



The Kingpin's Weakness

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Description: Easton Brawn, notorious gangster and self-proclaimed devil, has requested Scout's presence in his luxury box at the MMA fight—after only one glance—and his reputation gives her no choice but to join him there. Anyone who gets too close to Easton becomes a target for his enemies, so although this girl makes his once-dead heart beat out of control, he can only offer her one night of unparalleled passion. Love has no time limits, however. And before Easton knows it, he'll be in a rush to keep the girl of his dreams safe...and in his life forever.

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1

Easton

Not a damn thing moves me anymore.

In my youth, I was driven and ambitious. There was nowhere to go but up—straight to the top—and I didn't care how many bodies I had to step over to get there.

Here's what no one tells you, though. The top is fucking boring.

Now the only answer I hear is yes. Mainly because people assume their very existence will be in jeopardy if they question my decisions.

They're not wrong.

But I digress.

I'm at the top now. A kingpin, they call me. Lord and master of this city's underworld. Money is no longer something I have to work for. It's my due. Respect has been earned. Fear has been established. No one challenges the king when pain is the implied result. There is nothing else to reach for and I'm colder than ever. Cold and indifferent and moving from one moment to the next like a feather underwater.

Here is the other thing they don't tell you about being on top.

You lose more than you gain. Especially in my line of work.

A brother. A friend.

Casualties that come from being associated with a dangerous man, such as myself.

A waitress sets down a cocktail to my right, but I stare straight ahead, not bothering to pick it up. Not even sure if I ordered it in the first place. I'm in my private box at the arena, waiting for the MMA fight to begin below. My gaze drops to the crowd at my feet. Men in bloodthirsty packs, beers hoisted, general pandemonium. I own a sizable stake in the federation and I hoped it would amuse me to witness my illegal funds establish something so commercial.

But alas, once again, I am unmoved.

Tonight is a fight between the Maxim Semenov (aka The Madman of MMA) and Banner Kyle, a veteran of the sport who manages to even make my skin crawl. Quite a feat, considering the shit that I've seen and done.

I'm drumming my fingers on the arm of my leather chair, contemplating going home and skipping the fight altogether, but something catches my attention on the Jumbotron.

A girl's smiling face.

Something flickers in my chest and I suck in a breath, rubbing at the spot. It has been so long since I felt anything, the sensation of my own heartbeat is unnatural.

Who is she?

Front row seats are expensive. Could she be an actress or model?

She's certainly beautiful enough. But her black-rimmed glasses and the way she turns

in a wide-eyed circle have me discarding those professions. No, she isn't used to the front row. There is something buoyant and innocent about her. Classy. Soft.

I shoot to my feet and advance to the glass, as if I could reach out and touch her image on the oversized screen. Somehow she is the only person in this arena, the only person I've seen in years, that doesn't read as one-dimensional. In a sea of cardboard cutouts, she's a living, breathing thing and I swear I can almost hear her inhaling, exhaling.

Who the fuck is she?

I pull my phone out of my pocket, surprised to find my hand shaking. Gritting my teeth, I scroll for a moment, then hit the number for my head of security. He answers after half a ring.

"Yes, Mr. Brawn?"

"There is a girl..." I have to stop and clear my throat. "In the front row. Dead center of the ring. Black dress. Glasses. Bring her up to me immediately."

"Yes, Mr. Brawn."

"Don't take no for an answer."

"I never do."

I cross my arms and watch my security guard jog down to the front of the arena, just as Maxim Semenov busts through the double doors and thunders toward the ring—and his opponent. Normally I would wonder what has gotten the fighter even more worked up than usual, but I just want the girl up here. I can think of nothing but that.

Part of me hopes she bores me just like everything and everyone else. That way I can stay wrapped up in my cold indifference.

Yet another part of me knows that isn't going to happen.

There is too much honesty and life and intelligence in her eyes.

I can't wait to fuck her.

My breath fogs the glass a little and I wipe it with the wrist of my suit jacket, watching as my guard informs the girl she is wanted in my box.

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And I almost have to laugh at the horror that clouds her expression.

My name tends to get that reaction.

For the first time, I realize she is with another girl and they both argue. Don't they know it is pointless? I get everything I want. My world is a world filled with yeses. No isn't an option.

Finally, she is being guided up the stairs and...

Christ.

Her face is beautiful.

Her body is a goddamn meal.

She keeps tugging on the hem of her short, black dress and I get the sense she doesn't dress sexy very often and isn't comfortable in her clothes.

No matter. I plan to keep her naked.

My fingers start to burn and I realize my cigar has burned all the way down without me taking a single puff. They are almost at the entrance to my box now, so I stub it out, my attention locked on the door. Waiting for her to walk through. Preparing for my reaction to having her right in front of me.

But nothing, nothing could have prepared me.

My guard opens the door, gently prods her inside and closes it behind him, never making eye contact with me. Like a good little soldier. And there she is.

She shifts in her high-heeled Mary Janes, her head bowed forward slightly, leaving her face curtained by a wealth of rich brunette hair. When she peeks up at me through her glasses and sucks in a breath, I get this very raw, very real sense that I've made every single decision in my life just so that I could end up right here. With her.

"Hello," I say thickly. "What's your name?"

"Scout," she whispers. "And I'm going to pass out now."

I lunge, catching her right before she collapses on the floor.

2

Scout

When I wake up, Easton Brawn is looking down at me.

It wasn't a dream. I'm still in his private box. I'm alone with him.

The devil incarnate. The kingpin. The lord and master of the underworld. The notorious gangster I've been reading about in the papers since I was in middle school.

It's just him and me, sharing air space. No big deal.

Not a hint of what he's thinking shows on his face.

His corruptly sexy face.

He is a decade older than me, but there isn't a single wrinkle to indicate that he's in his early thirties. Almost as if he never shows emotion and therefore his face never creases, never crinkles. Just stays smooth. His eyes are mossy green. Sharp, but blank. Betraying nothing.

There is a faint aroma of cigar smoke around him and an undercurrent of mint. Not like toothpaste or gum. But the fresh herb. Chopped.

"You don't smell like the blood of your enemies at all," I murmur, obviously still in a stupor from my trip to unconscious land. "That's nice."

He tilts his head. "Have you spent a lot of time wondering what I'd smell like?"

"I was a little curious," I admit. "Is that weird?"

"A bit."

"Oh. Can I go now?"

"No."

"I had a feeling you'd say that," I whisper.

Easton Brawn, gangster, lifts a hand and brings it to my forehead, hesitating for a split second before feeling for a temperature with the back of his wrist. "Were you feeling faint before coming in here, Scout?" he asks quietly. "Or do you just find me that alarming?"

I sit up slowly, expecting him to back up a pace, but he doesn't. And that leaves me face to face with his gold belt buckle. Swallowing hard, I tip my head back to meet his eyes—and it's a long way up. The papers never mention him being so tall.

So...strong. "I find the unknown alarming. It's why I like science. There is always an answer eventually. Facts. When I walked in here, I had no idea what you want from me. I still don't. That's what I find alarming. Not necessarily...you." I force myself to stop rambling. "Thank you for catching me. I bruise easily."

He exhales slowly, rubs at the center of his chest. "Goddammit."

I push my glasses higher on my nose. "What?"

"I was hoping you'd do me a favor and be boring."

"Sorry." I open my mouth and close it. This man is nothing like I would have expected him to be. What is wrong with his chest? Is he going to faint, too? "I could try harder. Maybe recite the periodic table?"

"I have a feeling I'd find that adorable and it would only make things worse."

This whole exchange feels a little bit like a dream. Or like the time my sister and I shared a bottle of champagne on the roof of our building, lay right there until the sun set and the stars came out. It's a real moment, but it's more vivid than reality. Crystalizing itself. "I'm a little confused. You're the one that brought me here, Mr. Brawn."

"Easton."

"Oh." I shake my head. "No, I can't call you that."

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He raises an eyebrow. “Why not?”

Why indeed? Why does everything happening in my brain seem to fire right out of my mouth around this man? I’m not a smooth person by any means, but I’m usually not so goofy. Am I? “It’s a very intimate name. Isn’t it?”

A muscle ticks in his cheek. “Why do you think I brought you up here, cutie?”

Heat travels up my limbs like creeping fingers, warmth slowly curling in my belly. He wants me. My father is a gambler and bets on a lot of fights. Gets in a lot of trouble, too. On the way up here, I kind of convinced myself Easton wanted to speak about that. But no. His interest in me is sexual. And I suddenly feel very small and vulnerable sitting on that couch, the most notorious criminal in modern history towering over me. Vulnerable and...tingly.

His green eyes meander over my breasts and I’m shocked when my nipples plump up, as if wanting to show off. Rude little things. Do I hear him groan?

“Is this what you do?” I sound breathless. I am breathless. “You select a woman from the crowd and bring her up here for sex?”

He lifts a hand and cradles my jaw gently, running his thumb along my cheekbone. And I wish I hadn’t looked up, because his eyes smolder down at me. Making promises I don’t understand. “No, as it happens, this is not something I do. Ever.”

Okay. That makes this even more scary, so I pretend he never said it. Easy peasy. “Because I have to tell you, I don’t think that sounds very, um...satisfying.”

His laugh is pained. “You don’t think I’d be satisfied with you underneath me?”

Lord. My face is on fire. Other parts of me are suspiciously hot, too, now that the image of Easton Brawn on top of me, unclothed, is floating around in my head. “Don’t you want to get to know a woman before you j-just...” I flail my hands. “Otherwise, it would probably be very impersonal and, um...”

His thumb has stopped moving. “You’re a virgin.”

“Yes. Very much so.” I try to appear as rigid as possible. “You would hate it.”

“I sincerely doubt that.” Easton seems contemplative for a moment. Torn. Then the fingers on my cheek trail down to the strap of my dress. One digit tucks beneath the thin strip of material and drags it over my shoulder slowly. Down, down, until my nipple is just about to be exposed. “I’m a very bad man, cutie. So why am I having such a hard time taking what I want here?” His fingers trail across to the opposite strap and pull it down until the dress slithers down to my waist, my breasts fully exposed, my nipples in tight points. “I could make you want it,” he rasps, his chest expanding. “You’re already halfway there.”

