



The Way Her SEAL Cares

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Category: Romance, War

Description: PIPER

Going out to celebrate the championship hockey season of one of my best friends shouldn't have put me in danger, but it did. I didn't know dinner would lead to threats. Landon Sullivan, my boss at one of the top protection agencies in New York, is determined to keep me safe.

Can I really accept his help? He's gruff and barely tolerates me on the best of days. He doesn't need to know how much I want him or how often I fantasize about him. Nothing will ever happen between us; he's made it clear he doesn't care about me as anything more than his employee.

Will I be able to keep my attraction under control when Landon insists on keeping me close to protect me? Will he let down his walls or will I be left heartbroken and still alone?

LANDON

Piper has been a temptation since the moment I met her. I hired her to keep an eye on her, but then I've held her at arm's length. It's not fair, but I know I have too much baggage and I won't burden her with it. She deserves so much better than I can give her.

When she's threatened, nothing will stop me from keeping her safe, even my own demons. I've known she's mine since I met her and now it's time to show her. I'll use all my skills as a former SEAL along with the weight of the protection agency I've built to keep the threat away from her.

I'll prove to Piper that she can trust me, not just with her safety but her heart as well. I'll show her the way I care about her and then never let her go.

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CHAPTER 1

PIPER

I keep glancing at the delicate watch on my wrist, knowing Landon Sullivan is going to be back in his office any minute. I would prefer to be dressed and gone before that happens. He's the only one who has a private bathroom attached to his office or else I wouldn't be in his little man cave at all. But here I am, feeling like a dog trying to catch my tail so I can zip up my dress.

It's not a good look and the anxiety swamping me at the thought of Landon catching me is not helping.

I know he'd look at me with disappointment. Or maybe he wouldn't look at me at all. I'm not sure which would be worse.

As much as I try and deny it, there is a truth I need to confront and can't ignore, especially in the dark of night. I've been in love with my boss since the moment he interviewed me. I don't think he feels the same way toward me and after working here for a few years now, the reality of it stings. There's an ache in my chest and he's the cause.

For a little while I held out hope something could happen between us, but each day the sliver of hope gets smaller as the ache grows. It sucks.

I shake my head and let my hands drop to my sides as I stare at myself in the bathroom mirror. I've touched up my makeup and the last thing to do was change out

of my work clothes and put on this nice dress. I can't even seem to do that right.

I've been looking forward to tonight for weeks. It's not often I can meet up with Celeste and Ezra Payne, twins who I've been best friends with for years. The only thing which would make it better was if Stella could be there as well, but she's busy working.

We're all busy with our own lives now, especially Ezra since he's the goalie for the New York Storm hockey team, but we make sure to get together once a month, at least. We don't normally go all out and head to a fancy restaurant, but Ezra's season ended recently, and we need to celebrate. In style, apparently.

"What are you doing in here?"

The rumbled question in the silence has me jumping a fucking mile and letting out a yelp of surprise. I turn around so fast I reach out for the counter of the small vanity to stop myself from tripping over my feet. I'm more of a flats around the office girl so I'm out of practice in the heels I'm wearing. Why should I wear heels in an office where I'm surrounded by giants?

The main men of Sullivan Protection—Weston, Easton, Remington, Blaze and Hale—are all former SEALs and larger than life in all ways. Then there's Barrett, Owen and Colt who are newer to the team here at SP. They're broad and strong, strategic and deadly. They all work under Landon.

With my free hand clutching my chest and my eyes wide, I gasp, "Landon you scared the hell out of me."

He arches an eyebrow and I fight myself to keep eye contact instead of looking away. He doesn't like it when I curse. Which is ironic because the man has a mouth like a...well, a sailor and so do the rest of the men. Still, whenever I curse, I can almost

see the way he wants to tell me to watch my mouth.

Since he's not my father, I usually brush it off, but there are times, like right now, when the look he gives me makes me want to roll over and show him my belly. Which is ridiculous.

When he doesn't say anything, I want to squirm under his intense gaze, but I force myself to square my shoulders. I hate when we get into a battle of wills like this. I hate knowing I'm going to back down.

Because I have no other choice when it comes to Landon.

"I'm using your bathroom to change." When I try and zip myself up again, it's just as futile as it was moments ago. I don't need to show my boss, the man I've been lusting after, my back and bra. "I didn't feel comfortable using the restroom in the lobby and you were out meeting with a client. I expected to be in and out."

I huff out a breath, exasperated and hating how I tend to babble when I'm nervous. Landon always makes me a little nervous.

He narrows his eyes at me and steps into my personal bubble. I fight my instincts to step back. Landon is a lot of things, including a moody man who I can't read a lot of the time, but he would never hurt me. Hell, I'm pretty sure he doesn't want to touch me most of the time.

"Turn around," he grits out the command through his clenched teeth.

My body reacts before I can stop myself or argue. When I turn, the first thing I see in the mirror is Landon looking at my body. A hunger flashes in his eyes, but it's gone just as fast. I'm not sure if I saw it at all.

What I am sure about is Landon has been able to see my bra from the moment he walked in. And he's looking at it now. My cheeks heat and it only gets worse as I try and tear my eyes away from him. I can't.

It's a full-blown out of body experience, but it doesn't stop me from feeling when Landon's fingers skim my bare back right above the zipper. Even when I'm zipped up, I can feel the ghost of his touch on my skin.

The way Landon's eyes slide closed before he takes a deep breath makes my stomach feel like it's free falling. I turn slowly and look up at him, trying not to throw myself at him. How embarrassing would it be if I gave into the impulse? Would he reject me?

Fear keeps my feet firmly planted in place.

This bathroom isn't big enough for both of us. I need to get out of here. I can't be trusted.

"Excuse me," I whisper the words, hating how loud they are in the confined space.

Landon's eyes snap open and his gaze rakes down my body. He growls, "I don't know where you're going, but you're not wearing that."

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My spine snaps straight and indignance fills me. “What?” I narrow my eyes and launch into my tirade without waiting for his response. “No, never mind. It doesn’t matter because I am wearing this. I am going out.”

I try and step around him, but Landon doesn’t move. If I want out, our bodies are going to touch. It feels like a big risk. Especially since he’s not happy with me right now.

“Where are you going?” His question sounds deadly, as if I’m standing on the edge of a cliff and the wind is howling and raging with enough force to send me over if I’m not careful.

I don’t want to be careful. Not anymore. I’ve been careful. I’ve tiptoed around him. I’ve done his bidding and stood by his side, even if only professionally.

I scoff, “I don’t answer to you, Landon.”

I brush past him, no longer caring if I touch him in the process. Who the hell does he think he is? I want to scream at him, but I don’t. I want to curse him until I’m blue in the face, but I don’t.

I should.

Before I can slip out of the bathroom completely, Landon grabs my wrist, and my eyes snap up to his. There’s a fire there, but I don’t have time to analyze it. I need to escape.

“If you need me,” Landon’s eyes take me in before a grim expression settles on his face, the next words sounding thicker, “you call me.”

I give a curt nod and when I pull away, he lets me. It’s not easy, especially as I feel Landon’s eyes bore into me, but I don’t look back over my shoulder. I grab my stuff and head out, not letting myself linger any longer than I need to. I’m a little bit afraid he’s going to come after me.

What the hell was that look about?

I shake it off as I hop into a taxi and head over to the restaurant where I’m meeting my friends for dinner. It takes me too long to shake the feeling of Landon’s eyes on me and the feeling of being around him. I swear I need a hyperbaric chamber, but for my damn hormones whenever I need to reintegrate into situations after I’ve spent even the shortest amount of time with him.

It’s not okay the way my body responds to him. He’s made it very clear nothing is going to happen between us.

Whether I want it to or not doesn’t matter. It can’t matter. The ache in my chest feels unbearable.

The moment I climb out of the taxi, I have one of those moments when I wonder how the fuck I got from point A to point B. I don’t get the chance to dwell on it before I’m being engulfed in a hug from Celeste. Looking over her shoulder, Ezra is standing there. His size is imposing, especially with his arms crossed across his chest. It’s the smile on his face which gives him away.

