative. “My parents are gone too. I also have no brothers or sisters.” Huh. Lookie there, we have something in common.

He grabs two wine glasses from the cart and sets them down on the table. Then he grabs the bottle of wine, pouring us each a glass. Once our glasses are filled, he hands one to me.

“Thanks.” I sip the wine after my semi confession. It was much needed and I wonder if he realizes that I was talking about him. Did I just blow my cover? I watch Rex closely as he takes a generous pull from his glass, his Adam's apple bobs in the tanned column of his muscled throat. I hate that I am attracted to him. After all of it, I am still attracted to him. He continues to talk, and I listen. Hoping that what he says can be used as ammunition for my war.

“I was born on the wrong side of the tracks. My mother died of a drug overdose when I was young and I was left with a very resentful father that didn't want me and he took every available opportunity to take his hatred out on me, physically.”

His eyes grow distant as if he steps back in time and he's quiet for a few moments. Almost reflective.

“I'm sorry to hear that.” No, I am actually not, I'm glad he's alone and hopefully miserable. Do I wish him ill as a child, no, of course not, but he didn't give a shit what happened to me after he destroyed my family and stole my father's company? I stuff a fry into my mouth. Does it make me a terrible person that I'm happy he has nobody? I'm not even sure I care if it does make me a bad person. I'm happy that he has nobody. Just like me.

“I’m sorry that you’re alone, Winter. I know how difficult that can be, even more so for a woman of your age. I know you can’t go to school now since you reside at the Manor.” Such a polite way to call me a whore.

He continues, “But are you planning to go to school once you leave the Manor?” It’s a welcome change of subject for both of us, but the softness I see in his eyes, the compassion that is there and directed at me, not disgust or dismissal, is almost my undoing. I’ve not had anyone show compassion, or in this case, feel sorry for me in a long time. I’ve not had anyone to give a shit about me. I clear my throat so that when I speak my shaky voice doesn’t betray my nerves.

“I actually design jewelry. Or well, I use to. I’d love to be able to pursue that again.” Why did I tell him that? I haven’t designed jewelry since before my parents passed away. It was once a passion of mine that seems to have died when they did. I haven’t even thought about it in ages, but here I am blurting it out and sharing something I love, well once loved with him.

What the hell is wrong with me? Definitely time to change the subject.

“So, what about you. Let’s say you win this term. You can’t run for governor again. Where do you see yourself then?”

“I’m headed to the White House.” Rex pops a fry into his mouth with a triumphant smirk. One that says he knows his path to victory is all but assured.

And I would expect nothing less.

“Oh, Mr. President.” I laugh as I toss a fry at him. Of course, the bastard catches it in his mouth.

“You’re pretty perfect huh?” I ask as I sip my wine. He looks so happy with himself.

“I’m absolutely not perfect but I know what it’s like to reinvent yourself. I know what it’s like to want to seek revenge. And I know how it feels when you finally get it.”

I bet he does. I take a sip of the wine wondering how this night took such an unexpected turn.

We stare at each other as the tension builds between us.

“How does it feel when you finally get revenge?” One day soon, I’ll know.

There’s so much left unsaid but I can see in his eyes where this is about to go. Rex stands up and comes around to my side of the table. I watch with bated breath. I’m not certain what he’s about to do. He spins my chair away from the table. I hold firmly onto my wine glass as he does.

He leans over me, nipping at my lips. His soft kisses turn ravenous and I’m practically putty in his evil hands as he slides down to his knees in front of me and confidently spreads my thighs. I watch enraptured. I hate the effect this man has on me. Love and hate all wrapped up into an impossible tangle.

I sip my wine, never breaking eye contact with him as he kisses and nips his way up my thigh.

His breath hovers over my lace thong briefly before he slides it over, his tongue flicking out to touch my clit. I roll my head back and moan.

His mouth is magic.

I sip my wine again, trying to seem unaffected when Rex says, “Revenge is fucking fantastic.” He sucks on my clit. “You should seek your revenge.”

I choke on my wine.

## CHAPTER 16

REX

The last few days on the campaign trail have been great. And having Winter with me, by my side has made things a hell of a lot more interesting, even if she is pretending to be my assistant's assistant. It hasn't stopped me from sneaking kisses at times. It's brought a little bit of fun to an otherwise fairly boring but necessary endeavor.

It was worth every penny that I had to donate to that shelter called Survive at Knox's request. Apparently, his wife is involved with it and that place does some amazing things, though and I plan to add it to the list of my regular, annual donations. Maybe I could even manage to do a fundraiser for it. I make a mental note to have Tori look into that idea.

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“Thank you and be sure you get out there and vote!” I wave and bow in appreciation to the cheering audience, mouthing thank you, accepting the adulation and cheers from the gathered crowd as I slowly make my way off the stage. This leg of the campaign has picked up steam and we are looking good in the polls. I hope our pace continues on the same track. We’re steadily gaining a significant lead. It only takes one set back though. Running for office is like building a house of cards. One wrong move and it may all topple down.

I look off to the side of the stage seeing Winter standing there in the wings. I notice Tori and Steven standing not far from her, chatting feverishly. I wonder what that’s all about? I gaze back at Winter and as soon as her eyes meet mine, I smile so hard my cheeks nearly hurt. My heart pounds against my ribs. I’ve got it bad. It’s crazy, but in a short time, she’s grown to be very important to me and more so each day that I spend with her.

Yes, it’s new and exciting but it’s more than that. We talk and share things and I feel like I know her. I can relate to her. I think a few more weeks and we may have to discuss taking this relationship public. That’s assuming that I can buy her fully out of the contract with the Manor. Whatever they want, I’ll pay for it. Winter is worth it.

“Hello, fine ass-istant. Any urgent matters?” I whisper over the din of noise. I waggle my eyebrows at her and she smiles at me in that sexy way that she has, that I’m learning that I love, then she smirks and replies, “We need to talk about the latest issues that are arising, down under.” I bite back a laugh. It’s immature and unprofessional as hell, but I love every second of joking with her.

“After you my assistant’s assistant.” I usher her off the stage and through the crowd

to the waiting bus. The driver opens the door for us and we stay quiet as we board. I follow her and can't seem to stop looking at her ass in this form-fitting red dress as it shimmies to the back of the bus. I slide open the pocket door to the room that is acting as my office on wheels. I shut the door behind us, locking it and once inside she turns to face me.

"You were amazing out there today. The constituents here adore you. This suit looks sexy as hell on you and that green tie brings out your eyes."

"I only care about one constituent and I hope she adores me." I waste no more time grabbing her and kissing her senselessly.

"Do you know how hard it is to hide you? I hate it." I peck her lips feverishly. "I'd much rather show you off."

"I know but we have to keep things quiet, right? Besides I head back to the Manor in a few days."

The thought that she could be back there and that some man could touch her, kiss her, fuck her, pisses me off and I practically growl. "I hate it. If you go back there, I will be there every fucking night. No one touches you but me."

"That's almost sweet and a little scary, but you are the governor of this state; you can't be at a sex club every night." She kisses me, her soft lips brushing against mine and I can't help but hold her tighter as if someone may come along and steal her away from my arms.

"I'll figure it out. I'll buy out your contract."

"Why would you do that?"

I hold her at arm's length and look at her. "Why would I do that?" I parrot back in disbelief. "Why wouldn't I? Do you want to go back there?"

I thought we were growing closer the last few days, that maybe some feelings were starting to blossom for the both of us. Has this been one-sided? I can't make her stay nor do I have the desire to do so, but I had hoped that she would want to, maybe even just consider staying as a possibility.

"No. Of course, I want to stay with you. It's just that it doesn't make sense. You're the Governor and I am well, a whore." She whispers the words as if someone will hear her in the back of my bus. "Being with me;" She shakes her head and I'm trying my damndest to follow her line of thought but I'm just not there. "I could destroy everything that you have worked so hard for. And others, who are depending on you to keep their jobs." She bites at her thumbnail as worry lines form in between her eyebrows then she sighs a heavy, sad sound.