Wow. This is what turned on means.

I can feel his need for me. It’s calling out to something untapped in my own body. A need to please. To seek relief with the help of a man. To be trapped under his weight. To be taken in this unrestrained way. On the surface, there doesn’t seem to be anything scientific about sex, but...there is. There is chemistry and hormones and methods to the madness. A culmination of energy and movement. All of it calls to me now when it never has before.

But he’s a stranger. This isn’t how I imagined my virginity being taken.

I'm not the type to rush into important decisions. I can't let this unexpected attraction to Easton Brawn force me into something I could regret later.

"But I want my first time to be romantic," I whisper, resisting the urge to cover myself.

That draws him up short, though it's just a flicker of interest in his eye. The rest of his face remains impassible. Hard to read. "What does romantic mean to you?" he asks, cupping my bare breast in his hand, teasing the achy nipple slowly with revolutions of his thumb.

"Um," I breathe, wetting my lips. And...those aren't the only wet lips in the room. His touch is sending a wealth of confusing and exciting sensations through me, starting pulses in places that shouldn't have pulses. "Soft lights and flowers and—"

"Those are just things." He kneels in front of me, shrugs off his jacket and leans in to kiss the area between my breasts. His breath, his tongue, the side to side brush of his lips, the way his hands massage my sensitive mounds with such possession, is short-circuiting my brain. And then his hands slide up my outer thighs, gripping my hips beneath the dress and I have to trap a moan. "Lights and flowers have no importance."

"No." I struggle through the sensual haze he's wrapped me in. "No, but I also want to know the person."

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He slides me closer, to the edge of the couch. The move hikes up my dress and his eyes lock on the juncture of my thighs, flaring with heat. “You don’t need to know me to get off.”

“It would be better if I did,” I say unevenly. “It would mean more.”

Easton curses and a line appears between his brows, the first crack in his façade. “I can’t mean anything to you, Scout. You can’t mean anything to me.”

“Why?”

Agitated hands curl in the material of my dress. “I get one night. One. Any more than that and you’ll become a target.” He leans in and presses our foreheads together, gathering me to him on the couch like a rag doll, crushing me to his hard body. “Like everyone else that had the misfortune of being in my life. Do you understand?”

I do.

Of course.

I never stopped to think how lonely the kingpin’s life must be. Other criminals want his position. There are constant threats. Culpability. Relationships must be impossible.

I don’t realize I’ve wrapped my arms around his neck until Easton gathers me tighter, rocking me on the couch, his face taking deep inhales in my hair.

“Well...” I pause, questioning the wisdom of what I’m about to do. Am I crazy? I don’t know. But I can sense this man’s need for me and my instinct is to fulfill it. “We have the night to get to know each other, then. To make this meaningful. Romantic.”

His laugh releases in a rush. “Is this where I point out I already have you half naked?”

“Fair point. But you don’t want me to regret my first time.”

I state it as a fact. Because somehow I know it is one.

He lifts his head and scrutinizes my features, as if memorizing them. “No, cutie,” he says hoarsely. “I...don’t.”

“So take me on a date, Easton,” I whisper, giving in to the urge to brush his hair back.

The gesture, plus me saying his name, seems to unnerve him and soothe him all at once. One affectionate slip and he’s a cornered animal. He yanks me forward and pins me down to the couch so fast, a scream lodges in my throat. And then he’s above me, his body poised above mine, lethal and powerful, his hand dropping down to grip between my legs. “I could fuck you right now. Easy at first. Then hard enough to make you sore. And you would love it, little girl. Are we clear on that?”

My vision doubles, I’m so dizzy. From shock, from lust. From whatever foreign and unexpected effect this man is having on me. “Y-yes, we’re clear.”

Something like agony slips through his eyes. “Then why don’t I?”

“Who are you asking?” I breathe. “Me or yourself?”

He swallows, leans down and bares his teeth against my mouth. “I don’t take

innocent little virgins out on dates. I don't take anyone out on dates."

"Where are we going, though?"

I have no idea when I got so brave.

Am I the same girl who passed out when I walked in here?

I don't know where this confidence is coming from, but I have the complete conviction down deep in my belly that this man is not what everyone thinks. And that he is incapable of hurting me. That when it comes to hurt...he's the one who's experiencing it.

"You get to know me," he says in a low voice. "You might not like what you find."

Following impulse, I lean up and kiss his mouth softly, working my mouth over his until he makes a broken sound, kissing me back, winding his tongue around mine, his lips voracious, his grip tightening between my thighs until I whimper, shift my hips. Sensing we're reaching the point of no return, I pull away. "I'll take that risk," I manage through deep breaths.

For long moments, we stare at each other and he seems torn. Conflicted. Starved. But I know in my heart he's going to do the right thing. I'm positive.

And he proves me right when he rips away, pushing to his feet. He stalks across the luxury box like an angry panther, shoving a hand through his hair. Then, "Fuck. Let's go on a date."

It feels very odd to have another person in the back of my SUV.

Normally I travel alone.

I always imagined it would make me uncomfortable or intruded upon to have someone occupying my private space, but it doesn't feel that way with Scout. She is doing that thing where she looks around with big, blinking eyes, as if her surroundings are a constant surprise to her. And once again, I ask myself what the fuck I'm doing.

This can only be a one-night thing.

But the possibility of me letting her go without any lasting damage to my sanity is growing slimmer and slimmer by the second.

That kiss.

Her sweet body under mine.

The way she challenges me, makes me examine myself...

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It's refreshing and terrifying. Half an hour in her company and I'm already beginning to thaw. Beginning to wonder if I'm a normal, breathing human under the layer of ice after all. And that makes this girl very dangerous. When tomorrow comes and I have to leave her behind, I could be left in this new state of living, but she won't be here to nurture it.

I should take her home now, before I sink too deep, but...

It's already happened.

And I can't allow someone else to be her first time. No, I would rather fucking die. Thoughts of it would plague me for the rest of my life. Who was the lucky man? Did he give her enough romance? Did she cry out?

My grip tightens on the car door until it creaks, searing jealousy ripping through my gut.

No. It will have to be me. She'll spread her thighs for the devil or no one else.

But for the first time in a long, long time, I don't have a plan. I don't know exactly what I will be doing one moment to the next. What even is romance? How do I make it happen? She claims it's about knowing the person you're with, but I have totally lost sight of myself...and I have no idea what she'll discover.

"Where are we going?" Scout asks, beside me.

"I own a restaurant downtown. I've texted the manager to let him know we're

coming.”

“Oh.” Once again, she tugs on the hem of her dress, wetting her lips nervously. “Am I dressed right?”

My hand curls into a fist to prevent me from reaching for her. To fuck her on the seat and end the torture. Jesus, the moonlight loves her. Filtering in through the car window and bathing the slopes of her tits. Tits I’m all too aware feel indecently ripe in my hands. Ripe and young. “We’ll eat on the roof,” I say roughly. “No one is going to see you but me.”

She tucks her hair behind one ear. “Okay.”

Why am I speaking to this innocent girl so harshly? It’s not her fault I’m a depraved criminal who has forgotten how to have a normal conversation. I clear my throat. “You mentioned you love science. Does your job involve something scientific?”

“It will someday.” She sneaks me a glance. “When I graduate college.”

Jesus Christ. “And how long until that happens?”

“Well...it depends.” She folds her hands in her lap. “I should have another year left to complete my degree in physics, but it’s complicated.”

“Why?”

“I’d rather not talk about it.”

“Now I’d really like to know.” When she says nothing, I unhook her seatbelt and pull her across the back seat into my lap, tipping up her chin. “Out with it, cutie.”

She shifts on my cock and I grit my teeth. “It’s kind of embarrassing, you know? My sister, Whitney, is two years younger than me. But she’s been scrambling to pay for as much of my tuition as possible. So I won’t be stuck with a ton of loans. My father is a gambler, you see, and there was never a college fund...”

“Whitney is who you were sitting with tonight?”

“Yes.” She presses her hands to her chest. “She’s probably so worried about me right now. I love my sister. She’s my best friend.” Her exhale is sharp, a little annoyed. “That’s why I couldn’t let her marry Banner.”

“Banner? The fighter who competed tonight?”

She nods. “He’s always wanted Whitney and if he wins tonight, he gets to keep her. My father traded his own daughter to pay off his loans. Banner agreed to pay my college tuition, too, if Whitney married him. But I couldn’t let her consider marrying that awful man just so I could be debt free. I won’t let my sister be miserable on my behalf.” She presses her lips together. “That’s why she seduced the Russian. So he would compete harder. You wouldn’t happen to know if he beat Banner tonight, do you?”

“I’ll find out,” I say, kind of dazed by the avalanche of information. “If Banner won, he won’t be paying your tuition, Scout. I know that much.”

“Oh.” She looks puzzled. “Why?”

“Do you think I’d let another man pay your bills?” I nearly shout.

“I didn’t think about it. We’ve only just met.”

“Well, I wouldn’t,” I say with calm I don’t feel. “Consider them paid.”

She sputters for a moment. “No. Really?”

I incline my head.

Still she’s skeptical. “No.”

“Yes.”

Thoughts whirl behind her eyes. “How much money do you have?”

Who knows? I don’t even check anymore. I just keep adding to it. “A fuck ton. And it’s just sitting there collecting dust, so you’ll take it and get your physics degree. Are we clear?”

Her brows knit together. “Why?”

“Why what?”

“Why is it just sitting there collecting dust?”

I open my mouth and close it, searching my mind for the answer. “There’s nothing worthwhile to spend it on.” A beat passes. “Usually, anyway.”

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Her features soften. “Are you saying I’m the exception?”

My nod is brief. This girl has me admitting things I wasn’t even aware were true. She’s like an honesty magnet and I find myself wanting to drop my worst secrets in her lap. To have her judge me, sentence me, redeem me.

“That’s a pretty romantic thing to say,” she whispers, slowly laying her head against my shoulder. “You’re killing it already, Brawn.”

A laugh rasps out of me. And Jesus, I can’t remember the last time I laughed.