You could write the man off as just some jock or even some grumpy bastard, but you’d be wrong. He has a smile for pretty much everyone and a big heart of gold to go along with it.

Celeste grumbles, “I wish Stella was with us tonight.”

I pout as I pull away from my friend. “I know, but you know she works too damn hard. We’ll have to make sure she shows up next month.”

“She’s not getting out of it,” Ezra states without a hint of amusement in his voice.

Before I can say anything, I’m being pulled into his big, strong arms. I sink into him. For so long, Ezra has been like the big brother I never knew I needed and kind of didn’t want. There has never been anything more than that between us.

When he lets me go enough, I tip up and kiss his cheek. My voice is bright, and my smile is genuine, “Congratulations on your championship season, Ezra!”

He smirks down at me and raises his eyebrow in challenge, “Have you watched a single game?”

“Uh,” I glance away and wince. Scrunching my nose, I look back up at him from underneath my eyelashes. “I tried. I just don’t understand what the hell I’m watching.”

He shakes his head and laughs before kissing the top of my head and leading me into the restaurant with Celeste trailing us. He grumbles, “It’s not that difficult.”

I scoff and give his chest a playful swat, but he probably doesn’t even feel it considering how fucking big his muscles are. “I know you’re the goalie, doesn’t that count for something?” He gives me an amused, oh isn’t she so cute kind of look and I can only roll my eyes. “I know the Storm kicked major ass?”

I pose it as a question, but it really isn’t. They brought the championship back home to New York and Ezra played a major part in their victory. I might not know much,

but I know he's the last line of defense.

He rolls his eyes and beckons me to walk ahead of him when the hostess leads us to our table, Celeste looping her arm through mine as we follow behind. She leans into me and wiggles her eyebrows, dropping her voice to a whisper, "How's it going at work with your sexy boss?"

I groan under my breath. For all of five minutes I was able to forget about Landon Sullivan and the things he makes me want and feel. I shake my head and give a noncommittal shrug, but I'm sure it just makes me look slightly deranged.

I know my feelings are my own problem, but even as I try and shake it off to enjoy the celebration with some of my oldest friends, the feel of his fingertips brushing the skin on my back haunts me.

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CHAPTER 2

LANDON

I've felt like a caged animal since yesterday afternoon when I saw Piper wearing a dress on which hugged her body the way I yearn to. If that wasn't bad enough, her back was bare, her soft skin begging me to give into the desires I have for my little secretary.

I shouldn't have hired her. I knew it the moment I interviewed her. I wasn't going to, but then I thought about her being out there in the big, bad city without me, without my protection, without me being able to watch her. Instead of letting her go, I hired her at a salary far above what she should be making in her position.

She's worth so much more than I'm paying her and not in terms of the job she does.

The woman, my woman even though I can't claim her like I wish I could, should be draped in diamonds and wrapped in silk. I wish I could see her just like that.

Better yet, I wish I could see her naked and spread out on my bed, her dark hair creating a halo around her.

Fuck.

My cock throbs with the thought of being able to look at her pretty pussy dripping for me.

I've done so good for years. I've avoided being alone with her when I can. I've kept my walls up and I haven't stepped over the line when it comes to being professional with her.

No one needs to know how at night, alone, I stroke my cock thinking about how her lips would look wrapped around my cock and how her dark brown eyes would sparkle as she looks at me. It's only for me when I imagine how soft her hair would be wrapped around my fist as I plow into her. I swear there are times when I can hear how she would sound moaning and screaming my name.

Those sounds, the thought of it, the echo of it in my soul, have kept me up all night.

I was so amped up this morning, I was hoping a good workout would help me. It's why I came into the office early because we have a gym on site. Only, now I fucked that up as well.

I'm staring at the heavy bag which has rolled across the room, ending with a thump as it hit the wall. What the fuck? I feel like I'm losing it. The last semblance I had of my sanity walked out with the sway of Piper's hips yesterday.

I know she hasn't dated since she started working here and I wish I could say I didn't overwork her knowing damn well she wouldn't have time to date because of it. I would be lying if I said that and there are a lot of things I might be, but I'm not a fucking liar.

Except when it comes to how you feel about Piper and then you avoid it with everything in you.

Yeah.

Perfect.

The low whistle from behind me has me spinning around. How the fuck did they get in here without me knowing? I've been fucking slipping. Hale is standing right inside the doorway, his arms crossed, and his eyebrows pinched together. Remington is leaning against the doorjamb and looking amused as hell.

"Fuck," I mutter under my breath and then look back at the bag. I run my fingers through my hair before I start unwinding the tape from my hands. "What are you guys doing in so early?"

I glance over at them to catch the look they're sharing. Well, if that doesn't put the hair on the back of my neck on end. We might be brothers here at Sullivan Protection, but these two are exact opposites and if they're both here then it can't be good. I narrow my eyes at Remington who looks away.

My words are measured, slow and steady, as I push down the way it wants to waver in worry, in concern, in fucking fear, "What are you guys doing in so early?"

Hale must sense my concern and grunts, "Nothing is wrong with Ella." He glances at Rem who is still looking away. Hale sighs and then strides across the gym to shove a newspaper against my chest. "You should see this, and we thought it would be better if we showed it to you instead of you finding it."

I blink at the man who I've worked with for years, one of the men I trust with my life. Although I'm damn glad to find out Ella, my sister is okay. Even if I'm still coping with her being in a relationship with three of my best friends—Barrett, Owen and Colt—who also work here at SP. I know they're serious about her, but it's a lot to wrap my mind around. They treat her like a queen and it's the only reason I haven't kicked their asses.

If it's not about Ella...then who else could this be about?

My heart starts to race, and worry strikes me like lightning in a whole different way. There's only one other woman who would worry me as much as Ella. But these guys don't know how I feel about her.

I don't think.

I yank the paper away from my chest and look down to have a photo looking back at me. One which almost makes my knees give out. A photo of Piper. A photo of Piper kissing the cheek and hugging the goalie for the New York Storm, Ezra Payne.

"What the fuck is this?" I hiss the question and then let out a roar, wishing I hadn't just destroyed the heavy bag because I need to hit something right now.

Hale holds his hands up as if he knows I might take a swing at him. Remington starts to ease forward and tells me in a hushed tone, "This is why we wanted to make sure we told you as soon as we saw it."

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“Why would I give two fucking fucks about this?”

Hale’s eyebrows shoot up and I look away from his face because if I don’t, he’ll be able to read all my emotions and how close I am to cracking right now. His voice is low, “If you think you’ve been hiding a damn thing then you’re wrong.”

I snap my eyes to his and narrow them before tearing my eyes away from his and back at the newspaper. “I don’t know what you’re talking about,” I murmur.

Even though I’ve denied what they’re implying, I can’t help myself from looking at the article and a few smaller pictures where Ezra and Piper are sitting with another woman who is identified as Ezra’s sister. They look cozy.

Fuck.

When was the last time I thought anything was cozy?

They don’t identify Piper, but there’s plenty of speculation about who she is to Ezra. Every word, every insinuation that they’re together, is like a knife to the gut.

“Are you going to finally make Piper yours?” Remington’s voice is soft, and my head shoots up to look at him, my mouth opening to deny any feelings for Piper. He shakes his head fiercely, steel entering his voice, “Don’t. Don’t you dare disrespect her and lie to us about how you feel about her.”

Hale, points to the paper which I’m now clutching in my hand. “You might have already lost her.”

His words might as well be a grenade. They also surprise the hell out of me since there is not a damn thing about Hale which screams hearts, flowers or love.

The idea that Piper isn't mine, that another man could be touching her, makes me growl from deep in my chest. I must look crazed because both Hale and Rem hold their hands up and take a step back. I feel like my skin is going to split and a beast is going to be set free at any moment. I don't know how to stop it.