"I just didn't realize how many people that you employ and if we are found out, it doesn't just affect us. I didn't think about that... before."

I give Winter a confused look because as sweet as she is to consider others, I wonder, "Why would you need to consider them at all?"

Before Winter can answer, there is a loud commotion from outside of the bus and then I hear Tori shouting as she storms on board and makes her way to the other side of the locked door that separates us.

"Open up." Tori shouts and bangs on the door.

"What in the fuck?" I grumble but turn the lock on the sliding door, then push it open. An angry, red-faced, seething Tori stands on the other side.

She doesn't wait for an invitation as she storms passed me, then shoots Winter a dirty look before she slams a newspaper down on the desk in front of us. "News of this is spreading fast. I just had to fight my way onto the bus through a growing crowd of gathered reporters. I told you this would happen. I warned you and you didn't listen." Tori shakes her head as if she is disgusted. "You've been foolish with this girl and you're ruining everything we've worked for! You and Winter are front-page news!"

What? How did they find out?

I pick up the paper and it's a picture of us from the first night that Winter stayed with me at the hotel. We had dinner and then I had Winter for dessert. Then we made our way out to the balcony and I fucked her on that bistro table just like I had imagined. The picture is in full color and it's a picture of me embracing Winter from behind with one hand at her throat and our faces contorted with passion. Luckily, we were too turned on to get fully naked. She still has her dress on, thank God for that.

The headline says theGovernor's New Toy.

"This is ridiculous! Someone has leaked this to the press. These photos were taken from the woods behind the hotel." I slam the paper down on the desk with enough force that the few items resting there on the surface shake with the motion.

"We'll be lucky if we can recover from this. I told you she was trouble. She's probably leaked it so she can get some money." Tori points at Winter and I want to break her finger. Winter stays quiet, too quiet as I cut my hard gaze to Tori.Unbelievable.I understand that Tori isn't on board with Winter's presence on the campaign trail but she's on my fucking payroll, not vice versa.

"God, Tori. What in the hell has gotten into you?" I scape a hand over my face as I try to retain some fucking semblance of composure. I look out into the rest of the bus to see who is lucky enough to be witnessing this god damned fiasco and only Steven

stands in the kitchenette. Let him listen I decide.

“Winter is a victim in this as much as I am. Our privacy was invaded and turned into a headline! Besides, Tori, Winter signed a fucking NDA with the Manor. She can’t discuss any of this with anyone, even if she fucking wanted to.” I storm over to Winter where she stands frozen in place and wrap my arm around her shoulders. “Are you okay?” she nods her head in answer and I don’t pry. I just walk her around my desk, pull out the chair and sit her down in it before I return my attention to Tori.

“No, this bullshit came from somebody on my fucking team and when I find out who was stupid enough to betray me, I will fucking kill them.” I bang my fist down onto the desk and notice that Tori flinches and I realize I’ve scared her. But it’s not like she doesn’t know me.

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When I find out who has plastered Winter's beautiful face all over this newspaper, and I absolutely plan to, I will fucking kill them. Not only are they ruining my chances for re-election but they made the biggest mistake of their lives when they fucked with my girl. I rub up and down her arm trying to offer her some type of comfort and support. But her silence is worrying. Will she want to go back to the Manor now? Will they even allow her back now that her beautiful face is front-page news?

I will not stand for that. They have made an enemy out of the wrong mother fucker.

### CHAPTER17

#### WINTER

"Whatever you need I'll take care of it."

I never thought I'd ever hear those words from him.

"I may sadly have to take you up on that." I flop back onto the couch, defeat coursing through my veins. How in the hell did everything go sideways so damn fast? And I very well may have to take him up on his offer. I won't be able to get a job if anyone recognizes me because they won't hire me now. I'm kind of fucked.

Hopefully, this scandal stays local. Maybe I can move but I don't even know where I'd go. I've never even entertained leaving my home. Well, my home town. I no longer have a home. I don't have any friends really or family for that matter. I have Lila but she probably wouldn't give two shits if I fell off the face of the earth. And

how fucking sad is that? I have no one. Maybe that's just what I need to do. Leave. There isn't anything for me here anymore unless you count memories and heartache.

And now that karma sort of fucked Rex, I guess my revenge is complete.

Thanks, karma. You were just supposed to get Rex, not me too. I let loose a loud, resigned sigh and grab the remote control and turn on the T.V. And of course, the local news is talking about the scandal. So, I just turn the TV off and lay the remote control down onto the coffee table.

Fuck.

"I mean it could be worse, Winter. We're both single, consenting adults. We didn't do anything that any other adults on this earth don't do or haven't done." Rex flops down beside me where I'm perched, elbows on my knee, my face resting in one hand.

I examine his handsome stubbled face. He looks tired and stressed and instead of being happy about this, I almost feel bad. He's been nice to me, sweet even like the old Rex that I thought I once knew. I'm finding maybe I don't know Rex Dean, the man, as well as I imagined that I did.

Maybe he isn't as awful as I thought. Either way, it's too late to care. The damage is done. I just wonder what he will do once he realizes who I am. If he'll even remember my parents or me. Should I just tell him now? Blurt it out, like ripping off a band aid. But I find myself staying quiet. Maybe I don't want to end things with him this way. Maybe I won't tell him the truth at all.

"Yeah, but you're running for re-election for Governor, and you were caught on camera; choke-fucking a prostitute in public. Not looking good for us buddy."

We both laugh because what else can we do.

“You just stay here and lay low the next few days. I don't want to draw any more attention to you than necessary and maybe that will make the press lose a bit of interest as well. Maybe no one will be able to identify you. And I'll call the guys at the Manor to talk to them about that, as well as your contract. I'll take care of it.”

I don't respond, really what is there to say?

His phone rings and he pats my thigh as he digs his phone out of his pants pocket and looks at the caller identification. I find his touch comforting, supportive even. It's nice to be comforted. It's been so long since I've felt that from anyone. I'm pathetic. I pride myself on being strong but it's been a long time since I've felt comforted like this and I am eating it up. God help me, I am. Every day I spend with Rex has me viewing him in a little bit of a different light than I did just a few short days ago.

I'm not sure what to make of it.

Maybe what he did to my family was just a business decision and I'm taking it personally. Just thinking that thought makes me feel like I'm betraying my parent's memory. I turn my attention to his hand where he mindlessly rubs my leg as he continues to talk. From the one-sided conversation, it sounds like he's talking to his public relations team.

I focus on his face and as I gaze at him, I am struck with the realization that he is working so hard trying to fix everything and not once has he mentioned fixing things for himself. Everything he's done so far has been about making this right for me. It's weird. After all this time of carrying around this bitter indignation, I didn't see this coming. I'm not sure what to make of this side of him.

“Yes, I want to keep the lady out of any briefings.” He pauses to listen. I bite my lip as he scratches at the stubble on his chin. He looks sexy like this. Even in the middle of all this bullshit, he is sexy.

“We will not be commenting on our status.” He turns his hand over, palm up, and rests it on my thigh. I look at his hand for a moment and realize that he wants to hold my hand. I lace my fingers with his and he gives it a few gentle, reassuring squeezes. If it weren't for everything going on, this would almost be nice. Like how a normal couple enjoying time together might be; if they weren't a john and a whore.

Speaking of, he looks really great tonight and he smells even better. I stand up off of the couch but I don't let go of Rex's hand instead, I take the few steps to stand in front of him. When he looks at me quizzically, I get down to my knees.

Realization dawns on him what's about to happen and his gorgeously beautiful lips tick up in a lopsided grin. He is so fucking handsome. That lopsided grin makes him look so carefree.

I can't help but smile back at him as I reach for the button on his pants and make quick, quiet work of unfastening it and opening the zipper.

“We wouldn't want your team to know that your dirty little whore is about to suck your big, fat, dick,” I whisper the words as I work and his eyes blaze with heat, and his tongue darts out running along his overly plump bottom lip. The man has perfect lips. I wiggle on the spot, my pussy growing wetter just thinking about how it feels to have his mouth on my body.