Is honesty romantic? Is that the secret ingredient?

“You spend all your time making money,” she says, tracing the collar of my shirt, lulling me, making me hot all at once. “But if it doesn’t make you happy, what is the point?”

“I don’t know anymore,” I say, meaning it.

“What if you used your money for good?”

I scoff. “What, like charities? They don’t want to be tied to me.”

“It doesn’t have to be something so noble.” Suddenly, she sits up, a breathtaking smile blooming across her mouth. “Not that I don’t want to eat on a rooftop, but do you mind a change of plans?”

* * *

She brings me to a dive bar named the Speckled Hen.

I'm against the idea immediately, but she explains that she lives two doors down with her sister, Whitney, and they've more or less grown up in the bar.

"When my father didn't come home on time, the owner let us do our homework in the back room. We ate salted peanuts for dinner a lot."

I agree to this change of plans for two reasons. One, I want to see where this girl is living and if I need to buy her a penthouse somewhere safer. And two, I'm curious what her goal is by bringing me to the Speckled Hen. Who is this interesting girl? She would rather go to a neighborhood pub than dine on a private rooftop?

Fucking hell. Now I'm even more confused by the concept of romance.

If the bar wasn't full of men old enough to be her grandfather, we would have been out of there. And thankfully, the dim, ancient space only has one entrance, one exit, and a limited number of windows. I position my security on the street and in the rear, telling them not to let anyone in or out until we leave. This is not as safe as taking Scout to my own restaurant, but I find myself wanting to indulge her—a highly inconvenient urge.

A cheer goes up when she walks into the Speckled Hen, then dissolves into silence when I follow close behind. Oh they recognize me, all right.

Frankly, I'd be a little insulted if they didn't.

"Hello everyone!" Scout calls, turning and giving me a sly smile. "My friend Easton is buying all of your drinks tonight!"

The cheering is even louder than before.

Suddenly...I'm a hero?

And not a pariah.

Stools are opened up for us at the bar and I'm given good-natured slaps on the back. All the while, Scout beams at me. There's a burgeoning warmth in my chest that I can't recall ever experiencing. Definitely not since the loss of my brother and my best friend.

I hold Scout's hand underneath the bar. Then I decide it isn't enough and lock her against my side, while the old men tell stories about Scout as a young girl. How she looked like an owl with her big eyes and bigger glasses. How she would watch Jeopardy in the bar and the regulars would take bets on how many answers she would get correct.

After a while, the customers drift back to their usual spots, leaving me with an oddly optimistic feeling—and face to face with the girl who caused it. I pull her into the space between my thighs, appreciating the ripple of black fabric over her braless tits. “You're actually drinking a Shirley Temple, aren't you?”

She hums, a flush creeping up her neck. “Alcohol knocks me out. And they taste better.”

“And you're not of legal age.”

Her wince is adorable. “I didn't want to remind you.”

“I don't need reminding.” I slide a palm up her spine, along her shoulders and up into her hair, combing my fingers through the thick wealth of it. “Tell me why you

brought me here.”

“Because it’s real. You seem so...isolated.” Her expression is actually concerned. For me. It makes my jugular tie in a knot. “If you come down from your private box more often, you’ll see, Easton. That you’re not just a bad man, like you told me. You’re more. You can’t always stand above and look down at life happening. Sometimes you have to join it.”

“That’s not possible for me,” I say thickly. “Or anyone who gets too close to me.”

“Why do you believe that?”

Do I tell her? Do I ruin this positive impression she somehow has painted of me? Or do I let her think I’m redeemable when I know I’m not? I don’t know what I should do. Only that I can’t seem to hold anything back from this girl. How sweetly and gently she unwinds me. “This wasn’t always a one-man operation, Scout. My brother and best friend were my partners, before the life swallowed them up. They warned me...they warned me our dealings were growing too dangerous, but I was ambitious. I thought if I reached the top, I would finally...”

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“What?”

“Feel something.”

“And did you?”

“No.” God, my lungs don’t seem to be working right. “But I feel something...now.”

Her eyes are serious, but her lips are teasing. Flirtatious. I want to devour them. I want to devour her. Trap her inside me so she can never leave. “Maybe you should have been ambitious with romance, instead of crime.”

I shake my head. “No. There wouldn’t have been a point until now.” I wrap an arm around her lower back and pull her closer, both of us starting to breathe faster. To say nothing of my heart, which is close to beating out of my chest. “Jesus, Scout. Until...you.”

She just kind of sighs and melts against me and I realize she was right. I could have fucked her on the couch in my private box, but she wouldn’t have been pliant. Trusting. Comfortable. She would have been hesitant. Nervous. Now she knows me. I’ve already let her in more than anyone and she isn’t repulsed or scared. She accepts me.

Thank Christ I did this right.

And then she says, “Take me home, Easton.”

And I realize I was never really at the top at all.

This girl. Scout. She is the top.

4

Scout

Oh dear.

I'm falling in love with a gangster.

I feel as if I've unlocked a treasure that has been sitting, cold and unopened, at the bottom of the ocean. Every time he looks at me, more coins and jewels spill out in the forms of secrets and I just want to gather them up, greedily holding them to my chest.

I'm in his lap once again in the back of the SUV, driving toward his home.

No one knows where exactly Easton Brawn lives. And I get the sense that he is trying to distract me now. Every time I try to look out the window, he captures my chin and holds eye contact, slowly leaning in to coax my mouth into a surface level kiss, as if he doesn't trust himself to take more yet. His fingertips trace up and down my inner thigh, inching the hem of my dress higher until my panties are showing, but he never touches me there. In that place I am practically buzzing, growing more damp by the second.

"I'd like to move you somewhere safer, Scout," he rasps, massaging my knee and easing it wider in his lap. "Somewhere with security cameras, a doorman..."

"No, Easton." I battle through the drugging sensation of his kisses, so I can tell him this important thing. Which is...? Oh yes. Right. "No. Whitney has taken care of me

for so long. Now you are paying my tuition. This one thing, bringing us somewhere great to live, that is going to be my job. I want that responsibility. As soon as I get my first paycheck from NASA.”

His mouth curls into a smile. “NASA?”

I nod eagerly. “I want to help build the next space shuttle.”

There’s a tinge of sadness to his chuckle. “Well if you can get Easton Brawn on a date, cutie, you can do anything.”

“It was my first date,” I whisper, smiling at him. “And it was a great one. Thank you.”

“No.” He shakes his head. “I should be thanking you.”

“Maybe on the next one—”

“Scout.” His jaw hardens to granite, whatever he’s about to say causing him visible pain. “One night, remember?”

Those three words make me flinch, a sharp throb appearing below my throat. “But...I thought you might have changed your mind.”

“I haven’t. If anything, keeping you at a distance is more important than ever. Do you know what I would do if something happened to you? Because of me?” He frames my jaw in his hand. “This city would wake up to rubble and destruction and blood in the streets.”

I search Easton’s eyes and glimpse a certain madness there. And I know that as generous and protective and deep as I’ve found him to be tonight, there is very

obviously a little bit of the devil in him. Maybe even a lot. And oh goodness...maybe I'm attracted to that, too. His darkness. His unholy power, how far-reaching it has the potential to be.

“You wouldn't let anything happen to me.”

He seems to be steeling himself against my words. Against the temptation to agree. “Stop to think about how I'd manage that. Do you think I'd send you to school every day with a kiss on the forehead? No. I wouldn't. You'd be surrounded by armed bodyguards and I would still—I would still sweat bullets and fear the worst until you were safe at home. I would be jealous of everyone that came near you.” Laughing without humor, he drags a hand down his face. “And I haven't even been inside you yet, Scout. Jesus Christ. This could be the tip of the iceberg. I know it is.”

Wow. Easton is firm on this. He's going to let me go to keep me safe. His tone, his body language tells me there will no reasoning with him. I have no choice but to relent for now and pray he changes his mind. Hope he'll give in to whatever is happening between us and find a way to make it last. Make it work. Because I'm already dreading the sunrise when the spell between us has to be severed.

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Easton's phone rings and I try to use the opportunity to look out the window, ascertain where we are going, but he shakes his head. He tucks my face into his throat, so I can't see anything, and answers the call. "Yes?"

"Sorry to bother you, Mr. Brawn," I hear coming down the line. "Maxim Semenov has been in contact. The Russian wishes to express his concern over your...acquisition of his girlfriend's sister, Scout."

I sit straight up. "Girlfriend? Whitney isn't his girlfriend."

Easton raises an eyebrow at me. "Apparently she is now. Sounds like he won the fight."

"He more than won the fight, sir," says the caller. "He ended it in seconds by giving Banner a concussion and...well, he carried the girl, Whitney, from the arena over his shoulder."

My jaw is in my lap. Oh my God. Whitney.

Seemingly undaunted, Easton returns his attention to the call. "Since when do I give a goddamn about anyone else's concerns?"

The man on the other end sounds more nervous than before when he answers. "Semenov requests a phone call between the sisters."

I nod enthusiastically. Whitney has to be going out of her mind. She has no idea that Easton wouldn't dare hurt me. A few minutes on the phone and I'll put her fears at

rest.

Please, I mouth at him.

His throat works. “She will be free to make calls when I return her home tomorrow afternoon. She’ll call her sister at...one o’clock.”

He hangs up the phone, digs the corner of the device into his eye.

And that’s when we pull up at his colossal mansion.

* * *

Easton has my wrist in his grip and he’s pulling me through a dark foyer, striding ahead of me at a brisk, no-nonsense pace. “Are you hungry?”

I shake my head. My stomach is way too full of butterflies to eat. “No, thank you.”

“Thirsty?”

“No.”

“Excellent. Then I’m taking you to bed.”

I have no time to prepare before I’m swept up in Easton’s arms and we’re traveling up the stairs. “Don’t you want to give me a tour?”

He coughs. “No.”

“Oh.” A tiny arrow of hurt arrows into my chest. “Because I won’t be here for long?”

For a moment, he pauses on the stairs. “No. Because if I don’t get you naked, Scout, I’m going to fucking snap.”

I nod, swallow, let him carry me the rest of the way.