Rem looks at his watch and grimaces. "Piper is going to be here soon. You need to get your shit together."

"Hit the showers, boss," Hale says gruffly.

"Piper isn't mine," I grit out through my teeth. "I don't care what she does or who she's with."

Remington's face, which is normally graced with a smile, changes before I can even take a breath. He gets in my face, his voice low and threatening, "Lie to yourself if you must, but not me. Not us. We exist on trust. We trust each other with our lives. We trust each other to have the other's back. I'm having your back right now by telling you that you're being a fucking jackass and if it's not too late then don't fuck this up."

Hale gives a nod and then both men are fucking gone. I give one more look at the heavy bag, but then I'm stalking through to the gym bathroom. My mind is a million miles away as I wash up and then pull on the clothes I brought with me. How I don't rip every button from my shirt as I button it, I'm not sure.

Really everything in the world should be breaking in my hands right now because I'm having trouble dealing with the rage flowing through me. It's not only rage though.

It's jealousy. It's pain. It's fucking fear.

It hurts.

Those feelings throb inside of me. It has nothing to do with anger. The picture of Ezra fucking Payne hugging Piper keeps flashing through my head. Her lips on his cheek. It feels like my soul is being ripped out, a sliver at a time.

There has never been a woman in my life who has affected me as much as Piper does. From the moment I looked into her eyes, chocolate brown and so damn sinfully enticing, I was lost. I was lost to her. I haven't looked at another woman since then.

I couldn't.

It felt like I was betraying her just thinking about trying something, anything, with another woman. It made me sick to my stomach. It made me feel like those endless nights on missions when I wasn't sure if I was going to survive were upon me again. The thought of giving my body or my heart to another woman made me feel like I was right back there in the worst of my memories, in the landscape of my nightmares.

So, I haven't tried. I banished even the thought of it and focused on Sullivan Protection and making it the best it can be.

Still, I kept Piper at a distance. For me because it was the right thing to do. For her because I might want her, might know she's mine with every fiber of my being, but that doesn't mean I'm good for her.

I'm broken. I have been for a long time, and I don't think even her arms could hold me together if another piece of me splintered away.

Then where would I be?

I'd be even more broken. I would leave shards of her in my wake as well and I won't allow it. I can't. I refuse to.

She deserves so much more than I can give her.

Even if I hate it.

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Even if my soul tries to rear up and tell me differently. I know the truth.

When I finally leave the gym, I try and get to my office, but the first thing I see is Piper coming down the hallway toward me. I look down at my hands, realizing I'm fisting the newspaper with her beautiful face plastered on the front fucking page where she's kissing another man. I don't give a fuck that it's on his cheek. Her lips touched his skin and my anger, the pure fucking rage, builds in me again.

Piper's eyes are downcast, but when I let out a low warning growl against my fucking will, her head snaps up. Her dark eyes dart between my hand where the newspaper is clutched and the stony visage of my face. My jaw is locked so tight I can almost hear my teeth cracking under the force of it.

Piper's eyes narrow as she looks at the paper before she teases me, "What did that paper ever do to you?"

I force my fingers to relax a fraction and grit out, "Nothing. The paper didn't do anything to me."

It's not a lie. It isn't the paper's fault I can't get my shit together and offer my woman everything she needs. It's not the paper's fault I'm broken, that part of me never came back from serving my country. It's not her fault either, but it doesn't stop me from lashing out.

I shake out the paper and show it to her. When her eyes catch on the photo, Piper pales and it's as good of a confirmation as I'm going to get. My heart shatters. I'm too late. I was always going to be too late.

Piper takes a step toward me, and my body reacts, taking a step back. When her deep brown eyes come up to mine, they're filled with pleading pain. I hate to see it there, but what the fuck am I supposed to do? If she comes closer, I don't trust myself.

I would never hurt her, never, but I don't know what I would do if she got closer to me. If she touches me, confessions might fall from my lips, words spoken but to what end? What would be the point?

"Landon," she whispers into the void between us.

Has there ever been this chasm between us before? Was it always this wide? This inhospitable? This impossible? Was I just deluding myself into thinking one day things might be different? The spark of hope that she would wait for me is snuffed out.

She swallows hard and shakes her head. "It's not what it looks like."

"It doesn't matter," I mutter the words, but by the way she rears back, I know she heard them. I force my face into a neutral expression, tucking away the hope and the pain and the potential someplace deep inside me. It's not the first time, I've been doing it for years. So, why does it hurt so much more this time? "You're an adult, Piper. You don't owe me an explanation."

She opens her pretty lips, but I can't. I can't listen to her words right now. Why should I? Would they hurt more? Would they heal?

I'm too much of a coward to find out.

Instead of giving her a chance to explain, I shove the newspaper at her and then stomp into my office, slamming the door behind me as if the distance will help, as if it will make any difference.

I know it won't. It never has before.

CHAPTER 3

PIPER

I always thought each day was 24 hours, a constant. Sounds simple enough, right? We all know time might be a construct, but it's definite, it's measurable, it's the same and it doesn't change.

I was fucking wrong.

Every single one of the last three days has stretched on endlessly. I'm pretty sure every second has been branded on my soul in some way, especially those where Landon has looked at me, his eyes boring into me and making me feel like scum. That is, of course, if he even looks at me to begin with.

It's as if Landon wants to be this black hole in my life. Where there once was a man, my boss, there is only a void now and I don't know exactly how to deal with it. I don't like it.

No, it's more than that. I hate it.

I hate the way it makes me feel. I hate the way I miss him. I hate the way it feels cold and alone even when I've been working surrounded by the rest of the guys of Sullivan Protection.

Everyone has been super sweet, as if they know what happened. Even Hale, who is a bastard at the best of times, has been checking in on me. I swear Remington has

turned into an actual golden retriever the last few days. Easton and Weston are the same—they joke with me and pretend like nothing is wrong when we all know it's not true. Blaze has actually talked to me when before he normally just grunted.

I think the worst are the looks I've been getting from Barrett, Colt and Owen. They look at me with pity and it guts me. I know it's because they're blissfully happy in their poly-whatever they're in with Landon's sister Ella. They're happy and they've been trying to keep it lowkey for me.

Still, hard to keep it lowkey when I can see the vestiges of their tans from the vacation they took to the Bahamas even though it's been far too long for that tan to be hanging around. Maybe I'm only making it up. Equally possible. It could just be the glow of happiness they wear.

Will I have to look at it forever? Will I be able to stomach it?

Every day it's become harder and harder to swallow past the lump in my throat.

Remington moves toward me at my reception desk like he's approaching a feral creature and it only makes me want to scream louder. It makes me want to rant and rage. It makes me want to vent all my frustrations on him.

I know I can't; none of this is his fault, but the way he's treating me with kid gloves, along with the rest of the men here, is driving me up the damn wall.

They've always relied on me before and now it's as if they don't think I'm capable.

Remington lays the mail on my desk, and I narrow my eyes at it, especially the slightly larger envelope which looks like it's some sort of invitation. It wouldn't surprise me; the guys get invited to events around the city all the time because people want to be on their good side. What no one realizes is that these men can't be bought.

Not with some fancy schmancy event at least.

Being wine and dined won't make these men work harder. They take every single client and whatever their problem is seriously. They don't play favorites. The men of SP only know how to give it their all.

It's something I've admired deeply the entire time I've been working here. Now? It feels like a noose around my neck because I realize since nothing happened with Landon, knowing the kind of man he is, I've been alone in my feelings this entire time. Landon isn't the kind of man to hold back. Which is obvious with how strongly he's thrown himself into avoiding me.

I don't even understand why he's so angry. I didn't do anything wrong.

Do the pictures look good? No, but he didn't even let me explain and now I might as well be a damn plague of locusts to him.

"I can get the mail all by myself, I've been doing it for years," I snap at Remington whose eyebrows shoot up toward his hairline.

"I know you can," his voice is gentle and for some reason it only pisses me off more.