As he raises his hips and I pull his pants and his boxers down as one.

"No. She will not be talking to the press."

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His dick is already practically rock-hard as it springs free from its confines and I waste no time stroking him from root to tip. A little bead of moisture gathers there at the head and I swirl my finger over it and then work it down his shaft.

Rex's eyes close and his mouth falls slack as he holds the phone to his ear. When his head drops back to rest on the couch, I know that I'm making him feel good. A sick part of me loves that thought, that I can control this powerful man. I wiggle again, desperate for some sensation on my clit but I need this to be about him.

"Yes. An official statement."

His voice is gravelly, thick with need as I work his cock in my hand. I work my way down his shaft, twisting and turning my way up his breathing is growing labored. My tits pressing against his inner thighs as I lean forward and I pop the head of his dick in my mouth. I swirl my tongue around him and savor the fact that his hand twines into my hair, tugging hard.

"Ugh, yeah. We will." He moans and tries to cover up his pleasure by playing it off as part of his conversation. Needing more, I take him down as far as I can go, the head of his cock bumping against the back of my throat.

Rex groans loud as his hips surge up, shoving him impossibly deeper into my mouth.

"Gotta go." Before whoever he is on the phone with has a chance to respond, he ends the call, dropping his phone carelessly onto the couch, then he shoves both of his hands into my hair.

“Fuck, Winter. Your mouth, it's amazing.” He fucks my face and I love every second of it. My eyes water, I’m practically gagging, my mouth is so full of him. I allow him to use me to set the tempo. He meets my mouth thrust for thrust, his hips rising off the couch to shove his dick further down my throat. The sounds coming from each of us are lewd but it only feeds my desire further.

“I'm going to come.” He groans, his head thrashing against the back of the couch and that thought alone makes me speed up. I know he's telling me this as a warning so I can stop if I want to but I don't want to stop. I want this.

This isn't about revenge anymore, I need this. I realize I want to please him and doesn't that make me one fucked up person? I want to please the person that destroyed me.

His grip tightens on my hair and he takes a few, final deep thrusts and then he comes down my throat, a hiss escaping him. I can't take my eyes off of him, he looks so fucking sexy it's shameful. His eyes squeeze shut, his neck is strained and the muscle there is chorded. I'd love to bite him.

“Winter.” He whispers my name like a prayer as he runs a gentled hand across my cheek before he cups it. I lean into it, briefly turning to kiss his palm before locking eyes with him. What I see there scares the hell out of me. That is the look of more. Somehow over the last few days, things shifted between us, maybe it's because I feel like my family has been avenged and I can finally let go of that need to destroy him. Maybe being with him has drug up all those old feelings that I use to harbor. Whatever it is, this is different, we are different. We stay like that for a few moments, I nuzzle against his hand as he pets me.

“What are you doing to me?” He murmurs into the quiet of the room running his thumb over my bottom lip. I fight the urge to ask him the same thing. I'm not ready to let him know that he has any effect on me.

The moment is broken when his phone rings. He looks at it and sighs. "I have to take this. I'm sorry."

"It's okay. Go ahead." Before answering it, he leans over and presses his lips against mine. It's a quick peck and I move out of his way so he can right his clothes. He answers the phone and holds it against his shoulder as he stands and pulls his pants up.

"Hello?" I can't help but watch him as pulls his boxers and pants back up. My mouth practically waters to taste him again. When I finally drag my gaze to his face, I'm shocked. I don't know what this call is about but the look on his face turns to one of pure rage. He looks positively murderous and I realize that I never want that look directed at me. Shit.

"I'll be back." And that's all that he says to me before he marches out of the door. I'm trying not to be offended about that fact. I know he has a lot going on. I just hope it isn't some other issue.

Look at me, no longer wanting bad things to happen to Rex. That's new. I laugh a humorless laugh but it dies in my throat when Tori comes into the suite. Does she have a key to our room? I guess it makes sense. She is his assistant and she would need to access the room from time to time.

She struts in her curly, black hair looks perfect pulled back in a chignon and it shows off her high cheekbones and brown eyes. The deep green dress she wears hugs her every curve and makes her bronze skin glow. The look is completed with simple gold jewelry and gold high heels. Simply put, Tori is stunning. She is everything that I am not. Chic, educated, mature, and graceful. She looks every inch the woman that should be by the Governor's side. I wonder, not for the first time why they aren't together.

“Why are you still here? Haven’t you caused enough damage?” Tori cocks a hip and places her hand on it. Fighting the urge to not just tackle her to the floor instead, I let the truth fly. I’ve found that using people’s truth against them can be the best way to shut them the fuck up.

“I try not to hold your treatment of me against you. I know that you are in love with Rex and he either doesn’t know or doesn’t care. That has to sting. To be around him for so long and be friend-zoned.”

Her brows become sharp, angry slashes over her eyes. “You fucking bitch. How dare you!”

“Tori, that’s enough.” We were so caught in the moment that we didn’t hear him come into the suite but I hope he heard what we said. She’s a conniving bitch. I should know.

“Rex, I was just looking for you. Senator Zerbe called and,”

Rex looks fucking pissed as he cuts Tori off.

“I fired Steven Holland. He leaked the story about us to the press.” That muscle in his jaw ticks again as his eyes cut to me. Wow. His security leaked information about him. As controlling, guarded and cautious as I would assume Rex is this must seriously piss him off. I might have been happier a day or two ago but now, I feel bad for him. He too seems to have no one.

Tori snaps into action. She’s typing away on her phone an angry look on her face.

“We’ll do our best to contain this, I need our public relations team on the phone, again.”

“I’m on it. I’m emailing Judy Davenport now, she’s the best with spin.”

I stand here alone as I watch Rex guide Tori over to the dining table where they get to work. I’m not even a blip on his radar and I’m trying to reconcile this man, the politician, the Governor, with the caring guy that I saw earlier when his dick was in my mouth.

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Rex hasn't even acknowledged my existence since he returned. He and Tori work closely in hushed tones and don't think that I don't notice she touches him every chance she gets. I have to wonder if I did something wrong, but then I remember, just like the security guard, I'm expendable. Maybe I had it all wrong earlier. Rex is just out to protect his campaign.

### CHAPTER18

#### REX

I loosen the tie around my neck, before yanking it off and I let out an exasperated sigh as the town car drives me and Tori back to the hotel.

"Today was brutal." I mumble to myself. I'm just glad that it is over for now. I made the right decision to leave Winter at the hotel. The last thing either of us needs is more attention focused on this scandal.

"I don't want to say I told you so again."

Tori has been on my last fucking nerve today. "Well, then fucking don't."

I unbutton the top two buttons of my shirt just trying to get rid of this suffocating feeling that seems to have taken over my life the last few days. I'm on edge. I haven't felt this anxious in a long time.

The press is all over me today wanting to know who the mystery girl was, how long she's been my girlfriend, will we get married, do I consider myself a dominant, and

just on and on and on. Talking ridiculous shit to me. I swear to God I should have put Steven's head on a plate for leaking this. I can only assume he did this for some quick cash. He wouldn't answer me when I confronted and fired him and that only pissed me off further.

"I talked to Judy earlier from the public relations team. She suggested laying low. Don't answer any questions about it. They'll try to deflect this as best they can."

"Great, just fucking great." What kind of advice is that bullshit? Like I am too stupid to know that you divert, divert, divert.

"You know I'm trying my best to help you. But if you choose not to listen to me, there's not much I can do for you."

I practically growl her name. "Tori I'm not in the mood. I get you're trying to help me and I get that you're doing your job, and I get that you have a problem with Winter. Trust me I know, but I'm not in the fucking mood."

Luckily, we aren't far from the hotel. I can't wait to get out of this fucking car and put some much-needed space between Tori and me. The friction between us since the scandal leaked has been unreal. And I'm not sure why she seems to have this need to chastise me rather than do her fucking job and assist me. I have an entire fucking team for advice. Hers isn't needed or wanted.