Oh my goodness, I’m about to lose my virginity. I’m not scared, I’m more excited than anything. Whenever I’ve thought about having sex for the first time, there was never a face attached to the person, but deep down I know I’ll never think of anyone but Easton for the rest of my life. He’ll be the face above me, the voice in my ear.

There is a definite bittersweet thread weaving back and forth through my heart, knowing we only have this one night, but I won’t think about that until it’s absolutely necessary. This man comes with complications and I’ll take them, along with the good. As long as I can.

We push through the second door on the left and I gasp.

His bed is in the center of the room, huge, covered in white bedding. It is positioned in front of the ocean. Literally. One side of the room has no wall, no windows. It is simply open to the dark ocean, the full moon and the whitecaps crashing on the rocks below. Wind rushes in the room, making it feel like it’s outdoors, or the deck of a ship.

Easton sets me on the edge of the bed, kissing my mouth softly but thoroughly.

“Wait here,” he says, turning and leaving the room.

I’ve barely had a moment to flop back onto the amazing bed and revel in the softness when he returns, holding a fist full of flowers with the roots still attached. “You wanted flowers.” He lays them down on the nightstand. “These are from the front yard.”

The scent of lilac joins the salty ocean breeze in lifting my hair, tossing it around.

“They’re perfect.”

And then Easton is standing in front of me once again, his intensity penetrating now that we’re here. Now that his guard can completely come down. This time, I’m the one who pulls down the straps of my dress and bares my breasts to him.

He looks at them hungrily and unbuttons his shirt, yanking the buttons through their holes. “You are so goddamn beautiful. Like a dream I don’t deserve.”

“Yes, you do,” I whisper, letting my heels fall to the floor.

“No. I don’t.” He whips off his shirt, followed by his leather belt whooshing through the loops, the metal buckle cracking off the floor as he drops it. “Do you like my home?”

I nod distractedly, because oh lord, his chest is robust. Dusted with black hair.

Heaving.

His hips are two carved arcs that dive into his pants, bracketing a ripped stomach.

“It’s painted in blood, this house. Built with bones.” He looks down at his open palms. “I’ve done things with these hands that should stop me from touching you, but I’ve never been that noble. Although...” He yanks my thighs open, making me whimper. “You’re a fresh, little sacrifice even a saint couldn’t turn down, aren’t you?”

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My knees start to shake in his hands.

And they tremble harder when the panties are wrenched down my legs.

Tossed over his shoulder.

“Oh, sweet fucking hell,” he growls, prying my legs open to look at my sex, wetting the seam of his lips. “Would you look at that pretty little gash? Goddamn.” A shudder vibrates through him. “I thought I could make love to you, cutie, but I don’t know anymore. As soon as you’re not whining and trying to shove me off anymore, what if I just fuck you blind?”

“You won’t.” I suck in a breath as my dress is drawn down my body and left forgotten on the floor. “Y-you’ll be gentle with me.”

“HOW?” Easton growls through his teeth, pulling me to the edge of the bed, using a firm hand to press me down on my back. I’m completely naked now, my core exposed, and the rasping sound of his breaths tells me he likes how I look. That I please him. A lot. “Jesus, little girl. You’re either on the pill or I’m getting you pregnant.” His face lowers to the place between my thighs and he inhales deeply, his hips rocking against the edge of the bed. “No rubber is getting in my way of this.”

I don’t have time to explain that I’m on the pill before his tongue is traveling hungrily through my folds, shooting sensation down to my toes. He presses his face to my flesh and moans, his fingers flexing around my knees. His nose nuzzles me in the most incredible spot. He rubs the damp seam of his lips side to side over that tingling nub, kissing it gently, worshipping it with words my brain comprehends, even though

I am mentally spinning out. “P-please keep d-doing that.”

He does so much more than that.

His middle and index finger tuck into my opening and twist, exploiting a sensitive ring of nerve endings I didn’t know existed. And my back arches on a wretched sob, my entire body twisting, rising and falling like a billowing sheet tied to the laundry line. The side of his tongue saws wetly against the perimeter of that swelling bud, teasing me with partial contact, then rakes over it blatantly, making me scream. “Easton!”

By now, his fingers are pushing in and out of me, the pace decadent, smooth and unhurried while urging me somewhere. A little faster, a little faster. His tongue moves quicker on my clit and I start to whine, my toes straining, heels burying in the mattress.

Oh God. Oh God.

His middle finger tickles me on the inside.

His mouth closes over the bud and draws gently.

Pleasure stabs me in the center and my belly jerks toward the ceiling, sea air rushing in and clashing with my feverish skin, somehow heightening the lust, this proof of how hot I’ve become. How wonderfully agitated I am. A delicious tug increases in intensity until I’m shaking, my muscles seized and tense, followed by a deluge of relief so sweeping, I feel it in my hair follicles.

I have no idea how much time passes before Easton is dragging me up the bed, like a caveman bringing a clubbed female back to his cave. I’m dazed and sucking in oxygen, trying to reconcile what just happened with my body, when his mouth

crashes down on mine and the build starts all over again. Because oh. Oh lord. His naked weight on top of me feels forbidden and essential and I don't know how long I lived without it.

"You come so fucking hot," he says against my mouth, delving his tongue deep, invading me with aggressive, anchoring strokes. "You taste it? You taste your hot little cunt?"

"Yes," I gasp.

"You expect me to be gentle when you taste that sweet?" He reaches down and winces, bringing his shaft up against me. Where his fingers were before. He inches inside, stretching my entrance, hard into smooth. "Hold on to me. I'm going to try." His hips push forward and I'm being filled, fully, achingly filled. "I'm going to try and go slow. But...fuck. You are so tight."

I stroke my hands over his shoulders, lean up and kiss his chin. "I know. It's okay."

Moss-green eyes snag on mine, holding me in thrall with their power. The passion in those depths. "Are you trying to make this easier on me?" He bends his neck, his breath panting in and out between kisses. "Jesus, Scout. You're the virgin."

Yes, I am almost desperate to ease him.

Please him.

I'm shaken by the undeniable urge.

So much so that I reach down and capture his thick, muscular buttocks, yanking him the remaining distance, a hoarse sound leaving my throat.

“Scout!” He pants once, twice. “Ohhhh. FUCK.”

“Take me,” I manage, when the sharpest of the pain dulls into a throb. “I d-didn’t understand. Everyone makes love differently.” I pull my knees up and he sinks even deeper with a groan. “Maybe ours is rougher than others,” I whisper, writhing beneath him.

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He pulls out and smacks into me, baring his teeth. “No. I can do this.”

“No.”

“Yes, goddammit. You’ll have what you deserve.”

He drops his full weight on top of me, pinning my wrists high above my head. And then he starts to stroke his shaft into me slowly. Achingly slow. A vein stands out in the center of his forehead and his shoulders are bunched with tension, but he trails his tongue up and down the slope of my neck, raking me with the very edges of his teeth, his hips canting up, back, stoking a fire inside me with every groaning entrance into my body.

“Beautiful, beautiful girl,” he whispers in my ear. “It’s just that my romance comes nine inches long, baby. You understand, don’t you?”

Caught in a web of lust, I can only nod. Can only lie there and accept the ridged, thick thrust of his manhood, how it occupies me in thorough ebbs and flows, his hands biting into the soft skin of my wrists, his hips chafing the insides of my thighs. “Easton...” I breathe.

“I saw you walk in tonight and I knew you’d break me.” He kisses my neck, breathes hot air into my ear. “And you’re breaking me so good, Scout. This pussy doesn’t even feel fucking legal, you’re wrecking me so good with it. With your eyes, your heart, the way you say my name.” His tempo picks up, like he can’t help it, the muscles in his neck straining. “I’m going to come so hard. You’re going to make me. That’s what you were born to do.”

The raw way he speaks to me, his honesty, the lack of barriers between us builds the flame inside me once again and I whimper, my womanhood starting to quicken around his pumping shaft. More moisture ebbs from my body to slick his way and he feels it, his eyes glazing over, his thrusts turning more insistent. More urgent.

“Ah, Christ. I’m almost there.” He leans down and teases my nipples with the tip of his tongue. “Come on, cutie. Don’t make Daddy bust alone.”

Maybe it’s a little twisted—and definitely unexpected—that Easton calling himself my Daddy opens the dam of pleasure inside me. But it does. And I launch into another shaking fit, my thighs squeezing his hips, my lower body rising to meet his final, frantic drives.

Easton is rough at the end.

Holding me down, burying my face in his shoulder and slamming into me, calling my name hoarsely. His spend is hot and sticky, rope after rope of it fills me up, sliding down my thighs and even splashing up onto my stomach. And still his hips rut me like every drop has to come out, has to be purged or he’ll die. Until finally he rolls onto his side, next to me on the bed, and pulls me into his arms, raining kisses down all over my face, my forehead.

“Are you okay, cutie? Tell me you’re okay. I lost it at the end...”

“I’m okay,” I breathe, stroking his hair. “I loved it. Loved it.”

His exhale bathes my damp neck. “What is the point of owning the night if I can’t stop morning from coming?”

I don’t have an answer for him, so I hold on tight and let him rock me to sleep, silently begging the universe to let me keep Easton Brawn. To let him keep me.

Easton

I stare at Scout's curled fist on my pillow. Let my eyes travel up her arm, her shoulder kissed by morning light. Her bare tits nestled in the sheets, her rosy lips softened by sleep. Angelic. A breeze carries in off the ocean and stirs her hair, but she isn't roused by the sound of the tide coming in below, waves pounding on the rocks. Almost like she was made for this place. My home. Made for me.

She was.

One day isn't going to be enough.

Two. I can get away with two.

With a heavy swallow, I climb out of bed, throw on a pair of sweatpants and brush my teeth, making my way down to the kitchen. Am I crazy to take such a chance with this girl? My enemies are always looking for a weakness. A way to exploit me. And I haven't given them one since the elimination of my brother and best friend. Since they were gunned down in the street right in front of me, their expressions eternally frozen in fear.

There would be no recovering if the same happened to Scout.

Fuck that. If a bullet grazed her, I'd spend the rest of my life deranged.

She's dangerous to my sanity. A liability.