I don't want him to be gentle with me. I don't want anyone to be walking on eggshells around me. I don't want there to be a reason for anyone to be treating me differently than they did before.

"Stop it," I force the words out between my teeth.

"Stop what?"

I huff in exasperation and look into his eyes, standing up and placing my hands flat

on my desk. I still don't get anywhere near his height, but I feel a little more in control when I'm standing. It's control I desperately want to hold onto and never let go of.

I'm so tired of feeling small, of feeling like I've done something wrong, of feeling weak. I'm not fucking weak.

"You know what," I bite out. I'm seething now. "You all have been walking around here like I'm fucking glass. It doesn't make any sense. I'm not fragile. I'm fine. Everything is fine," the last bit comes out as a whine, and I swallow hard, wishing I could take it back and say it differently—with more strength.

"We know you're not fragile, Piper." His words are right, but the tone is completely placating, and I want to hurl something at him.

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I narrow my eyes at him and reach for the paper weight on my desk, the same one Landon got me the first Christmas I worked here. It's gorgeous and one of my most prized possessions because it is handmade millefiori glass done in cool colors where you can see the canes trapped inside of a solid glass bubble.

As much as I wish I could throw it at Remington's head, I know I can't. I know I won't. Destroying something Landon gave me might make me feel good for about a second, but it won't last. I know it. I hate it.

"Then stop walking around here like I'm going to have a breakdown at any moment and doing things which are not within your job description," I growl.

Remington holds up his hands and backs away slowly. Too fucking slowly. It makes my hackles rise and it makes me want to fucking scream.

I've never had a problem keeping my emotions under control, but right now I feel raw and on edge. I feel like my skin is one big wound and everything is poking it, reminding me it's not healed, reminding me just how delicate it is, how I'm barely holding on.

When he's gone, I drop down into my chair and force myself to look at the mail he brought up. I put the paperweight down gently on my desk, hating the way my heart stutters when I look at it. I've loved it since the moment I opened the box from Landon. I thought...I guess it doesn't matter what I thought because the last three days have proven to me how wrong I was.

About everything.

Landon is a coward and I never imagined that would be something I would think about Landon.

From the moment I met him, I thought he was a hero, so brave and capable. He might still be those things, at least to those who need him. But to me? Right now? He's a coward. He's been hiding from me.

I know he's mad, but he could have, at least, listened.

Three days ago, after our horrible start to the day, I tried to corner him in his office to talk to him. I even took a cup of coffee with me as a peace offering. I was going to tell him the pictures weren't what they looked like. I was going to tell him how Ezra and Celeste are two of my oldest friends and he's never been anything other than a brother to me.

I was going to spill all my secrets and bare all my scars.

He never let me get the chance. When I placed his coffee down, he looked at it like it was a real possibility I had poisoned it. Then his eyes found mine and what I saw there stole all my words and my breath.

It wasn't anger. I wish it was. It was pain and betrayal, so deep and real and true that I didn't know how to process it.

I sputtered and choked on air, unable to form words, unable to be brave in the face of the crushing weight of his emotions.

"I'm sorry," I said weakly, but it was all I could get out.

When his cell phone rang, he practically dove for it. I took the opportunity to make a hasty retreat. Since then, he's been effectively avoiding me.

I know I don't owe him any explanation, but it feels like I do. In my heart I know I need to explain everything, but it feels like we're on two sides of the globe without the means to do anything other than stand still.

"Fuck," I curse under my breath as I go through the envelopes, junking a few things because we're very happy with our insurance, thank you very much.

When I get to the largest envelope, I'm surprised as fuck to find it addressed to me. It's unusual and it has all my instincts revolting, but I guess it's not too surprising. A lot of our clients know who I am and my position here. I suppose they thought they might curry some favor and I could get the guys to attend some function if they address the invitation to me.

As if I would want to spend more time with Landon than I have to.

Maybe a week ago this would have worked. But now? Not a chance in hell.

Not even the thought of getting to see Landon in a tux, which would be hot as fuck, would be enough for me to go to bat about an event right now.

I slit the envelope using my opener with a flick of my wrist. When I pull the card out, I realize instantly it's not an invitation. No. Not at all.

The card is covered in embossed lettering with delicate flowers in the corners. It's pretty, but there's something off about it.

The front reads:

Our condolences on your loss. There are no words to express grief and pain, but you can still hold the memories of the person you loved and lost close to your heart.

I open the card, my hands starting to shake as I do considering no one I know has died recently. I shouldn't be getting a card like this. I don't think. I would know, I think. I'm pretty sure.

The only thing taking up the inside of the card are pictures from my dinner with Ezra and Celeste, but these aren't from the newspaper. These are on photo paper. I gasp and snap it closed because of the message scrawled across the inside.

Soon, I'll be sending these cards to everyone you love. He is mine.

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I'm panting, maybe hyperventilating. Panicking? I'm not sure what the hell I'm doing right now.

"Piper," Landon's deep growl has me screaming and whirling around, the card clutched to my chest. He takes me in with the sweep of his eyes before he takes a step forward. "What's going on? What's that card?"

I shove the card behind me in the most juvenile move I've used since I was a fucking toddler, I'm pretty sure. "Nothing," my voice comes out too high pitched and I wince. I shake my head and try to grab hold of my hurt and my anger at this man. He doesn't have a right to ask me what's wrong. Not now. Not ever. My voice is stronger this time, "Nothing. Nothing is going on. The card is just some stupid prank."

I turn back around and try and shove it back in the envelope, but it's impossible. My hands are shaking too hard for me to do it. The next thing I know it's being ripped out of my hands. I turn around to look up into the thunderous face of Landon.

He reads the front of the card before opening it. His eyes widen before he lets out a roar which has me freezing and almost peeing my pants. Easton and Weston come tearing into the reception area, both with guns drawn and startled looks on their faces. He doesn't turn toward them, instead his eyes are locked with mine and I can't look away.

I can't.

I wish I could.

He holds out the card, “Find out who the fuck sent this to Piper. I want everything you can find out. Now,” he barks, making me jump in my seat.

I move my toes a little to try and roll my chair away from him, but I don’t get far. The moment Easton, who does most of the IT stuff around here, grabs the card, the twins let out their own growls and Landon’s large hands grip the arms of my chair. I’m not sure if I stop moving or if he’s holding me in place.

Does it matter?

I squeeze my eyes shut and my lungs seize. I can’t breathe. Is this what drowning feels like? Why can’t I breathe? I should be able to. My body is supposed to know what to do. Why doesn’t it know what to do?

When Landon’s hands land on my knees, I gasp and my eyes pop open. I expected to see his eyes filled with anger and for it to be directed at me, but they aren’t. Oh, he’s angry, but I, somehow, know it’s not directed at me. There’s also concern there and...something else I’ll have to try and understand later.

“Piper,” he whispers as his thumbs move back and forth on my knees, grounding me, “I’m sorry I wasn’t ready to listen before, but I am now.”

I want to reach for him. My body begs for me to leap into his arms. I desperately want him to give me comfort, to prove to me that solid exists, that stable is at the tips of my fingers instead of this feeling of freefall.

“I grew up with Ezra, Celeste and Stella. They’re my best friends. Stella couldn’t be there, but we all get together once a month. We don’t normally go out, but Ezra’s championship win was something to celebrate. Not that I really follow or understand hockey,” my words come out in a rush, bubbling and tripping and stumbling as they do.

Landon's entire body softens and then I'm in his arms. The fear, the panic, the naked vulnerability catches up with me and I start sobbing against his chest. I'm not even sure if it's from relief that he's not ignoring me anymore or if it's fear of what the card means and what could happen next.

He wraps me up tighter and holds me closer.

"It's okay, Piper," he whispers against my head, and I can't get close enough.

"You were a real jerk," I hiccup the words, but I know he hears them by the way he chuckles under his breath. I jerk back from him and when he looks down at me, I see the regret there. The little part of my heart which is fueled by hope, warranted or not, sees layers of regret in his eyes. Is it real? The accusation, the reason for my hurt, for my bruises, slips from my lips, "You wouldn't even listen."