The limo pulls up outside of the hotel and I waste no time getting out.

"Governor Dean, can you tell us who was the mystery woman?" Are you abusive? Will you marry her?"

Pushing my way past the press to the lobby, their questions come in rapid-fire. I'm not answering any of their fucking questions. I look back and Tori is lagging, the

press has surrounded her and is peppering her with the same questions. It's an asshole move leaving Tori out there to fight for herself, but right now I don't seem to care. There's only one woman I need to see.

I get to the elevator and press the buttons that will take me to the floor of my penthouse suite, and for the first time all day, I feel like I can finally breathe.

I've gone to war, served my country, and served many missions under the radar for the Special Activities Division and I would do any of that all over again rather than deal with the fucking press. They are relentless.

The elevator takes its sweet ass time but when it finally deposits me on my floor and I get out I stop in my tracks. The door to our suite stands ajar.

The hair on the back of my neck rises. There's no reason that fucking door should be open. I waste no time pulling out the hidden firearm in my waistband and make my way to the door.

I stand there silently for a moment and listen. I hear nothing. I note that the door isn't busted. Pushing the door open the rest of the way, I walk inside scanning from side to side. I don't see Winter anywhere.

What I do see stops me in my fucking tracks.

The suite is a wreck. The coffee table is toppled over and it looks like Winter might have been having breakfast at the time of her attack. The food from her domed plate is everywhere.

My girl gave them a fight. And I'm not surprised in the least. But with the front door not busted open, they had a reason to be invited in or she knew her kidnapper. I sweep the rest of the rooms, the bedrooms, the bathrooms and she is nowhere to be

found.

She's got to be okay. I keep telling myself that. Whatever Winter's back story may be, she's tough. I just hope one day she will trust me enough to tell me. I realize that I like the thought of that.

I hear a noise at the door and turn, aiming my gun. Tori stops dead in her tracks, raising her hands in the air. "Christ Rex! What in the hell?" I lower the gun and put it back in its holster so I can dig out my phone and make a call.

"What happened in here?" Tori looks around carefully as if something will reach out and grab her.

"Winter has been taken." I send a text to Knox Bane. Explaining the situation. A few seconds later he says he has a man on the way who can help and I welcome it.

"Taken? Who would do such a thing?"

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I shake my head. Surely, she isn't this ignorant. "I'm the Governor, Tori. Her face was just splashed all over every news outlet. I have a lot of enemies."

There are a lot of people domestic and foreign, who would seize upon the opportunity to harm me or anyone they perceived that I cared for. Just another reason that being alone has made sense over the years.

"I'll call the police." Tori begins to dig her phone out but I stop her.

"No, no need. I've got it taken care of. We are going to keep this private."

"Private? Is that even legal?"

"Gather the rest of the staff in your suite. Keep this information to yourself." My phone chimes with an incoming message and it is Knox letting me know that he is sending help. Whatever that means. I tuck my phone away and usher Tori out as I pull the door shut behind us.

"Get someone in here to clean up the mess, please."

I escort her to her room next door and go inside, my gun is drawn to make sure there's no one lying in wait. Once her room is cleared, I lock her in and head down to the lobby. I hope that they will allow me access to the cameras but if not, I have enough contacts to work my way around that. I take the elevator down to the lobby and I peer out the front doors. Of course, the press are still lurking outside. Another reason to keep Winter's kidnapping quiet. No reason to give them more fuel to add to the fire.

I make my way to the counter and an older man that sits behind it greets me. “Good evening, sir. How may we help you?”

“I need to see a manager, please.” No sense in wasting time explaining it to a person that doesn’t have the authority to give me what I want.

“Yes, Governor. Let me make a call.” I wait impatiently. Every fucking second counts right now. Luckily, a few moments later a gentleman comes around from behind the registration counter to meet me.

“Governor Dean, how may I help you.”

“I need to see the footage for the hall outside of my suite. There was an incident.”

The Manager doesn’t even hesitate. “Yes, sir. Please follow me.” I do as he instructs and follow him through the door behind the registration desk. We walk down a short hall to an area marked as security.

A large man sits in the chair behind a desk watching a multitude of monitors but he isn’t wearing a uniform. No, this man is in a suit. and if I’m guessing, he has never missed a workout. His arms are massive.

“Mr. Solis. Sorry to bother you but the Governor needs to look at the footage from,” The Manager looks at me and I realize I never gave them a time frame. “This morning,” I interject.

“Thank you, Mr. Solis. I’ll leave you in capable hands, Governor Dean.”

I nod to the manager as he leaves. Taking the opportunity to check out the beast in the dark suit and the large oppressive form of this huge security guard. Something seems off here but I just keep my mouth shut. It isn’t my problem if he gets me what I need.

“This?” Mr. Solis asks as he zooms in and I see Winter headed out of the suite and making her way to the stairs, an unknown man behind her.

“There, zoom in.” I can’t make out his face, the angle is all wrong and he is smart enough to know where the cameras are. The bill of his hat hides his identity perfectly.

“Fuck.” I can’t tell anything about who that is.” Did she leave willingly? The mess in the room indicates otherwise but he could be an angry boyfriend for all that I know. Maybe they are a team and they trashed the place looking for items to take. I’d be really pissed if that were the case. I might even have to fight that douche bag for Winter.

“Governor, look.”

Mr. Solis rewinds the footage and zooms in as they turn the corner to walk into the stairwell.

“There.” He says as he pauses. I lean in and sure the fuck enough, that sack a shit has abducted Winter at gunpoint.

“Can you follow them down the stairs and out?” I am going to kill whoever the hell this asshole is that has kidnapped her.

They will never find his fucking body.

I watch as this piece of shit marches Winter down multiple levels of stairs before entering an employee elevator where they exit the building and he takes her to an old nondescript black van where he covers her head in a black sack before loading her inside. Fucking prick! I can only see a partial tag as he drives off with Winter.

Fuck.

“Thank you, Mr. Solis.”

I don't wait for his acknowledgment. I exit the security room and as I'm headed back out into the lobby, my phone chimes. I find a message from Knox.

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Sent you help. Meet him in the lobby.

“Governor. Mr. Bane sent me to help.” I look up to see a smiling Lazzaro Mondragon. If Knox thinks he can help me, I’ll take it.

“Someone took Winter. I have a partial tag.” I say as we head out of back side of the hotel away from the waiting press.

Hang on Winter. I’m coming.

### CHAPTER19

#### WINTER

I slide across the floor of the van, again and bang against one of the wall panels. “Shit!” I shout as my head collides with the metal surface. I’m tossed from side to side the motion of the moving van bouncing me around on the hard surface of the floor.

What is happening?

I’ve concluded that there aren’t any seats in the back because I’ve surely rolled all over every inch of this vehicle at this point. I’d have hit something by now. But I really don’t know because he put this sack over my head and handcuffs on my wrists before he tossed me in here. Speaking of handcuffs, the metal bites into my wrist, again. I’d be shocked if it doesn’t bleed if this continues but I guess I have bigger fish to fry.

I'll be lucky to be alive after this.

Maybe it's morbid but I'm not afraid to die. Or maybe my sad little life makes it easier for me to think that I'd be okay to leave this all behind me. I don't have anyone left to lose. But there's a little thought in the back of my mind that tries to shout Rex's name. I'm not listening to that though.

A phone rings at the front of the van and I try to stop sliding around long enough to pay attention. I brace my feet against the floor, hoping to stop myself from sliding as the van jostles along the road to its location.

Is it Rex on the phone? I hate that there's a tiny kernel of hope there for the possibility that it isn't him. That maybe he feels this thing sparking to life between us and he couldn't possibly seek to destroy me in such a way. I hope he couldn't fuck me so thoroughly, and plot my death. Is this a way to get rid of me? That's a brutal way to end a scandal but me and karma did fuck up his re-election bid.