Then she walks into the kitchen in a borrowed T-shirt with messy hair, blinking at me innocently from behind her glasses and I almost laugh. An adorably nerdy, five-foot-

three college student could put a wrench in my billion-dollar operation by shedding one tear.

Jesus.

Scout is staring at me and blushing under the kitchen's archway. "What is it?"

"Nothing." She presses her knuckles to her lips, subduing a smile. "I just...after last night..."

My eyebrows go up, heart beating faster. "Are you actually feeling shy?"

She holds up her index finger and thumb, nearly pinching them together. "A little."

"Come here."

"No, I'm good."

"Scout," I say warningly. "Here. Now."

I receive an eye roll in response, but she pads her way over to me where I stand at the coffee maker. "It's just that now I'm thinking about all the things I said in the dark. And all the things that you said," she rambles. "They sounded perfectly appropriate at the time, but now it's light out and you...you don't have a shirt on and..."

My hand cups her cheek. "And?"

"And I can see a lot of what's happening in your sweatpants," she whispers, looking up at the ceiling. "Pretty much all of it."

I look down to find my cock at full mast. Of course it is. Scout is in the room.

Being fucking delicious. Fresh from having her cherry popped.

“And?” I prompt her again, my voice like gravel.

“Well. It’s um...N-Newton’s Law states that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction and...”

Christ, she is so sweet, she’s going to break me in half. “Is that your way of telling me your pussy is wet, cutie?”

She hums, the color of her cheeks deepening. “But I seriously doubt I can do what we did last night when it’s light out.”

“Oh, you doubt it, do you?”

Her expression is solemn. “Yes.”

I tuck a finger under the hem of her borrowed shirt, tease her belly button with my knuckle. “Would you like to have your hypothesis disproven?”

Scout gasps. “Don’t use science terminology. That’ll only make it worse.”

“Mmmm. Centrifugal force.” Her mouth drops open and I swoop down to the kiss the corner of her parted lips. The move causes her neck to lose power and I dip my head to rake my tongue up the side of that smooth slope, snagging her earlobe in my teeth. “Beta particles.”

So help me God, she can barely catch her breath.

I'm jealous of science.

Or maybe it's all me turning her on, because her legs almost collapse when I palm her pussy, massaging it firmly through her moist panties. "Easton," she moans, clinging to my shoulders. "How can that feel so good even when I'm sore?"

The word "sore" wrenches something in my chest.

I barely stop myself from shoving my face into her neck and howling in denial.

"Goddammit," I manage around the tightness in my throat. "I knew I was too rough, especially at the end." I kiss her forehead apologetically. "You were just so wet and tight."

"You were perfect." She kisses my pec, smooths her hands down my chest. "It was just my first time. That's why I'm sore."

I adjust my erection. "This can wait. What will make you feel better?"

When she bites her lip and gives me a mischievous look, it becomes blatantly obvious that I'm out of my head in love with Scout. Permanently. No way out. I never stood a chance. "We could do a science experiment."

A laugh barks out of me. "The kitchen is yours."

For the next half an hour, I drink my coffee and watch her flit around the kitchen like a hot, nerdy fairy. She retrieves an empty, plastic, two-liter bottle from the recycling and fills it with oil and water. Next she finds green food coloring and adds several drops, her brow pinched in concentration. She adds a healthy dose of salt, then shifts the bottle side to side.

“Do you have the flashlight app on your phone?” she asks over her shoulder.

Nodding, I open it up, setting it down on the counter.

Biting her lip, she carefully places the bottle on top and I realize what she’s done.

“It’s a do-it-yourself lava lamp.”

“Uh-huh,” she says, grinning. “See, the salt binds the oil, making it heavier than water.”

“An equal and opposite reaction.”

“Yes.” She beams at me. “Next time, I’ll make a battery out of a potato.” As soon as the words are out of her mouth, she tries to jog them back. “I-I didn’t mean next time. I know there can’t be a next time.”

My heart rips up into my mouth at the thought of her leaving. Of coming down to this kitchen tomorrow morning and not having her here, doing science experiments in one of my T-shirts. I’m already miserable at the prospect. “I’ve decided that I’ll be keeping you here until tomorrow, Scout.”

Is that relief that loosens her shoulders? Parts her lips? “I’d like that.” She ducks her head, but I catch her smile. “But I do have class tomorrow morning.”

“I can have someone collect clothes, books, whatever you need from your apartment.”

“Thank you.”

“I’ll drop you off at school.”

She nods. “And that will be it.”

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My coffee boils in my stomach. “Yes. It has to be.”

* * *

Eventually my chef arrives to make breakfast.

From her perch on my knee, Scout makes a list of items she needs from her apartment and I relay it to my security team. One of them is sent to purchase her a variety of bathing suits and they return with several options within the hour. Now I stand in my bedroom with a cock made of steel, watching her try them on in the full-length mirror.

Every time she looks at one of the price tags, she frowns over her shoulder in my direction and it makes me fantasize about all the ways I would spoil her rotten, if I was able to keep her forever. Just to get that cute little frown of reproach. I’d build her a science lab to start, because it’s obvious that conducting experiments makes her happy.

Fuck it. Whether I can keep her or not, I’ll do it anyway.

I’ll help her be successful. Keep tabs on her grades, her career.

Crave her from a distance...

Are you deluded? You’ll never be able to stay away.

Determinedly, I tune out the voice in the back of my head, clearing my throat hard

enough to bring Scout's head up. "Try the blue one. It matches your eyes."

She chews her lip. "Oh, but it...it doesn't cover the butt. Like, at all."

I raise an eyebrow.

Scout strips out of the black bikini she's been trying and I grind my teeth together. God almighty, the ass on this girl. I could take a fucking bite out of it. When she realized I was going to observe as she tried on bathing suits, her entire body flushed, but she's growing more and more confident. How could she not be when I'm tenting the front of my sweatpants, groaning in appreciation every time she fits the little triangles over her tits?

I'm not going to make it much longer without squeezing my cock into the tight hole between her legs, but I'm trying to make up for being an animal last night.

The royal-blue thong bikini is the clear winner.

Not only because it frames her ass like the work of art it is, but there are gold embellishments between her tits and resting on her hips. And I like her looking expensive. I like her looking like Daddy spoiled her.

Like she's done every time, she checks the price tag and gasps. "I-is this accurate?" She stares at the bathing suit in the mirror. "Is the gold real?"

"You think I'd put you in fake gold, cutie?"

Without waiting for her to answer, I strip out of my sweatpants and walk naked to the dresser. I can feel her attention fastened to my hard cock as I search for my swim trunks. So I take my time putting them on, making eye contact with her when I fist my dick and position it as comfortably as possible inside the nylon.

“You ready to go to the beach?”

“The where?” she asks, sounding dazed.

* * *

On the way down the stairs to the beach, Scout takes her scheduled phone call with her sister. “Me?” she squeaks into the receiver of my phone. “Are you okay? The Madman himself carried you out of the arena after giving Banner a concussion and no one has seen you since!”

She pauses, frowns.

“It can be about you sometimes, Whit.”

There is a break in the crashing waves and though it’s faint, I can hear her sister’s next question come down the line. “Has he hurt you?”

My gut twists. Of course the sister would be worried. Scout is holed up with the devil.

But Scout answers right away, as if the very idea is preposterous and I relax. “No.”

“Are you allowed to leave?”

Scout shoots me a questioning look and I give a firm headshake.

“Hard no.”

I don’t hear the next part.

“Of course I will.” Scout sniffles. “I miss you.”

Pause.

“I had sex, Whit,” she whispers dramatically.

Jesus Christ.

I’m caught between exasperated and amused. I live in a hard world and I can’t help but be...moved by the obvious love between the sisters. Didn’t I once have something similar with my own brother? Have I hardened myself so much against getting attached that I’m caught off guard when I see this type of familial bond in front of my eyes?

When Scout hangs up the call, she seems a little lost and I don’t like it, so I tuck her into the crook of my arm. “How is she?” I ask.

“Conflicted, I think. Whitney is harder to read than me.” She presses her lips together. “She wants to see me. To make sure I’m okay. Can you arrange that?”

My jaw pops. “I’d rather not waste the time we have together.”

She stops on the bottom step, right before we reach the sand. “It wouldn’t be a waste.”

“That’s not what I meant. I just...worry you’ll want to leave early. If you see her.”

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“I won’t, Easton.” She leans in and kisses the center of my chest. “You have my word.”

Still, I hesitate. We are safe inside my estate, but as soon as we set foot outside, there are variables I can’t always control. Enemies lying in wait. Traps. Violence. If a fucking hair on her head was harmed, I would tear the sun down out of the sky.

“Easton,” she murmurs, laying her cheek against my rapidly thudding heart. “Just a quick meeting. You decide when and where. It’ll be okay.”

I make a hoarse, skeptical sound. “This is important to you?”

“Yes.”

My eyes close, my very soul rebelling over the idea of denying Scout anything she wants. Anything in the world. “Then I will arrange it.”

Her smile makes me short of breath.

“Until then...” I reach behind her back and untie her bikini top, removing and draping it over the railing, leaving her ripe little tits bared to the sun. “You won’t be needing this.” I take her hand and guide it to my cock, watching her eyes glaze over as she grips me, tests the heavy weight of me in her palm. “This is all you’ll be needing.”

Scout

The ocean water is warm, the sun decadent.

I wade into the surf hand in hand with Easton, marveling over this adventurous person I've become. Topless at the beach with a renowned criminal! The most exciting thing I've done up until this point is mix Coke and Mentos. How times have changed.

And truthfully, I can't look at Easton and see a criminal anymore.

I see a complicated man with a painful past who created his own trap. The one he is stuck in now. The one preventing us from being together beyond tomorrow morning. He is not satisfied with his world, no matter how much money he has. Or nice things he can afford.

There is an ache in the center of my chest that has a lot to do with sympathy.

But more with love.

I love Easton Brawn.

And I think that means I have to convince him not to push me away. Even if he thinks it's for my own good. It's not. I can't just go back to my regularly scheduled program now, knowing that he's sitting here lonely in his mansion by the sea. Broken and tortured.