Landon's eyes soften. "I know. I was a complete ass. I'm sorry." Something becomes steel in his expression, his jaw clenching. "You're going to stay with me and I'm going to keep you safe."

I open my mouth to protest, but the way his eyes glint and the way it seems like he grows in stature right before my eyes as if readying to be my knight, to be my savior, stops me.

Would it be so bad to let him take care of me? Just this once?

CHAPTER 4

LANDON

I'm determined to keep Piper safe, but having her in my home, sharing space with her so she's so close and so far at the same time, is really difficult for me. She's been staying with me for six thousand minutes, give or take because I haven't been keeping an exact count. Well, not that I would admit.

The day when I pried the threatening card from her fingertips, a rage I've never felt before overtook me. The thought of her in danger, of the woman I've been treasuring in my heart since the moment I met her, not being safe? It tore at me, and it broke something in me.

Suddenly, everything I had been using as excuses to keep us apart, all the arguments, the defenses, the stupid fucking reasons, melted away and the only thing left in their wake was the pain and the fear in my Piper's eyes.

Maybe it was too far to demand her to come to my place, but the thought of not being there to protect her and making sure she is safe was something I couldn't bear. The weight of reality was so much heavier than the weight of my past and the demons I've been carrying on my back for years.

For her to call me out on my shit? I don't think I've ever been more attracted to her, and my cock firmly agreed.

I put my guys, my brothers, the only other men I would ever trust Piper's life to, on

the case and then I swept Piper up and declared our workday over. She was quiet while I took her to her place, following her like a shadow as she packed up a few things. Not having her in my home and safe was eating at me and riding me hard.

When she was trying to pack up some of her undergarments, she turned and huffed, her hands slamming down on her hips, her voice insistent, “You don’t need to be right behind me as I do this.”

I got right into her space and noticed immediately how her eyes dilated and darkened with my proximity. I know Piper feels the same way about me as I do her, but seeing it right there close enough to taste almost shredded the last of my control. I was barely hanging on with my fingernails, grasping it, trying to give me enough to get her back home.

“Button,” I growled, and she blinked at me like she was looking at me for the first time, “I’m not leaving your side until we know what the fuck is going on and who sent you that card.” I slid my eyes closed and let myself bleed at her feet. “If what they put in the card, if you were dead? I don’t think,” my voice croaked, and I opened my eyes so she could see my sincerity, “I wouldn’t survive it. Let me do this.”

Piper swallowed hard and nodded her consent before quickly grabbing half her panty drawer and shoving it into her bag as if it prevented me from seeing the scraps of lace and satin. My cock was already begging me to take her to the floor and seeing her panties, imagining how they would look on her, did not help, but I kept it together.

When we got to my place, I gave her a tour and then we proceeded to have the most domestic fucking night of my adult life which involved us making dinner together and drinking wine while we ate. We talked most of the night, actually talked, for the first time since I met her. I realized then how much I was truly depriving myself by not letting her get close to me.

I was missing out on her sweetness, her sense of humor, her outlook on the world which is so filled with light and hope. I was missing out on the possibility of the shards of my heart and soul being mended, pieced back together so they could heal into something better. Something which existed just for her to be sheltered by.

As I laid in bed that night, unable to sleep with her so close and yet so far in the guest room, I made a vow to myself. I won't be holding her away from me any longer. I'm going to grab her and pull her close, giving her everything I should have since the moment I met her. I'm going to be her shield and her sword, her comfort and her solace.

I'm going to make Piper mine.

I'm just not entirely sure how to go about doing that. As someone who has always been decisive, not knowing is fucking with me.

I see the way she looks at me when she doesn't think I'm looking. Especially at night when I'm in a pair of shorts and t-shirt or in the morning when we're having breakfast together, one I cooked. I know she wants me. I'm just worried the space between us, the one I've shoved between us, won't be closed easily.

Since I've given up all the lies I've been telling myself, the excuses, I'm ready to go at the speed of light to have this woman in my arms, in my life. She's already in my heart. I just don't know if she will be right there with me and the thought of her needing more time kills me, but I know it's my fault.

I make sure to get her coffee in the morning, putting it in a travel mug for her so it's ready when we leave to head into the office. When I handed it to her the first morning, she looked between me and the cup a few times before blinking and furrowing her eyebrows together.

“I don’t understand,” she mumbled. “I’m supposed to get you coffee?”

I moved into her space and took her hand in mine, bringing it up until she was grasping the cup of coffee while I stared deep into her eyes. “Not here you’re not. This is your home.”

She blushed at my words, and I saw a spark of hope in her eyes before she snuffed it out and shook her head. “I’m just here until it’s safe.”

I made a noncommittal sound, knowing I shouldn’t push her, especially not first thing in the morning after she’d gotten a damn death threat the day before. I knew it could just be some sick joke and didn’t have any credibility. I wasn’t willing to risk it.

I’m still not a few days later.

Especially with the look Owen has been giving me since he barged into my office a moment ago while holding an envelope which looks familiar. I can’t tear my eyes away from it. I know it’s going to be another card, another threat. My gut is screaming the truth of it at me.

“You know what this is,” Owen doesn’t pose it as a question because we both know it’s not. I nod and Owen growls, “Are you going to get your head out of your ass and claim your woman now or are you going to let your shit get in the way of your future?”

My eyes snap up and for the first time in a long time I really look at Owen. It’s been hard for me to do so for the last few months, ever since I found out Ella’s relationship with him, Barrett and Colt. Some days I’m not sure why it even bothered me; I know the kind of men they are and know they’ll treat her right.

When I blew up about the four of them being together, I knew I fucked up

immediately, but I've had problems letting it go. Maybe because I needed to lash out?

Fuck.

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I slump back against my seat and bury my face in my hands.

Is it really that simple? Did I just need to be mad at something and took my feelings, the growing bitterness and mountain of excuses about Piper, out on someone else?

When I look up at Owen he's smiling softly and chuckles, "You figured it out, I see."

"How did you know?" I don't even try and deny it or what he said about Piper. I don't give a fuck if everyone here knows how I feel about my little Button. Hell, they probably do. None of them are slouches and they've been trained by the best and are the best. "Fuck," I shake my head. "I know how you know."

Owen barks out a laugh, "It's always been written all over your face."

"I owe Ella an apology," I mutter. I've already apologized to her, but it had more to do with me wanting to keep my sister in my life than anything else. I look him in the eye and don't back down, "I owe you one too. I'm sorry."

He smirks at me, the fucker, "I know." He holds up the envelope and my stomach twists again. Fucking hell. "Now, what are you going to do about Piper?"

They already know the situation in terms of who Ezra fucking Payne is to her. I'm still not over that my woman put her fucking lips on him, even if it was his cheek and even if they have been friends almost their whole lives. It makes me want to mark every single fucking inch of her.

"She's mine," I tell him simply.

Considering what Owen says about how he feels about Ella, how they all feel about her, he should understand. His grin grows slowly before it fills his face and he nods once, satisfied with my answer. He turns and starts to stride out of my office. I almost yell and stop him considering I still don't know what the fuck is in the envelope he's holding.

He looks at me over his shoulder and gives me a serious look, which is so unlike Owen, "We got this, Landon. We got this. You can't be point on this and you know it. Let us work this side of things and you worry about your girl."

He's gone before I can say anything, but I find my cock lengthening in my pants and my heart rate skyrocketing. My girl. Fuck yes, she is.

Now I can't stop thinking about claiming her. It's the only thing I can seem to think about for the rest of the day along with how her case is going. Time is sluggish and it's hard to concentrate. I swear I keep getting hints of her clementine and grapefruit scent, sweet and tart and all fucking Piper.

When it's time to go, I'm not sure if I'm relieved or not. I'm glad to get her home, somewhere I know she'll be safe, but I'm so fucking keyed up. It's difficult for me to keep my hands off her while I'm driving us home. I want to reach over and touch the soft skin of her knee right below where the pencil skirt she's wearing stops.