Or is it the Manor? Oh hell. If that is the case, I'll definitely be dead soon. I would guess after my face was splashed around the media that I won't be welcomed back to their fancy brothel. They strike me as being more professional than this. Especially the way this guy is driving. It doesn't scream seasoned professional killer to me at all.

"Yes, I have the package." He replies and his voice sounds off. Like he's whispering or talking quietly. I don't know who this man is that kidnapped me but after he showed up in a maintenance uniform, my dumb ass let him in. I remember thinking his hair looked unnatural, like a bad wig and he had on glasses. But I blew that off and allowed him access and as soon as I turned my back; we were both fighting. I am by no means a fighter and this man outweighs me by a bit but I gave him hell and frankly, if I have to die, I went out fighting. I did scratch him so his DNA will at least be under my nails. Not to mention I hopefully gave him a little something to remember me by.

I snicker, “How’s that scratch?” Of course, he doesn’t answer but as we fought all over the hotel room, I did manage to grab my steak knife that was with the cutlery for my breakfast and I gave him a pretty nasty slice through his shirt to his arm. I was trying to stab him in the damn eye after I slapped his glasses off but he deflected it. It all happened so fast but I hope I got a few good shots in on this asshole.

He continues to talk in hushed tones and I can’t hear his whispers well enough to make anything out. I’m not sure how far we’ve gone out of the city but I know we’re definitely out of the city. I can no longer hear the noise, the hustle, and the bustle. It’s quieter here.

We make a sharp turn a little too quickly, and I roll around on my side banging into the wall of the van. Dammit. “I’m going to get killed in the back of this vehicle before you get me to wherever you’re taking me. You don’t have to drive like a maniac!” I shout into the void. Damn psychopath.

“Shut up.” That’s all he says and I take a few seconds to try and analyze his voice. It doesn’t sound familiar though. This has to be tied to the governor since I don’t even know... well, anyone at all anymore. If my parents owed anyone any money they’re too late to collect. That just makes this situation even sadder. Will I even be found? I won’t be reported missing because there isn’t anyone left who would miss me.

He must be off the phone now because I no longer hear his muffled voice. The road turns to gravel underneath us. I can hear the distinct sound of the gravel pinging against the underside of the van. A few moments later the van comes to stop and my kidnapper shuts off the engine then he gets out.

I wait in silence, the only sounds are my anxious puffs of air. I don’t wait long though. The doors open and I try to sit up. But I’m so confused and I don’t know where I’m sitting at inside this fucking van. Can I kick out at him? This might be my only chance to escape.

I do just that and with a grunt, I know my kick landed true. But that didn't even faze him it seems because he grabs my leg by the ankle, hauling me through the van door.

Shit.

My head cracks on the metal beneath me so hard it jars my teeth and my ears ring. My captor drops my leg and before I can sit up or even fall to the ground, he snatches my arm and hauls me up to my feet in one swift move. He's muscular, I recall. Something lands in my stomach with enough force that I groan but then I'm being tossed like I weigh nothing. Blood rushes to my head and it intensifies the throb that is growing there and the ringing in my ears sets my already frayed nerves even further on edge. I think that I'm upside down. He must be carrying me over his shoulder. I wonder if I can kick him?

I move my legs and his muscled arm comes up and locks my legs securely against his body, blocking my efforts.

Damn it.

"Hey, what the hell are you doing?" I question him but he doesn't say anything he just continues to carry me like a sack of flour.

My senses are on high alert. I hear a dog bark in the distance. Some type of loud music plays in the distance possibly from a house nearby. A door creaks and we must have entered our destination. Soon all sounds are muffled as he shuts the door behind us.

He walks around, his large footsteps reverberating on the walls around us. It smells terrible in here; the air is saturated with a very musty odor and I find a little niggle of fear creeps in at the idea of this is where I will die.

I don't dwell on that for too long because he tosses me off of his shoulder and I land on an equally smelly soft surface. I roll to my side and push up onto my feet.

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“I want to know what is happening. Tell me.” It’s hard pretending as if I’m not scared especially since I don’t even know if he is still in the room with me. I take a step forward, then another. One more step and his voice is low as he cusses under his breath but as I make that next step I stumble and he catches me.

He doesn't let me fall. And that right there tells me a lot. He's keeping me safe. And I would do well to remember that.

“Can you tell me anything.” He doesn’t reply verbally, he just picks me up and places me back down on what I’m guessing is maybe a mattress. But he places me in a way that is a little more comfortable like he’s trying to help me out. Interesting. I wonder if he feels guilty for his part in this and I also wonder if I can work him over to my side.

It's easy enough for me to pry money out of men. I’m practically a pro at getting my way at his point. I decide to play on his good graces.

“Thank you.” I let a little shaky wobble enter my voice and he sighs like this is the last thing that he wants to be a part of. But that doesn’t seem to garner enough sympathy to even get this sack off of my head.

Damn it.

I hear his footsteps retreat from me and then a door creaks before it must close. I stay quiet listening as his footsteps pound down the hall.

“Call...” I couldn’t hear the name but he has the call on speakerphone because I can hear it ringing. He’s just going to let me listen? Or maybe he doesn’t realize that I can

hear the call. Or likely he doesn't fucking care because I won't be alive much longer anyway so what does it matter?

The phone stops ringing, someone has answered and I pray that he leaves it on speakerphone.

"Hello." The lady's voice says and I'm about to shit my damn pants because I recognize that bitch's voice! It's Tori.

"We made it. The package is secure."

"I'll be there as soon as I can. Do not engage. We discussed this." Is this man a rapist? A murderer for hire? My mind runs wild with questions of the unknown and what this small tidbit of Tori's involvement means. Discussed what exactly? My heart sinks in my chest. Rex has set this into motion. He plans to get rid of me. I shouldn't be surprised. I knew better. I knew what he was capable of but I chose to see him differently.

Stupid. I am so fucking stupid and now I will pay with my life.

## CHAPTER 20

### REX

I followed Lazz out of the back of the hotel and over to an unremarkable white van. But when the doors slide open, it's like a technology hub. A couple of rough-looking guys sit inside working with the computers and I notice that they are wearing leather vests, their patches indicating they are Wild Man and Ghost and they are proud members of Iron Mayhem.

"Holy shit. What in the hell is all of this?" I ask as I follow Lazz into the back of the

van and take the seat opposite of him as we sit in captain's chairs that have been turned around to face the rear of the vehicle.

“This is the mobile spy-mobile for the club. This tricked-out van can do all sorts of reconnaissance shit. Most of our members are veterans, after all. We like to utilize their training.” Lazz smiles as he casually laces his hands behind his head like he doesn’t have a care in the world. Hell, this guy is so laid back he probably doesn’t have any cares.

“Ghost, we got a partial. Can you run it?”

“Absolutely.” Lazz rattles off the information and as I wait, I can’t help where my mind wanders. I’m worried about Winter. Where is she? Is she hurt? I know she must be scared but I know wherever she is, she isn’t taking this shit lying down. My girl is smart. She’s likely to free herself before I can even attempt to extract her and I realize that is fine by me. I like her determination. She doesn’t wait for anyone. She makes shit happen for her and she will do whatever is necessary to make it happen.

Stay safe, little storm. I’m coming.

“Got it.” Ghost says as he swipes on the screen, expanding the searched information so we can all see it. “Virginia Holland.” He says and I am certain that all the color drains from my fucking face.

“Fuck!” I shout trying to reign my anger in only nothing can reign this anger in.

“I take it you know her?” Lazz asks and Wild Man and Ghost turn to face me.

“I know the name. I fired her\_\_ what I’m now assuming is a relative...the other day. Steven Holland. Son of a bitch! I never in a million years thought he would do something like this.”

I like to think of myself as a pretty good judge of character, but the day that he was hired, I was at a summit. I was out of fucking town and it wasn't me who hired him.

"Tori." I fucking growl her name and start digging my phone out of my pocket.