I'll have to be subtle about it.

I might not have to do too much convincing at all. Didn't he already extend our association by a second day? Maybe all I have to do is love him. Show him how

much. Until the idea of putting distance between us is unfathomable.

Easton's hand is in mine and I slow him to a stop where the surf hits me mid-calf. Taking a deep breath for courage, I kneel down in front of him and start to untie his shorts. I've never even dreamed of doing this to a man, but ever since I walked into the kitchen this morning and saw the thick trunk of his sex outlined by his sweatpants, I've been fantasizing about taking Easton into my mouth, experiencing the taste of him. The texture, the weight.

His head tips back when he discovers my intention, releasing a groan up at the sky.

"Fuck yes, baby," he rasps. "You know what I need, don't you?"

Easton is a powerful man. A man well used to taking his due from his subjects. Being served. And I'm reminded by that when he takes over the task of untying his shorts and presents his long, rigid shaft in a confident hand. Feeding it toward my mouth.

"Good girl, Scout." He tugs down my chin and slides his thickness between my lips, panting, holding his breath, releasing a guttural sound. "Suck Daddy off."

I do.

Eagerly.

I'm immediately frantic to please him. The warm surf gurgles up around my inner thighs, arousing me, stroking my senses and I do the same to Easton, pumping my hands up and down his lush inches, trying to get him as close to my throat as possible without choking. I accidentally graze him with my teeth and I start to apologize, but he hisses and grabs two fists of my hair. "Again," he begs thickly. "Clamp your lips. Fist fuck me hard. Rough. Give me a little teeth. I'm big and stiff—I can take it."

My eyelids flutter and I scoot closer, my knees dragging through the wet sand. I love this position. Him towering above me, watching from above as I service him. I love being a servant, sent to gratify my master. My Daddy.

“Fuck, little girl. You’ve got me so hard.” His hips roll forward and back in a sensual pattern, but I can tell he’s holding back. Trying not to make me choke. I want to make him wild, though. Want him to lie awake in the middle of the night thinking of me doing this to him. Thinking about how good I am at it. Needing my mouth like he needs his next breath. So I command my throat muscles to go slack, then cram as much of his shaft as possible into my mouth, my eyes tearing when his smooth tip nudges a place that has never been touched. “Scout,” he growls, his abdomen knitting up in front of my eyes, veins standing out, his drum-tight skin vibrating. “Oh Jesus. Don’t move yet. Stay still.”

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And then he exhales in a rush and pulls himself from my throat.

“You think you’re sore now?” I’m being pulled to my feet, the bikini bottoms ripped down my legs. “Get your legs around my fucking waist.”

I’m whimpering his name as I comply, my extreme wetness more obvious now that I’m no longer kneeling in the water. I’m damp and dripping and it has nothing to do with the ocean. “Easton,” I sob, climbing his hard body, and lock my thighs around his hips, biting my lip in anticipation of being filled up. Filled completely. “Please, please...”

The head of his sex nudges inside me, his hands going to my buttocks and rifling me down every hard inch until he’s reached the hilt. My gratified scream echoes down the beach, off the rocks, even as Easton stumbles, groaning, going down on his knees in the water.

“Tighter? How are you fucking tighter?” He leans back and rolls his hips, using his hold on my bottom to pull, pull, pull me onto his throbbing girth. “Find your clit, baby. That little button I licked last night. Find it and rub it on Daddy.”

“O-okay,” I hiccup, pulling myself higher against Easton’s body and tilting my hips back—and explosions go off in my ears. That sensitive bundle of nerves he exploited with his tongue last night finds the meatiest part of his manhood and I ride it there, up and back, dragging the tingling flesh faster, faster. “Feels so good, Easton. Oh my God.”

“You feel so good to me, too, baby. So goddamn perfect.” He grips my hips and

grinds me down, heightening the incredible pulsing pleasure. “Jesus Christ. Your mouth has me so fucking horny. Now this little wet pussy?” His hips slam upward into me, his hands bruising on my hips. “I’m already going to come.”

“M-me too,” I cry out, not realizing the truth of it until I speak it out loud. But the pleasure twines inside of me, wrapping around everything and preparing to snap. Soon, soon. It’s coming. I can’t bear it. I can’t live without it. “I love you, Daddy,” I chant, finding that final hint of friction against my clit and flying off the handle. “I love you. I love you.”

Easton’s mouth molds to mine, capturing my screams of pleasure and mingling them with his growls, the wet heat of his pleasure fountaining into me, his lower body hefting me up and up relentlessly. I’m consumed. In his arms, I’m broken into tiny, little pieces and put back together, welded by a sense of desperation. Belonging. Coming home.

His male release rolls down my inner thighs and we don’t come up for air, our mouths in a continuous dance of wet hunger. Until finally we break away, sucking down gulps of oxygen, his eyes locked on mine like he might tackle me backwards into the surf. Even on the heels of mind-blowing release, he’s feral. An animal. And I’m the one who incites him.

He crushes me to his chest and bellows a tortured curse toward the heavens.

Several seconds tick by. And then...

“I love you, too, Scout,” he breathes unevenly in my ear. “I love you.”

In that moment, I’m so positive he could never let me go.

Not when we love each other.

If I was thinking coherently, I would have remembered the saying about loving things. And how letting them go is often the only way to express it.

* * *

Me and Easton swim in the ocean. He peppers me with questions about myself that I'm all too happy to answer when he's holding me close, his fingertips lazily stroking ocean water up and down my spine. The sun warms his skin and I rub my face against it, breathing his scent and sipping salt off his shoulders.

We're both naked and the moment feels bare, too. Unguarded. He tells me about his brother and father. How they were killed coming out of a restaurant on his twenty-fifth birthday. They were targeted on purpose and Easton was spared, specifically so he'd have to live with the knowledge of what his lifestyle had wrought. The rivals he'd tested by rising to power and usurping them as number one.

Their killers were dealt with.

He says the words easily, but the brief tension that rides through his muscles is not simple. Or detached. He still feels the loss—and it's obvious that the deaths of his loved ones is why he planned to keep me at a distance.

The reason he still might still be planning to return me to the real world.

Without him.

But I try not to think of that. Instead, I bask in the sunshine with this man I love, telling him about the antics me and Whitney once got up to. He laughs, kisses my neck, holds me while I float on my back, tracing every inch of my body with his fingertips.

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A picnic basket with sandwiches and cold drinks seems to magically appear on the beach and I eat mine cuddled in his lap, wrapped in one of the towels that were also conveniently left for us. After that, we spend the rest of the day in bed.

Easton makes slow, heated love to me in the center of his king-sized bed, never breaking eye contact while riding my body, reaching deep into me with every long stroke. Our warm breaths mingle between us, his hard-packed muscle sliding up and over my soft valleys, my knees pressed wide on the mattress, our skin still hot from the sun, his back flexing under my fingertips. His pace doesn't pick up until I'm gasping and writhing, sweat beginning to gather on his upper lip, his forehead. And then I'm pressed face down into the mattress and fucked. The bedroom fills with the sound of his masculine agony, the erotic slap of his sex entering mine. My hair is wrapped in his fist, his teeth embed themselves in my neck, my shoulder, chastisements filling my ears.

Bad little girl making Daddy so hard.

You tease me just by existing.

Your pussy asked for this.

By the time he's done with me, I've been wrung out.

I'm limp and gasping and made of gelatin.

We fall asleep sometime in the late afternoon wrapped in each other's arms and I can't imagine not spending every day with Easton, just like this. Forever.

Maybe I shouldn't have wished for it so hard, though.

Maybe I offended fate trying to will a certain future.

7

Easton

Scout is still asleep when the sun disappears from the sky. Boneless in the sheets looking like an innocent angel who has been assaulted by the devil.

There is some truth to that, isn't there?

Although I don't want to leave her soft warmth, I told her I would arrange a meeting with her sister, Whitney. So that's what I'm going to do. I want to wake her up with good news and see her smile. This girl's happiness feeds my soul. This girl who loves me.

Who I love in return. Desperately. Obsessively.

Who I have no idea how I'm going to let go.

Maybe I won't be able to. Maybe I was an idiot to think it was possible in the first place.

I pace my kitchen in my robe, phone pressed to my ear. Through my head of security, the time and location are decided on. A safe place, away from the city. No weapons. Drivers only, no one else. Still, I'm unsettled by the idea of taking my Scout outside of these walls, even to meet her sister. Too many accidents can happen. To say nothing of non-accidents.

Determined to calm my nerves, I nurse a glass of whiskey and tell myself to be calm, collected for her sake. And with resolve squaring my shoulders, I'm getting ready to go wake up Scout when my phone rings again.

Once again, it's my head of security calling.

"Yes?"

"Mr. Brawn."

Already, I don't like this.

He says my name like he's nervous to say what comes next.

I pinch the bridge of my nose tightly, until I feel pain. "What is it?"

A short pause. "There has been some...rumblings. Underground. About a contract being taken out on..."

My pulse starts to thud up against my ear drums. "On who?"

Why am I asking? I already fucking know.

Jesus. Jesus. Already?

"Her, sir."

The confirmation turns my spine to ice.

Scout. There's a contract out on Scout. To kill her.

“Who ordered the hit?” I choke out.

“Conrad.” My foremost rival in the gambling trade. He, too, wanted a piece of the fighting federation, but I outbid him. I should have seen this coming. But how? How? When I didn’t see her coming. Goddammit. Scout. “He was at the fight the other night. Saw you bring her to the box. He might just be guessing how...important she is to you. But a stab in the dark is worth hurting you, I’m guessing.”

Hurting me?

If something happened to her, it would end me.

My world would wink out like a light switch being flipped off.

Not going to happen. Nothing is going to touch her. I won’t allow it. “Find out where Conrad is this evening. I want an address. I’ll handle it myself.”

“Sir...”

“That’s an order,” I bark, hanging up the phone and slamming it down on the counter.

An intake of breath whirls me around—and there’s Scout in the doorway, fresh from a shower. She’s made use of the clothes I had transferred from her apartment, leaving her dressed in a loose yellow summer dress. She looks so much younger than she did in the sexy black dress at the fight, I almost do a double-take. God. What have I done bringing this guileless college student into my hideous world? Endangering her life?