I've often wondered, since I hired her, if she knows how much her skirts drive me fucking crazy. The desire to pull it up her legs until it's rucked up around her waist so I can reach her wet pussy has been there from the first time I saw her wear one. It's a starring fantasy of mine when I've stroked my cock to thoughts of Piper.

Now, having seen some of her panties, the need to follow through and show her the dirty visions in my mind are almost too fucking much. I tighten my grip on the steering wheel and clench my jaw. The tension between us seems to grow with every

breath.

She must feel it because by the time we get home, she practically jumps out of the car, her chest heaving. I let out a low growl and then I'm out and around to her. The fear of someone waiting for her, of her being unprotected for even a second, makes fear fill me.

I get right in her space and lean down so I'm looking into her eyes, "You know the rules, Button. You broke them."

Her big brown eyes are wide and wild as she looks at me. When she licks her plump bottom lip with her pink tongue, something snaps inside of me. I know it's the worst place for me to do this. I know it'll leave us both vulnerable. I know it; but it doesn't stop me.

I grip the nape of her neck with one hand, the other yanking her into me so our bodies are aligned. The gasp she lets out might as well be a big neon fucking sign of invitation for me. My lips meet hers and the fucking neon shatters, showering us in dangerous flickering light and sparks.

I don't wait for her to realize what is happening. I deepen the kiss immediately, the way I've wanted to from the moment I met her.

She fits against me perfectly, as if her body was always meant to be pressed against mine.

When Piper moans into my mouth, I pull back from her, my eyes scanning around to ensure we really are safe and my impatience, my need, didn't put my woman in danger. I don't know if I could survive if it did.

Her eyes search mine as her fingers come up and touch her lips, looking plump and

just-been kissed. “Landon,” she whimpers.

I don’t answer. I can’t. We don’t need words between us, anyway. I pick her up and throw her over my shoulder, my hand smoothing over her ass before smacking it. She lets out a low gasp, but it’s a needy sound which makes my cock throb.

“You’re going to pay for not following the rules, my little Button, and you’re going to enjoy every moment of it.” I start moving to take her inside, her fingers curling into my shirt and her body relaxing into mine. I mumble, “I am, too.”

Piper giggles and reaches down to smack my ass, making me stumble slightly as I cross the threshold. I love the sound of her laughter, I always have. I give her ass another smack and chuckle when my girl moans.

Yeah, I’m definitely going to enjoy this.

CHAPTER 5

PIPER

I was not aware alternative universes existed until this precise moment. I know for a fact it's not normal procedure for a client to stay at any of the guy's places. Yet, I've been at Landon's for a few days now. He's been taking great care of me, and I've felt safe the last few days, but this feels like more than keeping me safe.

I haven't been brave enough to ask about it and something in the way he demanded I stay with him made me wonder if I wanted to know. As he stalks into his house with me over his shoulder, I realize I should have asked more questions.

It's not like I don't want this to happen between us, I desperately do. Landon's lips pressed against mine was even better than I imagined. The way the softer curves of my body pressed against the hard lines of his makes me feel safe and at home. I even relished in the way his beard rubbed against the sensitive skin of my face. Still, I don't want to have too much hope.

Could this simply be some sort of stress reliever for him? I'm convenient? Is this some sort of perfunctory payment thing for him keeping me safe? For him having me stay with him?

I shake my head and push those thoughts away. Landon hasn't ever been that guy. I don't think.

When we're in his room, the one room at his place I haven't step foot in, and he's

putting me back on my feet I snap back to reality. The way his body feels against mine makes me shudder in his arms.

His eyes are darker than they normally are and bore into me, making me want to drop to my knees and please him. It's an odd feeling. He's been my boss for years and I've never felt the need to submit to him, not like I do right now. There's a fire there and I desperately want it to burn me alive.

Landon unbuttons his shirt and my eyes drift down to watch as each centimeter of skin is revealed to me. "So naughty," he grits out through his teeth.

My eyes snap up to meet his and I'm not sure if he's angry, the same way I wasn't sure about it in the car. The feeling, the tension, was so oppressive I wasn't sure what to do with myself. It's why I threw myself from his car the moment we arrived. I couldn't take it any longer. It felt like a weight around my neck, one I couldn't dislodge and wasn't sure if I wanted to or not.

Being able to take a deep breath helped me to clear my head. Then he told me I broke his rules and my pussy flooded. Yeah, my body likes being under his control, under his rules. All of me likes it and I'm afraid I like it a little too much.

When Landon lets the shirt drop to the floor, my hands move on their own so my palms skim over his pecs, my fingers moving through the light dusting of hair there. He closes his eyes and tips his head back before his deft fingers start working on my blouse, pulling the hem from the pencil skirt I have on.

"I can't decide if I want to keep the skirt on you while I fuck you or not. I've been fantasizing about taking you while wearing one from the first day," he admits softly, staring into my eyes so I can see the truth there, the fucking need and the desire.

I gasp and furrow my brows together, "I don't understand."

He rips my shirt back and off my arms, letting the fabric flutter to the floor. His eyes soften as his hands come up and cup my face and my hands move over his shoulders. “I know,” he whispers, “and it’s my fault. I shouldn’t have kept pushing you away, Piper. I’ll make it up to you.”

I’m momentarily frozen by his words and the sincerity in his tone. The kiss he presses against my lips this time is soft and sweet, an apology and a promise. I want more. I want him.

When I press my body against his, he growls into my mouth as his arms encircle me to make quick work of my bra. When he unzips my skirt, I know there is no going back from this. I don’t want to, but warning bells chime in my head at the same time.

“Landon, I don’t know what this is,” I breathe out, my mind racing and my body screaming for me to just give in.

“This is me claiming you like I should have done years ago, Piper.” He presses his forehead against mine as his hands rove over my body, lighting me up from the inside out. “You don’t have to believe me, not now, but I’ll prove it to you.” When he tugs me against him this time, I feel the evidence of how much he wants me against my belly. Holy shit. His voice drops an octave, seriousness filling each word, “You need to know I haven’t looked at another woman since the day I hired you. I couldn’t. You had no idea, but I’ve been yours since then and now I’m going to make you mine.”

Everything freezes, my mind, my body, my heart. Everything.

Could his words be true?

Time only starts again when he kisses me, picking me up with his strong hands on my hips. When my legs wrap around his waist, I kick my heels off my feet. He lowers me slowly to the bed, proving his strength, as if I need a reminder, following me down

and blanketing me with his weight.

It's surprisingly grounding, and I'm instantly addicted to the feeling.

I open my mouth, needing to understand, but he doesn't let me get any words out. His lips press against mine and I let everything go. The fear, the concerns, the worry, even the hope for something more than this moment float away from me and within a heartbeat they're farther away than my fingers can reach and grasp.

I give my body over to Landon. I trust him. Maybe I shouldn't all things considered, but I do. I want to be his; I want him to be mine.

I kiss him back and wrap my limbs around his body, very aware that the only thing between us right now are his pants and my flimsy lace panties. Even those layers don't prevent me from feeling every single inch of him. I pull him down against me, wanting more, needing more.

"Please," I gasp out the plea against his lips and feel the way his own curve into a smile.

He moves slowly, deliberately, and pushes up and moves away from me. When he's standing at the edge of the bed, I let my eyes move over him. I take in the tattoo on his arm which is normally covered with the sleeve of his button-down shirt. After Landon smirks and then turns away, I gasp at the eagle which covers the entirety of his back.

He looks over his shoulder at me as he toes off his shoes before undressing completely. When he turns back toward me, I gasp again and this time it has nothing to do with ink and everything to do with his cock. It's perfect. It looks girthy and just the right length and it has one of those unicorn curves. I bet it will hit all the right places inside of me.