"Okay fellas, we need to run a background and record sweep. Pull any real estate or holdings owned by Holland, family, or acquaintances." Lazz instructs and as I pull my phone out of my pocket, I do something that I haven't really done in far too long. I pray for Winter. I pray for her safety. I know all too well what it's like to feel alone and scared. I think back to my childhood and pray that if it is Steven that has her, he at least will treat her well until I can get there and kill him.

I dial Tori and it rings too many times. Finally, she picks up.

"Hey, Rex. I was waiting on your call." She sounds smug and far too pleased for my liking. I think about the way that she and I have butted heads recently and how that started when Winter showed up. I think about how I caught Tori berating Winter on more than one occasion and how many times Tori almost chastised me about my relationship with Winter.

Son of a bitch.

I can't believe that I didn't see what was right in front of my face.

"Where is she?" I yell into the phone and I am greeted with maniacal laughter. Tori is fucking unhinged. I should have seen this coming. I knew she had feelings for me when we were younger, but I chalked that up to a childhood crush. Why the fuck didn't I see her jealousy coming? Maybe I gave my old friend too much credit.

"Awe Rex. She's okay\_\_ for now. I tell you what, cut her loose and we can kill her off and frame Steven for it and you and I walk away. We can be together like we are meant to be. You know, I thought that you would realize that by now. How perfect that we are for one another because we are. Everyone sees it. Everyone but you, apparently. But that's okay. I'll take care of this little problem and we can move forward. Together."

I hang my head in shame. I allowed Winter to be put in this situation. I should have noticed that Tori was coming unhinged and that she was losing her grip. It wasn't just Winter that I failed.

"Tor. You've lost your grip on reality. Just tell me where Winter is. Don't fucking hurt her and we can get you the help that you clearly need. We can move on from this. We go way back, Tori. I don't want to hurt you."

If she so much as harms a hair on Winter's fucking head I will kill her. Friend or not.

"Rex, you just don't get it. Now, do you still not get it? I will do anything for you to

make you happy. And this infatuation you have with this woman, is going to ruin you and your career. It already is!" She screams into the line.

"But I will take care of this just like I have taken care of so many other things while we have been on the path to get you to the Presidency. I will take care of this, too."

She is fucking crazy. She is obsessed with me and the idea of us and the Presidency and she is fucking crazy. My old friend is no longer there. Maybe like she said, she's been doing this for a long time. I shudder to think of the shit she has done to others in my bid to become President.

"We've got a lock on the phone." Wild Man whispers into the din of the van and Lazz wastes no time hopping into the driver's seat. He starts the engine, and we take off as he punches some things in on the screen. Tori's cell phone dings off of a tower and we head in that direction.

I look at Lazz. This isn't civilian technology. He shouldn't even have access to this but he just smiles that carefree smile and waggles his eyebrows at me. I let him do his thing and focus on keeping Tori on the line. The more accurate we can get to her location, the faster that we can extract Winter.

I shouldn't poke her, I know, but I can't help myself. My kindness only spreads so far, and right now I am feeling anything but kind toward this woman.

"Tori, listen to me carefully. I am not the one to be fucked with. Do you understand me? This isn't some fucking game. Return Winter to me or I will fucking kill you once I find you. And there will be nowhere to hide, Tori. Not for you and not for Steven. I promise you my face will be the very last thing that you both see on this side of the dirt."

I will bury these two fucks for this.

Tori just carries on as if I didn't just threaten her life. That alone lets me know that she is a lost cause. Even if I spared her, she may never stop coming after me and what I hold dear.

"We're closing in," Lazz whispers to me as he follows the GPS.

"I understand you're upset right now, but once we're in the White House you'll see what all I've sacrificed to get you there. I expect that you'll reward me by making me the First Lady."

"I have to go now, Rex. I suspect you might be close by at this point and I need to take care of your little storm before you show up. See you soon, sweetheart."

"Tori! Tori!" I shout her name again but there's no response. I look at the phone and the call has been dropped.

"Fuck!" My frustration nears a crescendo and I have had all I can take. I can go in and topple a fucking government no problem but I can't track down two psychopaths who've kidnapped my woman?

"It's okay. We'll find her." Lazz says in that laid-back way of his and I'm just finding it hard to believe at this point.

"The aunt has a few rental properties in this area. A couple are more remote. I'd suggest starting there." Ghost calls from the back and I watch as Lazz taps the screen and new coordinates pop up on it.

"We will find her. I promise you." I look over at the man that I am putting my complete faith in because at this moment, I don't have much of a choice. But I can see that he means what he says and the forlorn look that now crosses his face tells me that this happy, go-lucky, laid-back guy works hard to be this way. Whatever he has

been through I hope it isn't selfish to think that maybe I don't want to be dealt the same hand.

"We've got a location coming up. We'll take point. Are you strapped?"

I pull my firearm from the waistband of my pants. "I'm good." I wait impatiently as Lazz kills the lights and I hear his club members shuffle around in the back of the van, preparing to get out with us. Once he slows to a roll, I hop the fuck out.

"Goddamn it!" Lazz says to my retreating form but I don't wait.

I don't give a fuck, I storm up the steps and kick the fucking door in, gun drawn and ready.

## CHAPTER21

### WINTER

## Page 41

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 4:39 am*

This room smells terrible and I have no idea how long I've been here sprawled on top of what I can only assume at this point is a dirty, disgusting mattress that is placed onto the floor.

Or that's my best guess because this stupid sack is still tied onto my head and my hands are still in handcuffs behind my back. But I guess I might as well be thankful for the sack on my head because it's keeping me from seeing what surely must be the filthiest mattress on the earth underneath me. I shudder to think what I'm lying on. Based on the smell alone, it's not good and it's definitely not clean.

I am holding my breath as I strain to listen to see if anyone or anything is near, but all I hear is the wind, and from the sounds of it, it's tearing through this space so this building, or whatever it is, must be dilapidated.

I need to pee so bad and have for a while, but my choices seem bleak. Ask the man that kidnapped me or pee on myself? At this point, my vote is leaning towards peeing on myself.

I am not too anxious to call my kidnapper back into the room with me. Right now, I'm alone and that is the preferable situation. Dirty mattress and all. What's a little pee smell mixed into the cacophony of smells in this place? I can't help the humorless laugh that escapes me but before I can dwell on my decision for too long, I smell something different. Something good. Food. My stomach grumbles in response to the favorable scent but I'm afraid of anything this kidnapper might give to me because who knows what it's laced with.

The door squeaks on rusty hinges as it is unlocked from the outside and pushed open.

“I've gotten you something to eat.” My kidnapper says in that same low whisper-like voice, and that tells me he's hiding his identity from me.

I still don't have a clue who he is. Nothing is ringing a bell. But he must know who I am and he's afraid that I can identify him. He better be more worried that I don't figure out a way to kill his ass. But I reign those thoughts in. He's trying to be nice to me, so that is the angle that I need to work.

“Thank you. Is it possible for me to use the bathroom?” He must move to place the food down and I can only imagine what surfaces the food is now touching as well. God only knows what awaits me in the bathroom.

My kidnapper grabs my elbow, lifts me to my feet and we begin to walk. I stumble a little bit, tripping over my own feet but he doesn't let me fall.

I can't help but ask. “Why are you doing this? You don't seem like the type to kidnap people. So, I have to ask why you're doing this?”

He doesn't say anything, but I didn't really expect the man to have a heart-to-heart with me as we shuffle along to the bathroom. We must arrive at our destination because he stops me with a hand on the handcuffs.

“Ouch.” I hiss as the metal bites into my already frayed flesh.

“I'm going to take these off and the sack, but only soon you can use the restroom and eat, but you should know that there's no way out and when you come back out, I will be right here waiting. Do you understand me?”

I sigh a resigned sound before responding. “I do understand.”

I understand more than he realizes because now that I will have formally seen my

kidnapper's face, I know I'm not getting out of this alive. Why else would he let me see his face? It was too chaotic when we fought. I wouldn't have been able to pick this man out of a lineup by his face alone. I couldn't even describe one feature. It's like my fight or flight kicked in and I chose to fight. Everything else didn't matter.