“Is everything okay?” she whispers.

My jaw is so tight it’s going to snap. “Yes. Just business.”

She nods, taking me at my word. “Okay.”

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With the hit out on Scout, how can I bring her to meet Whitney? I was paranoid and fearful for her safety before, but now? I'll be a fucking madman.

I'm not going to break my word to her, though.

I told her I would do this for her. I will see it through.

But after...after that, I have to let her go.

I can't drag her into this hell I call a life and expect her to be happy. This life of constantly looking over one's shoulder. I'm confident in my ability to eliminate this threat, but what about the next one? And the one after that?

"Easton?"

I clear my throat hard. "I've set up the meeting with Whitney."

Her face lights up. "You did?"

"Yes." I resist the urge to reach for her. If I'm going to survive without her touch for even a second, I have to start hardening myself now. But she makes it impossible by throwing herself into my arms. And I gather her up and bear hug her like a dying man, inhaling her like a drug, crushing her to my body and memorizing every curve and valley.

Eventually, somehow I manage to set her back down on the ground. Then I take her hand and walk her out of the house, where my SUV is waiting at the curb. They

already spoke to my head of security and know where we're going, so I don't have to give any instructions.

I only make it about ten second before I put up the privacy screen and pull Scout onto my lap so she's straddling me. Her face is flushed in an instant, her pussy already writhing on my dick. And fuck, I want to see it. Want to watch that perfect friction happen, so I lift the hem of her dress and make her clamp the thin, yellow material between her teeth. And there's her tight cunt, rubbing on my cock and rapidly dampening the material of her panties. She's whining for it, trying to fuck me through my pants, and Jesus, yes, I could come just like this. But I want more. Want closer. So I push my middle finger into my mouth to get it wet, then shove it down the front of her underwear to stroke her clit. Tease it until she's dancing around and whimpering on my lap.

"Unzip me and put that cock where it belongs then."

Maybe I am the devil, because it turns me the hell on. Watching this almost-virgin fumble in her haste and inexperience, trying to get my zipper down. But she finally does and she bites her lip, eyes glassy, her small hand jerking me off.

Scout eases down onto me, inch by inch, her tight pussy constricting around me already, her hips jerking up and back, almost involuntarily. Like she's programmed to fuck me. Only me. Like her body moves on instinct when it's her and I, racing toward pleasure. Giving me no choice but to experience mine. She's a miracle. A gift. I can only mold my hands to her ass and help her gallop, her little milking channel riding up and down my cock, trying to pump the seed straight out.

And because this might be the last time I'm inside her, I'm desperate. My fingers bruise her pumping cheeks and I suck red marks onto her neck, throat, tits and I say the dirtiest shit that lurks in my head.

I own your horny little cunt.

You're damn right it fucks on command.

In other words, I make sure she'll remember me.

But while I might be taking her like a rough bastard, I'm also the man who buries his face in her hair, clings to her beloved body and calls her name hoarsely, begging for touch. She gives it to me and we sail over the edge together, Scout left trembling and gasping for air in my lap. We stay like that right up until we reach the meeting point.

We're the first ones to arrive, but the other SUV pulls up shortly.

Of course, Scout dives excitedly for the door and throws it open.

I drag her back in and slam it.

"Wait."

She flinches.

God, I'm so on edge, so messed up knowing I have to let her go, that I'm behaving like an asshole. It's not fair to her, but my insides are being pulverized in a blender. "I'm sorry. I just need you to be safe." Slowly, she nods, though she seems to sense there is something I'm not saying. Something important I'm leaving out. "Just wait for me to come around, okay?"

Her swallow is audible. "Okay, Easton."

I pull her face close and kiss her hard, before tearing myself away and exiting the vehicle. "Send out the girl," I shout, buttoning my overcoat. "Only the girl. They

meet halfway. If I see a fucking weapon, it's over. We're gone."

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“Same goes for us,” the Russian calls back. “And I’ll wait for Whitney at the same distance you wait for her sister. Or we’re gone.”

A detached part of me sees the humor in this. Two men snarling like territorial beasts over their women. These sisters who have arrived to steal our rationality and calm. But I’m too shaken up knowing there’s a contract on Scout, so my appreciation of the humorous moment is only fleeting. Muscles tense, I open the door and help Scout out...

And then I watch her run toward Whitney in the open field with my heart in my throat.

They embrace, tears flowing down their cheeks. Talking a mile a minute.

I harden my jaw and stem the flow of emotion that threatens to upend me.

Scout will be okay. With a bond like she has with her sister, she will heal. She will be strong.

One day, she will thank me for what I have to do.

8

Scout

I wake up in my old bedroom, my vision fuzzy around the edges.

There is a poster of the periodic table taped to my ceiling, one of the corners peeling off. There's no cigar scent. No ocean salt tingeing the air. No male warmth beside me. That's how I know I'm home, not in Easton's mansion by the sea.

Panic sets in quickly, my throat constricting hard.

I sit up and look around, tears already brimming in my eyes.

Maybe I'm dreaming?

No.

No, I remember getting back into the SUV last night. Easton taking me home in dead silence and giving me a glass of wine, telling me it would calm my frayed nerves after my crying jag in the middle of the field. Then a second glass that made the room start to spin. He didn't drug me. I'm just a complete lightweight. Any kind of alcohol knocks me out cold if I drink enough of it—and that's what happened. The last thing I recall is falling asleep standing straight up with my head lolling on his broad shoulder, babbling on about how much I love him.

Oh God.

He said this morning we would part ways.

He never took it back. Never changed his mind.

This is it then?

He's just...gone?

We're over?

A pitiful sob wrenches free of my throat.

I start to call for Whitney, before remembering she's been hijacked by a Russian MMA fighter. I'm alone here. Did he even leave anything? A note?

A search yields nothing. Just my school books stacked neatly on the coffee table in the living room and the vaguest hint of his scent. Did he carry me in here, lay me in bed and walk out? Did he even look back or second-guess himself?

In this moment, I truly hate him.

He stole me out of my life, made me love him and abandoned me.

Left me floundering with a broken heart and no way to reach him. No recourse or closure. I don't have his phone number and the way to his house is a blur, because he always made sure I was distracted in the back seat.

An alarm beeps on my phone.

Class. I have class.

Going to school seems like such a foreign idea when I've been locked in a fantasy for two days, but I have to go. There is an exam next week and the next few sessions will be spent reviewing. Feeling like something inside of me has died, I go through the motions, taking a shower and getting dressed, piling my hair up in a bun. Books in hand, I leave the apartment...

...and I immediately know I'm being watched.

Every hair on the back of my neck stands at attention, prickles riding up my arms.

I turn in a circle on the walkway outside the building, trying to find the source of my intuition, but I can't see anything out of the ordinary. At least until I get on the bus.

When I take my seat, I watch over my shoulder as two nondescript cars pull away from the curb outside my residence and follow the bus at a discreet distance. But I've watched a lot of suspenseful movies and I'm not fooled. I know what a tail looks like. But I can't tell who is in the driver's seat from this distance.

Resolutely, I turn back around in my seat, crack open a textbook and fire through some review questions. If those are indeed Easton's men tailing me, they can suck it. He doesn't get to control me from a distance. He's either in my life completely or he isn't. These half measures aren't going to work for me. I want the man or nothing at all.

And I miss him.

Terribly.

All through class that morning, I feel like there's a hard-boiled egg stuck in my throat and there's a hot iron pressed to the back of my eyes. I replay every moment of our two days together. Me fainting in his luxury box, Easton buying drinks in the Speckled Hen, making love in the ocean, falling asleep in each other's arms, making a lava lamp in his kitchen. Was it really so easy for him to just offload me and go about his merry way?

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Towards the end of class, another wave of electricity walks up my arm and I turn, scanning the faces of the students, trying to pick out someone I don't recognize.

There.

Is that guy wearing an earpiece?

Wait. There are two of them.

"Class dismissed," drones the professor and everyone stands, blocking my view of the two men with curly little wires trailing down their necks.

I crane my neck to pin them down, but one of my classmates stops in front of me, a backpack slung over one of his shoulders. "Hey, uh...Scout, right?"

"Yes," I say absently, still scanning the milling crowd of students.

"My name is Paul. I've been sitting behind you all semester." I force myself to focus on the young man and nod, as if I recognize him, but unfortunately I don't. Everything but the subject matter tends to fade away during a lecture. Usually, anyway. "I just wanted to say, I really liked your kinematics presentation last week."

"Oh." I give him a genuine smile. "Thank you."

"Sure." He shifts on his feet. "Do you want to grab a cup of coffee?"

My immediate reaction is to say no. I've been asked out before, but I've always

declined, reasoning that boys were too big of a distraction while in school. With Whitney working so hard to help pay my tuition, I owed it to my sister to be one hundred percent focused. That reasoning never occurred to me while I was with Easton. I'm pretty sure that makes me a hypocrite, doesn't it? Maybe I should say yes to this guy.

No. I am going to say yes!

Rebellion roars to life inside of me, crackling in my fingertips.

I've just been dropped off like a sack of potatoes while the man I love moves on. Without so much as a goodbye kiss. Well I can move on, too. Perhaps there is nothing I really find attractive about my classmate, but the world isn't going to end if we have a friendly cup of coffee. And maybe it'll help me once again feel like I'm in control of my own destiny. My own decisions. There might be a significant part of me saying yes out of anger at Easton, but so be it. I'm heartbroken and pissed and craving a distraction from the bleakness surrounding me.

"Sure." I pick up my books. "Coffee sounds good."

Paul does a double-take. "Really?"

Already nerves are running a hamster wheel in my stomach, but I ignore them. "Yes."

We walk out of the class and into the hallway, weaving through groups of students. Once again, I have the sensation of being watched, but I keep my eyes forward. Paul holds the door for me and we walk out into the quad, crossing a green field littered with more students. A bell tolls somewhere in the distance and the breeze makes me shiver, the urge to look over my shoulder strong. I focus on what Paul is saying, though. Something about our upcoming thermodynamics exam. And we eventually reach the small campus coffee shop and go inside.