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My pussy clenches and all I can think about is having him fill me. Landon's eyes move over my body to take in the way my chest heaves with every breath, the way my nipples harden to diamond points, the way I'm rubbing my thighs together in the hope of getting any fucking relief. I know there's only one thing which will make the growing ache go away and right now he's standing there looking down at me as he lazily strokes his length.

My fucking mouth waters as I watch pre-cum bead at the tip and the thought of swallowing cock has never made my mouth water before. It must be him. There's no other explanation.

My hands slide down my sides and I go to hook my fingers in my panties, needing to get this show on the road. Needing it more than my next breath.

"No," Landon barks and I freeze. My eyes widen and when Landon looks into them, he softens slightly. He shakes his head, "I'm going to undress you, Button. You're my prize and I'm going to savor you."

I swallow hard and whisper, "Prize?"

He nods slowly, his fingertips moving up the outside of my legs toward my hips. "Yes, my prize." His eyes lock with mine when his fingers hook into the band of my panties. "I used to collect buttons when I was a kid. I have no idea why, but I loved them. Each one was a little treasure. No matter how many I collected, there was one that was my favorite. I don't remember when I found it, but I remember it was the only one not in the jar with the others. It was special."

My voice is barely a whisper as he pulls my panties down my legs and they fall open for him, “Is that why you call me ‘Button’?”

Landon nods as his eyes move slowly down my body before locking on my pussy and licking his lips. He groans, “I want to taste your sweet pussy, but I need to be inside you more. Next time, I promise to worship every single inch of you.”

My heart flutters when he says next time as if this isn’t some one-off. I know it shouldn’t. I know it’s dangerous, but I can’t help it. I’ve wanted him for so long and no amount of denying it or trying to forget about it has worked. Now, he’s right here and he’s looking at me with hunger.

“Please,” my voice is high and needy, “I need you inside me Landon.” I spread my legs wider for him. “I fucking ache.”

He groans before he crawls over my body, the feeling of his warm skin against mine both a balm and an accelerant. It is like I can’t get close enough. I need him. Every single inch of him. Especially his perfect dick.

His lips meet mine as his throbbing shafts splits my pussy lips, the head nudging my clit and sending jolts of electricity zinging through me. He groans against my lips, “Need inside you. I don’t want anything between us.”

I wrap my legs around his hips and try to move mine so I can take him inside me, but he’s like a damn statue and doesn’t move as he pulls back and looks into my eyes. “I’m good. I mean,” I take a deep breath and try and get it together, “I’m covered.” I wince. “I’m on birth control.”

Something desolate and full of yearning skitters across Landon’s expression, but it’s gone so fast I might have made it up. Does the thought of having this man breed me have my pussy throbbing? Yes, without a doubt. That’s a cliff I can’t dive off tonight,

no matter how surreal this whole thing already is.

Landon cups one of my tits, tweaking my nipple as he pulls his hips back and fills me in one stroke. I gasp when he hits the back of my channel. Holy mother of curved dicks, yes.

My nails dig into his shoulders as I moan, “Fuck, Landon.”

He smirks down at me and then him and his perfectly quirked cock start to move. The first few thrusts are like flirting with someone for the first time—light and demure. I can feel the strain on his control when my pussy squeezes down on his length.

He growls, “You like my cock, Button?”

“Perfect,” I mewl the declaration and I don’t know if it’s about the shape of him or the rhythm he’s found. Both?

Does it fucking matter? You’re gonna come. Hard.

Our movements speed up, meeting and retreating, a contrast, a duality, a balance which works toward the goal of our pleasure. The sounds of our moans fill the room, the masculinity in his pushes me closer to the edge. I’ve never seen or heard Landon lose control and being witness to it now is an experience.

One I want to treasure. One I’ll hold close for the rest of my life.

“Fuck,” he groans, “you feel so good wrapped around me.” His eyes darken as he looks down at me and nips at my lip. “You gonna cover my cock in your cream, Piper? Gonna squeeze me until I fill you up?”

My back arches and the way the wiry hair on his chest scrapes against my sensitive

nipples has me gasping for breath and trying to hold back. I don't want this to end. I don't want this to ever end.

My heels dig into Landon's ass, and he starts to fuck me faster, a sheen of sweat coating his skin and making my fingertips slip across it. My hips move to meet his and I widen my legs and tilt my hips in the hopes of getting him deeper.

His hand moves down my body before he circles my clit with his thumb. He plunders my mouth, kissing me until I can't breathe. Until the ability to form coherent thought flies out the window. Until my body is strung so tight I'm not sure which way is up or down.

He mumbles against my lips, words of praise and promises of pleasure, but I can't hear any of it beyond the way the words make me feel. My body is focused on the way his cock is sawing in and out of me and the way he's playing with my clit. It's pushing me closer and closer to release.

I'm desperate for it.

I'm screaming for it.

"Come," Landon barks out the word and I swear my world goes white for a moment as my orgasm rips through me and my muscles clench. All of them. He groans, "Fucking hell, your pussy is trying to strangle my cock, Piper."

"Please." I don't know what I'm asking him for.

He must know because he pumps into me a few more times before he presses his cock deep inside me and roars out his release. The sound of it and the feel of him send aftershocks through my body as I ride the wave of our, now, combined pleasure.

Landon's mouth crashes against mine as he fills me with his cum and my body seizes up, freezing and holding to try and prolong the good things, the best things, the feel of him. I know I can't though. Even while Landon strums my clit one more time.

When our lips part, we're panting, our heartbeats pounding in our chests, and staring into each other's eyes. I don't know what he sees in mine, but I know what I see in his. I see a future, a possibility.

I can only hope it's real instead of just my imagination.

CHAPTER 6

LONDON

My eyes pop open and I know, immediately, something isn't right. I take a deep breath and listen to the room around me before I swing my head sharply to the side to confirm what I already know to be true. Piper isn't in bed with me. She's not snuggled into my chest. I'm not spooning her.

She should be cocooned in my warmth right now and instead she's...not.

Where the fuck is she?

I hear noises coming from the kitchen and start to stalk toward the door, intent on grabbing her and hauling her cute as fuck ass back to my bed, but when I look down at myself, I realize I'm naked and with a glance at the clock I see we're going to be late if I don't hurry the fuck up.

Damn it.

I power through a shower, ignoring my cock when it hardens at thoughts of what it would be like to have Piper with me in the shower.

Not the time and not the place. Not this morning at least.

When I get down to the kitchen, dressed and ready for the day, I find Piper already there with a cup of coffee. She's staring into nothingness, so I take a moment to

admire my woman. She's so damn beautiful, but in an unassuming way. She's not the type of woman to flaunt her looks or use them as a trap.

Hell, she doesn't need to anyway. She's perfect just the way she is and draws people in without trying. I love her for it, and it also makes me want to roar. It means she's going to need my constant protection which makes me feel possessive as fuck. I'm not going to be able to let her out of my sight.

Considering I've been pushing her away for years, I'm surprisingly okay with the thought of having her and keeping her.

How soon can I get her pregnant?

It's not something I've ever considered, but the moment I met Piper a lot of things I thought I knew changed. Now that I've had her, been deep inside of her and felt her pussy squeeze me like magic or some shit, I'm embracing all my psychotic thoughts about her without a care.

I clear my throat and Piper jumps, letting out a little squeak as she does. When she turns toward me slowly, her eyes are big and round. Fucking adorable.

She winces slightly as if she's afraid of my reaction. She should be because she left my bed, and I didn't have the pleasure of getting to wake up with her in my arms. I have a feeling if I say as much to her she'll run so I keep it to myself.

For now.

Her voice is tentative, "Good morning?"

I grin at her, my voice a husky rasp, "Good morning, Button."

The slight blush which rises on her cheeks makes my cock throb, but I ignore it. She's trying to figure this thing out between us and I'm not going to push her. Not yet. Not right now.

As I make a cup of coffee, I can feel her eyes on me. I don't mind at all. When I'm done, I turn to her and fight the instinct to pull her against me and kiss her until she can't breathe, until she can't think.