Some fighter I turned out to be. I still got kidnapped despite my best efforts.

He takes off the cuffs and immediately I move my wrists in small circles and rub at my hands. One wrist is severely bruised, I can tell just by the way it feels. Possibly even fractured from where I was swung around the back of that fucking van.

But then a few seconds later the sack is pulled off the top of my head. My hair comes up with it cascading down over my face and I shake it and brush it out of my eyes. I squint against the brightness, trying to get my eyes to adjust to the sudden intrusion.

"The bathroom is straight ahead." I don't even look at him, I just walk straight ahead, pushing through the old metal door. I jump when the door clangs shut behind me. The sound echoes around the room.

And just as I thought, this place is disgusting. It seems like maybe it's an old factory of some sort. The walls are brick and the floors are an old, well-worn tile that was once white but is now every putrid color imaginable.

The facilities are old. The whole bathroom is full of broken and busted grayed stalls. The brick walls are even chipped and broken down in spots and old graffiti is spray-painted everywhere. It's the literal place of my nightmares.

I make my way to the one stall that still has a door and pushing it open, the metal creaks on the hinges. Unbuttoning and unzipping my pants as fast as possible, I yank them down just enough to be able to hover over top of the commode and go as quickly as I can force myself. I stand and yank my pants back up, making quick work

of securing them.

I highly doubt there's water in here so when I finish up I don't even bother to flush, I just come out of the stall and head to the sink. I turn the faucet and nothing comes out, just as I figured there's no water here. There are not even mirrors. They are long, broken and scattered throughout this room. I head toward the door and back toward my captivity, but before I can exit the bathroom, I hear my captor's phone ring.

I delay just on the other side of the door and wait for him to answer. Imagine my surprise when he answers it on speakerphone. He grumbles a greeting and when I hear who is on the other line I could bust into a pure fit of rage.

“It's me, Steven. I had to call on the burner. I tossed my other phone. I'm pretty sure that Rex was tracking me.” The very familiar voice says. “I'm on my way. Don't kill her yet. I want to help you. I love it when you're dangerous and aggressive.”

Disgusting, and I am pissed.

It's Tori! That fucking psychotic bitch!

“If Rex is tracking me, he is going to be pretty pissed. He wants his precious storm back, so when I get there, we have to be quick!”

I should've known! I should've known she would do this! She is obsessed with Rex after all. And now I feel a little bit bad that I thought maybe he had a hand in this because I can see this is all designed and executed by Tori. She's using Steven and I guarantee you she is fucking him to get him to do her will.

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*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 4:39 am*

I storm out of the door come face-to-face with Steven.

His eyes grow large as I slap the hell out of him then snatch the phone out of his hand.

“You conniving, sneaky bitch. If I see you, Tori, I'm going to fucking kill you for this.”

Stephen snatches the phone back out of my hand but he takes it off the speaker and holds it to his ear.

I stand there seething, watching my handprint blossom red against his cheek as he holds the phone between his shoulder and his ear. He grabs me around the wrist placing the handcuffs back on me, but he locks them in front of my body this time instead of the back.

I don't wait for him to place that sack back over my head, I just move and he comes along beside me to direct me back to that shitty, dirty room. Once we enter back inside, I cringe as I look around and try to imagine how many germs have infected my body. It's disgusting in here. Trash, broken bottles, and oh yuck, is that a used condom? So much grossness litters the floor.

There is at least a couple of metal chairs at a table where the bags of fast food sit and I walk over to that and sit down. The time for being a considerate hostage has come and gone. Steven needs some real talk.

“Are you fucking Tori or is she paying you?”

I use my cuffed hands to drag a bag of food over to me. I pluck a straw from inside the bag and pull it from the wrapper and stab it into a cup. I grab the fountain drink and take a sip before placing it down beside the bag.

I almost feel sorry for Steven. He isn't an ugly guy, but I bet my money that Tori lured him into this with sex and a promise of a relationship. I've seen his type plenty at the Manor. They are just sad and lonely. Those men have more money than sense though. Poor old Steven here, I'm pretty sure he has neither.

"You know that she is in love with Rex, right? Obsessed. As soon as you kill me, I'm guessing that is what she wants." I snag a fry out of the bag and pop it into my mouth. "She'll throw you under the bus." I grab another fry and Steven watches me but I can tell he is listening. Hopefully, my words are sinking in.

"Having Rex is her goal, my friend." I point my fry at him then bite it.

His face scrunches up in consternation. "Tori loves me. She is helping me get revenge on Rex for firing me, because he is in love with Tori and she doesn't want anything to do with him."

Wow. Steven is really dense.

"Sorry but you're wrong." I shove a bunch of fries in my mouth and before I can swallow them, the bitch herself enters the room.

"Tori." Steven practically purrs and he rushes to her side, hugging her and they shove their tongues so far down each other's throats, I could vomit. I stop eating.

They finally stop and Tori beams a triumphant smile in my direction. "Hello, skank." She laughs like she's the funniest thing in the world. But then she walks over and slaps me. My head turns to the side from the force and I have no doubt that I will

have a massive handprint on my cheek.

“That was for talking shit about me to my Steven. Here baby, set this up.”

She hands him a bag and I realize it's a camera and a tripod. Steven wastes no time setting it up to where the camera is focused on the mattress.

Why do I have a feeling that I'm about to get back onto that nasty ass thing?

Once he's done positioning the camera, he comes over to me and yanks me out of the chair by the handcuffs. My wrists ache and strain and I grit my teeth against the sharp bite of pain.

Steven drags me over and flings me down onto the mattress.

“Just like we said, baby. Do it just like we planned.” He walks over to Tori, kissing her again and I am disgusted, yet again. Steven is a fucking chump who is getting what he deserves by listening to her ass, I decide as he makes his way toward me.

Oh, fuck no.

Tori moves behind the camera and I see a red light come on that indicates she pressed record. Surely this isn't about to happen but as I look back at Steven, he is moving toward me and is unbuttoning his pants.

I close my eyes and try to breathe long, deep, slow breaths as Steven pushes me back on the little shitty mattress and hangs my hands off a hook that I didn't previously see there. The hook closes and I am stuck. Laying on this shitty bed with my hands strung up over my head.

“You don't have to do this.” I whisper as he kneels between my legs.

“I’m sorry.” That’s all that he says as he gets my pants unfastened and begins to pull them down. Hung from this hook and powerless a tear falls down my cheek and I think of a man that has green eyes and how I wish he were the prince that saves the princess.

But my life isn’t a fairytale.

Steven looks to Tori and she nods for him to continue and I realize what she is doing. She is going to record him raping me. And she is going to put all the blame on him. Stupid fucking Steven.

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 4:39 am*

He rubs the tip of his cock against my pussy and I whimper.

“Please, don’t. Please!” I shout the words hoping that he will come to his senses. Praying that this isn’t my fate but as he lines himself up with me, I close my eyes and think of Rex.

The way he looks at me. The way Rex touches me. Maybe if I think hard enough, I can get lost in those memories that at the time I didn’t realize were so precious. Now I’m stuck in this nightmare.

Steven begins to surge forward and everything happens in a blur.

## CHAPTER22

### REX

We were lucky as hell that the first place we checked was where Winter was being held. Steven’s aunt owns a lot of rental properties in this area. The van was one of many in her maintenance fleets and he just so happens to now work as her head of security since I fired him.

I didn’t see or hear anything at first when I entered the building. I still don’t know where the van is but this is an old run-down industrial complex that has been long abandoned. He could have parked it anywhere. I was about to give up and leave when I heard a cell phone ring out in the distance. I know Lazz and the guys are somewhere behind me so I will have a backup if needed, but I couldn’t wait any longer. Every second that Winter is gone is a second that she could be in jeopardy or taken from me

permanently, and I realize that I am not okay with that thought.