We take a table in back and Paul leaves to order coffee at the register.

The lack of sound in the place makes me shift uncomfortably. I glance down at my arm and find every hair standing up. Casually as possible, I peruse the customers sitting at tables and over in the lounge area. Is it me or are there a lot of men here by themselves? One of them catches my eye and quickly looks away. What is going on?

No sooner has Paul returned with our coffees is there a loud crash.

The sound of the entrance door slamming off the wall.

And my breath begins to race. I wonder if I'm dreaming. Because there he is. There's Easton, striding into the coffee shop in his long overcoat with eyes on fire. They cement me in place, my nails digging into the soft booth on either side of my thighs. He looks god-awful. Has he been trying to pull his hair out by the roots? The closer he gets to the table, the more I notice his eyes are like red marble, bloodshot and...angry. Livid, actually. Violent.

Betrayed.

Betrayed?

How dare he? How dare he have been so close this whole time, while I suffered? While he could have made everything better simply by appearing. How dare he leave me?

As he weaves through the tables, students elbow each other and whisper his name in awe, recognizing my gangster on sight.

No, he's not my gangster anymore, is he?

I don't notice the lit cigar between Easton's fingers until he drops it into Paul's cup of coffee, putting out the flame with a hiss. Then he leans down into my classmate's face and bares his teeth like a wolf. "Run, motherfucker."

"Yes, Mr. Brawn," Paul squeaks, grabbing his backpack and sprinting for his life.

Easton watches my classmate haul ass toward the door. "Great choice, cutie."

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I'm a collision of emotions. Anger over Easton leaving me. Relief over seeing him again. Indignation, sadness, frustration. Hot moisture floods my eyes and he sees it. Gulps. Whispers my name shakily. But there is no way I'm letting him see me cry. He doesn't get to have a single part of me anymore. Not unless he takes all of me.

I snatch up my books and stomp toward the door.

At least six men scoot their chairs back and stand up, glancing at Easton, awaiting their boss's signal. How many freaking people have been following me?

I don't stop moving, even though I can feel Easton behind me.

Sense him following.

Is there a part of me that wants to be caught?

Is that why my breath shudders out when a hand closes around my elbow?

"Scout," he says raggedly, turning me around to face him. "Don't run from me."

The tears give up the fight, trickling down my cheeks. "You ran from me."

"And I made it less than twelve hours. I'm so fucked up, I can't see straight." He falls into me, his fingers raking up into my hair, tilting my face up so I'm looking up at his tortured features. My books tumble forgotten to the ground. "Please, I can't do it. Take me back."

“No. You didn’t even say goodbye,” I sob.

“I’m so sorry,” he rasps, brushing away my tears with his thumbs. “One of my rivals put a hit out on you, Scout. I was terrified. I am terrified you’ll never be safe with me.”

A weight drops in my belly. “A...hit? On me?”

“I took care of it, baby.” He presses our foreheads together. “I looked right in his eyes and ended him. In your name. No one threatens my girl and lives.” His lips touch mine and we both moan, an involuntary sound that comes from being close to the person who rules your senses, your body. “I’m sorry for leaving you like that. I was so worried you’d end up like them. My brother. My best friend. And I also knew if I told you I was leaving and you cried, I’d never go through with it. But Jesus, I’m dying without you. I’m fucking sick, Scout. Come back to me.”

Despite my frustration, I understand now. How he must have felt finding out someone wanted to kill me. This man has lost so much and carries the responsibility for that loss. Carries the guilt. Another loss—me this time—must have scared him into pushing me away. Still... “How can I come back to you? Be with you? You said it wasn’t possible.”

“I’ll make it possible,” he says passionately. “I’ll protect you. I’ll guard you like a treasure, because that’s what you are.”

“And if there’s another threat? You won’t disappear on me again?”

“Never. Never. If I have to form alliances all over the city, I’ll do it. I’ll approach my enemies and help make them rich, so they have reason to protect you as well. I’ll have ears and eyes in every corner of this town. You’ll be their goddamn queen, Scout, because they will know that everything of value to them will crumble if you’re

harmed.” He lifts me off the ground, so my feet are dangling, his mouth pressing kisses all over my face. “Marry me. God, marry me.”

Happiness swims through all the pain and goes off like fireworks inside of me. Am I strong enough to be the wife of a gangster? Am I okay with being guarded like royalty for the rest of my life? Yes. And yes. What is the alternative? Knowing this man exists a matter of miles away and not being with him? I couldn’t stand it. Missing him would be a terminal ache.

“Yes,” I whisper, crossing my wrists behind his neck. “I’ll marry you, Easton.”

He makes a hoarse sound and bands his arms around me, crushing me to his chest. “Thank God. I’ve got you back. I love you, Scout. I love you so much.”

“I love you, too,” I laugh, my heart swelling painfully.

We stay like that for long minutes, Easton rocking me in the middle of campus while people watch from a safe distance, his ring of security standing alertly nearby. But little by little, our embrace begins to change. His hot breaths on my neck turn me warm and pliant...and his big palm moves down my back to rest on my backside. His shaft grows engorged between us, our hands turn greedy for touch. “Now,” he murmurs into my neck, his fingers biting into the flesh of my bottom. “There’s a little matter of you going on a date we need to...handle.”

“We do?” I whisper, trying not to squirm.

“Oh yes.” He carries me toward the parking lot, his security team surrounding us on all sides, hands poised inside their jackets. “Daddy didn’t like that.”

And his guards stay positioned around the SUV while Easton takes me roughly, loudly, thoroughly in the backseat, my knees shoved up near my ears, reminding me

over and over again exactly who I belong to. Forever.

Epilogue

Easton

Five Years Later

I never thought happiness was possible for me. Not until her.

Now I stand on the private beach in front of our house, Scout wrapped in my arms as the fireworks go off overhead. Whitney and her husband eat cake on paper plates, feeding bites to their children and laughing at their antics. It's my birthday, but I hardly notice, because every day feels so significant. Special. Scout makes it so.

True to my word, I've spent the last five years building alliances all over the city. I've legitimized my opponents, instead of competing with them for territory. I've helped expand their wealth, made myself indispensable to them. Now I have a network so vast, no one would dare challenge it. Not when the alliance increases all of our power exponentially. Sure, the whole city is run by a ring of criminals now, but so be it. The love of my life is safe and that's all that matters.

I tilt my wife's head to one side and trace the slope of her neck with my lips.

She turns to face me, awareness, hunger in her eyes and I wish for the fireworks to be over so we can set our own off. Upstairs in our bed. Sometimes I worry that my need for Scout is too incessant, obsessive, intense, but then she looks at me like this. And I know the lust is a two-way street. Wasn't it just this morning I woke up to having my morning wood ridden by my naked girl, her teeth sunk into her bottom lip to keep

from moaning and waking me up?

Fuck.

That was hot.

She is so insanely hot.

It's hard to pinpoint when she is at her sexiest. When she's naked on her back, begging Daddy to go faster? When she's in one of those tight pencil skirts, focused on work? Or maybe when she's tipsy on a single glass of wine and dancing in the moonlight in her nightgown...

I could spend hours pondering this. And I have.

My wife occupies my every waking thought. Everything I do is with her in mind.

Our future.

Scout is indeed working on the team designing the next space shuttle. I had to donate a significant amount of money to NASA for them to allow twenty guards to accompany my wife to work every day, but eight figures tend to make just about everyone amenable.

Because she's been working so hard and establishing her career, we haven't had time to start a family yet. Five years ago, I was still learning to have a wife. Trying to find ways to counteract my panic every time she left the house. I'll never stop being wildly overprotective and territorial, but I'm able to manage those emotions now. And so when Scout is ready, I'll give her a child. I'll give her seventeen, if she wants them, and I'll find ways to shield them all.

“I have a birthday present for you,” Scout whispers now, her hand sneaking under my shirt, her fingers threading through my chest hair.

I lean down and kiss her slowly, winding our tongues together until she makes my favorite mewling sound in her throat. “You’re my present. Every single day. The gift that keeps on giving.” I wink at her. “Especially this morning.”

Her cheeks turn pink and I marvel at her continued ability to blush, after all the depraved things we’ve done together in bed. Not to mention the new ways we’ll invent to make each other crazy. There’s no bottom to our well of creativity.

When are these fireworks going to be over again?

“It’s something else,” she says, smiling shyly, starlight reflected in her eyes.

I tuck some loose hair behind her ear. “Tell me, cutie.”

She adds a second hand beneath my shirt, tracing the contours of my chest and my cock takes notice of her appreciation, hardening in my briefs. “You know how I completed that big project at work a couple of weeks ago?” She waits for my nod. “Well we have to wait for another department to develop the next series of parts, before we can move on to the final step. Meaning...if I wanted to take some personal leave, now would be the time.”

My heart beats faster. “Yeah?”

“Happy birthday, Easton.” Her fingertip trails down to my belt buckle, tugging on the leather, her own breath turning short. “You should spend it getting me pregnant.”

My dick is straight up now, throbbing. “You’re off the pill?”

Her nod is enthusiastic.

She's over my shoulder before the next firework goes off, her laughter tinkling in our wake as we climb the stairs. By the time we make it to the bedroom, my heart is lodged in my throat and I can barely speak, I'm so grateful for my wife. For the happiness she's given me. And as I often do, I shudder, remembering the morning on her college campus when she cried and I didn't know...didn't know if she'd take me back. It's what I'm thinking about when I slide my cock into her wetness and rock deep, looking into her eyes, knowing this could be it.

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I could get her pregnant.

She wants it, too. Wants it bad.

Her thighs are spread wide, her hands gripping my ass, urging me to ride her roughly, every pound of my hips causing the headboard to crack off the wall. My groans are hoarse, her moans more desperate than usual. A female who knows she's being bred, welcomes it, just like she welcomed me into her heart. And when we come together, I bear down and shake from the impact of my love for her, the life we're creating.

"I love you, Scout," I growl into her neck, still spasming inside of her.

"I love you, too," she gasps back, clinging to me.

And ten months later, our love expands to include one more.

THE END