I sneak down the hall and I can hear Winter pleading with whoever has her. That sad, resigned sound in her voice almost breaks me. I pick up speed and when I turn the corner and scan the room, I see fucking red.

Steven Holland has Winter trussed up by her arms and, as my beautiful girl lies in the nastiest filth that I have ever seen, this piece of shit is about to fuck her. I don't even think. It's like muscle memory at this point. I have taken more lives than I have saved. I exhale and squeeze the trigger.

Steven doesn't even know what hit him. He is dead before he can blink. Winter screams as his dead body twitches on top of hers and I walk over grab him by the collar of his shirt and push him off. She is still screaming, her face is covered in blood, and I hate that she will have this memory of this piece of shits' death on her mind until the day that she dies. I lean over, keeping an eye on Tori as I unhook the handcuffs from the hook that bind Winter's wrists to the wall.

"Are you ok baby?" I ask and she whimpers but shakes her head. "I'm okay, now."

The site of her covered in that asshole's blood makes me even angrier. I want to shoot another hole in his dead fucking ass. I keep an eye on Tori and slip my jacket off and lay it across Winter's exposed lap just in case Lazz and his men come in. I look behind the camera and Tori stands there, a look of horror on her face.

"You wanted me. Well, here the fuck I am, sweetheart." I stride across the room and I have never hit a woman in my life, but I fucking punch Tori right in the mouth. She howls with pain and covers her bloody lips with her hands as she cries.

"I should fucking kill you." I seethe with anger that this woman, whom I've known all of my life, who I thought was my friend, has betrayed me in every way that she

possibly could.

“I don’t understand, Tori. Why did you do this?”

She tries to laugh but when she moves her hand, I can see that I busted her bottom lip pretty well. I don’t even feel bad about that.

“You were supposed to love me. Me! I have given my life to helping you! I didn’t mind so much when you fucked random women. I knew they didn’t mean anything but when you brought her onto the campaign trail,” Tori shakes her head. Her dark hair cascades around her shoulders. For such a beautiful woman, she’s ugly on the inside. “I knew she was different.”

My God, she is crazy. “You had Steven leak the story.” I look to Winter as she stands, pulling her pants back up and it makes me sick that she has gone through all of this because of me.

“Yes. I thought with the threat to the campaign that you’d get rid of her.”

“I guess once you realized she wasn’t going anywhere you decided to what, to have her kidnapped and raped?”

“She wasn’t supposed to make it out of here alive!” Tori runs toward Winter and I’ve heard all that I need to hear. I raise my gun and squeeze the trigger.

Winter gasps as she stares at Tori’s dead body, and I’ve had all of the distance that I can bear.

I walk over to her and hope to God the woman can even stand the sight of me now that she sees what I am.

“I’m sorry Winter.” I reach out to touch her but she leans back away from me. Damn, that hurts more than I want to admit.

“I understand if you don’t want anything to do with me now.” I don’t like it, but I understand.

“No, Rex, it’s not that. I am thankful that you saved me. I know they were about to kill me. But I have to tell you something and honestly, once I do, I think it is you who won’t want anything to do with me.”

“I don’t know what you think that you could possibly have done that would make me not want to be with you.”

Winter hangs her head and I pull my pocket square from my jacket pocket and walk over to her. “May I?” I ask and she shakes her head yes. So, I gently hold her chin in my grasp as I try to clean the blood from her face.

“Talk to me, Winter.”

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 4:39 am*

“I knew you, before the Hunt, before the Manor. I knew Rex Dean the soldier. I was a young girl and you showed up at my parent's party in your military uniform and you stole my heart.” She ducks her head trying to hide her eyes from me.

“Don’t hide. Let me see you.”

She raises her eyes to look at me again. “I’ve loved you for so long. Even when I wanted to hate you.”

My brow furrows. “Why would you hate me? Did I do something to you?” She sighs and shifts from foot to foot, growing impatient with my cleaning her up, or worried about the bomb she thinks she is about to drop on me, but I tell you what, there isn’t much this woman can do to send me away now. And I find that I am okay with that.

“Be still.” I admonish with a smile as I wipe her brow.

“I’m the daughter of Augustus and Summer Jensen.”

I stop in my tracks.

“You’re Augustus’ daughter? I wondered what became of you after they were gone.”

She laughs a humorless laugh. “You took everything from us. My mom died and my father came to you for help and you stole his company. Everyone that worked there lost their jobs. Good people lost everything and so did we.”

Fuck. That’s not the truth. That’s not what happened at all but if I tell her, it will

change the way she sees her father. I stay quiet but continue wiping at her face. Winter Jensen. I couldn't recall August's daughter's name but I had wondered about her over the years since I had heard he had passed.

"I'm sorry about your parents. Did you go live with relatives after he passed away?"  
Fuck she became an orphan.

"No. I dropped out of school and tried to take care of myself. I don't have any other family."

Jesus Christ. This poor woman.

"I wanted revenge against you. I, I went to the Manor to earn enough money so that I would have the time to destroy you."

"Winter." I don't even know what to say. Thinking of the events occurring as she must, I can't blame her.

"You hate me now?"

"No." I couldn't hate her for wanting vengeance.

"Was I just revenge?" I feel vulnerable asking but if these feelings are one-sided...

"No." She breathes the words and I lean in and kiss her lips. That's all that matters. We can work past all the other things that stand in our way. With Winter by my side, life is happier.

"Hey!" I spin putting Winter behind me and draw my gun on Lazz.

He tosses his hands in the air, "Fuck. Don't shoot quick draw." And Ghost and Wild

Man come in behind him.

“Well, fuck, I see you didn’t need too much help, after all, Governor.” Lazz laughs and I tuck my gun away, drawing Winter to my side under my arm.

“Hey, sweetheart. You good?” Lazz looks Winter over from a distance and I can tell he is genuinely trying to make sure she is ok.

“How about you two get on out of here and we’ll get this mess sorted.”

“You’d do that?” I ask cocking a brow in his direction.

“Oh yeah, we have a team for that. Besides, you’ll owe me a favor.”

He winks at me and I have no doubt the man cashes in his favor.

“Deal.” I walk over and shake his hand. He shakes mine back then hands me a set of keys.

“Your assistant won’t be needing that anymore. If you head down the hall, take two flights down it will dump you out at her sedan. Take care of our girl, and we’ll be in touch. Winter, you need me just call, sugar.”

“Thanks, Lazz, for everything.” She says as she reaches out to shake his hand.

## Page 45

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 4:40 am*

“You can come back and stay if you need a place. No strings attached, Winter. Just show up.”

I walk out of the room with Winter under my arm and I hope like hell she will decide to stay with me. Will we be scrutinized for our age differences? Sure, but both of us are used to conquering adversities. My little storm is a fighter and I want nothing more than to be by her side.

I brush her hair aside as we walk down the dilapidated hall and I smile when I see the little heart-shaped birthmark that’s still there.

“Well, look at that. A unique birthmark for a unique young lady.”

She smiles up at me brilliantly. This woman is so beautiful and perfect for me it makes my heartache. We both are recalling that old memory of a moment now frozen in time from so long ago and I place a soft kiss on her heart.

## EPILOGUE

(ONE YEAR LATER)

I carry the drinks out to the lounge chair on the beach where Winter sits reading. Whatever the latest must-read romance novel is, is perched onto her very round, very beautiful belly.

“Here my little storm.” I hand her the fruit juice slushy.

“Mmm. Thank you.” She takes a large sip then sits it down on the table beside her and returns to her book.

“You’re not too hot, are you?” I can’t help but ask. It seems all I ever do now is worry about the two of them.

“Stop worrying Gov. We’re okay.” She laughs and her beautiful smile makes me laugh too.

We came to Hawaii for a vacation but also because Winter has sold some of her jewelry to a local boutique. I’m very proud of my wife and her growing business.

My phone chimes in my pocket and when I pull it out and look at the screen and see who it is a lump forms in my throat. It’s been over a year but a promise is a promise.

Lazz

Hey Governor. About that favor...