"Ready to head out?" The only reason I can keep my voice even is because of my training, I'm sure of it.

Her little nod is all I need, and I lead her out to my car and make sure she gets in safely before I close her door. The drive to Sullivan Protection is silent, but I know it's quiet she needs. You learn about the woman you love when you've been watching her for years. She's the kind of person who needs to think things through. I can only hope she doesn't end up regretting what happened between us.

I don't have room in my heart for regrets, not when she takes up so much of it.

What if she does regret it? Say something! Put her at ease.

"Piper," I start, but she shakes her head, and the rest of my words die in my throat.

"Can we not talk about this right now?" She doesn't look at me, but there's something broken in her voice.

Shit. Did I fuck up? Again?

When we park and I lead her inside, with every breath it feels like she's retreating farther and farther from me. It makes me feel like my skin is too tight on my body. I want to scratch it and pull it from my muscles piece by piece.

The moment we step off the elevator, she walks to her desk with her shoulders hunched down. The demons of my past, the ones who have whispered in my ear since the moment I met Piper, are back. They murmur that I will never be enough for her. They breathe that I will never be able to love her the way she needs. They remind me I'm damaged and she's better off without me.

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A shudder racks through her body as she places her cup down and I find my feet frozen barely off the elevator. She starts to head down the hallway to the small common area where the coffee pot and fridge are. I don't think she's going to look back at me, but she glances over her shoulder anyway.

What I see on her face guts me. There are tears in her eyes and defeat in her gaze.

She's running.

When she turns into the small room, my feet finally come unglued from the floor and I'm pounding down the hallway toward her. Before I can get there, Blaze steps out of his office, a stern look on his face. The man barely talks, but I get the feeling he has some words for me. He's always been protective of the people he considers family and Piper is included in his short list.

"Why the fuck did Piper look like she was crying?" There's a clear threat in his voice, "What did you do?"

I step up and get right in his face and snarl, "What I did isn't any of your business, but I know you're only trying to protect my woman, so I won't punch you for having the fucking audacity to ask me such a thing. I will say I claimed her. She's mine. She knows it." Some of the fire in me deflates at the thought of the tears, uncertainty and pain in her eyes when she looked back at me. "I thought she needed some space to process, but I realize now I was wrong."

Blaze studies my face for a moment before grunting, "Take care of it."

I give him a nod, knowing I won't be stopping until it's taken care of. Until she knows what she means to me. Until I put all her fears and worries to rest. When Blaze steps out of my way, I'm on the move again.

Piper's shoulders are practically falling in on herself when I slip into the room, closing and locking the door behind me. The way her shoulders move tells me she's crying and my heart sinks. I was trying to do the right thing and I still fucked up.

Maybe I'm not the right man for her.

No, you just need to stop fucking up. You need to be honest. You need to tell her how you feel.

"Piper," I breathe out her name as I close the distance between us. When my back is pressed against her front, she starts shaking her head rapidly and her hands come up to cover her face. Fuck. I grip her shoulder and turn her, but she doesn't drop her hands, doesn't let me see her gorgeous face. "I'm sorry, Piper. I thought you needed some space. I thought you just needed some time to think and process, but you really needed me to reassure you. I fucked up. Again."

Her dark brown eyes peek up at me from between her fingers. It would be adorable if her eyes weren't rimmed with red, making me want to kick my own ass. I bet Blaze would do it for me and I might just let him later, but right now I need to focus on my little Button in front of me.

"Last night," she croaks.

I don't know if she has anything else to say or not because I'm not going to let her finish her thought. "It was the best night of my fucking life, Button." Her hands fall to her sides and her eyes widen as she stares up at me. I band my arms around her and pull her into my chest, not leaving any space between us. "The fucking best. I'm

sorry I gave you any room to doubt me or what you mean to me. That's on me."

She shakes her head slowly, her mouth opening and closing before one word slips past her lips, "What?"

I give her a small smile because she has no idea what she does to me, what she means to me. "I've pushed you away for so long, I thought you needed a little time, a little space to process what happened."

"Space?" Her eyebrows furrow together. "You were trying to give me space? You don't regret what happened? You don't want it to just go back to," she pauses and winces as her eyes fill with hurt and pain, "to how we were before last night? Before I was threatened?"

I let out a low growl, my entire body revolting at the notion of us going back. "No," I bark, and she blinks up at me. I cup her face in my hands. "I meant every single word I said to you, and I feel more for you than I could even express. I held back because I don't want to scare you. I don't regret a damn thing that happened last night." I kiss her lips softly, murmuring against them, "The only regret I have is not letting you in and telling you what I knew the moment I met you, Piper; not making you mine then."

"You don't regret having sex with me?" Her voice is barely there, but I hear it all the same.

"Never," I snarl the word. "I don't regret making love to you, Button. I never could. Never." I look into her eyes, willing her to hear me and to understand. "You hear me? Fucking never. You're mine. I'm yours." I pepper her face in kisses and feel her relax into me little by little. "I should have told you back then because I knew it the moment I met you. There was never a single doubt. I knew it. I was just scared."

She scoffs, “You, Landon Sullivan, were scared?”

I chuckle under my breath and nod, tucking her into my chest where she burrows deeper. “I was scared because there are times when it feels like my demons will drag me down to hell. I was scared because you’re too damn good for me, Piper. I don’t deserve you. I probably never will, but I also know you’re the other half of my soul and I’ll put in the work every single day for the rest of my life to work at being the man who deserves you.”

She gasps and pulls back from me so fast, my hands scramble in order to grab her and not let her fall back on her ass. Hell, the room is small enough that she’d probably hit her head. Not on my fucking watch. Hell no.

There’s chastisement in her tone, “Landon Sullivan, I better never hear you say such a thing again. I won’t tolerate such bullshit being spoken in my presence.” Despite how raw it feels having displayed all my worries, all my vulnerabilities and the whispers of my demons, I find myself smiling. “You are the most amazing man I’ve ever met. You have no idea how honored I’ve been to work here, to see the work you do and how committed you are to protecting the people who need you. It has been more rewarding than I thought it would be.”

“That’s just my job,” I insist.

Her hands come up and bury into my hair, giving a little tug. “No,” she grits out. Her eyes soften as she looks at me. “It’s who you are, Landon. You care about others. You make sure they’re safe. You’re a good man.”

“I don’t just care about others, Piper,” I whisper the words somehow even though I’m almost too in awe of her and her conviction to speak. “Helping people in need is my penance, my attempt to balance the scales for the things I’ve done and seen.”

She sighs and shakes her head, “You have nothing to atone.” I’m ready to dispute her words even though I know I can’t tell her much of anything, but she cuts me off. “I don’t need to know what you did, what you were ordered to do or what went wrong in order to know what I’m saying is true.” She looks deep into my eyes, and I swear I can feel her brushing against my soul. “We all have demons because it’s part of being human; it’s part of living. Yours pushed you into the life you’re living.”

It's hard to listen to her, to reconcile her words with everything I've been telling myself for years. The flashes in my mind of the atrocities I've seen are hard to swallow. Does it matter that they were done in the attempt to do what's right?

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Piper sighs. “Will you stop helping people when the karmic scales are balanced?”

“No,” I rear back from her as if she’s slapped me, “of course not.”

“Exactly,” she says matter-of-factly. The sly smile she gives me tells me she just proved her point about me. Maybe she did.

She says it with so much conviction, her big eyes looking up at me with so much innocence and knowing. I don’t know how or why but all the things I’ve told myself, the explanations I’ve made and the things I’ve believed, burn to ash in my mind and on my tongue.

There is only one truth left in the cinders.

“I love you, Piper,” the words are spoken with conviction as I pull her impossibly closer, my lips hovering over hers.

She gasps, “I love you, Landon.”

When I kiss her this time, there is nothing between us. There is no past which weighs on me. There is no danger to her in the present. There is only us.

Somehow, it feels like the first kiss of the rest of my life.

CHAPTER 7

PIPER

I feel a buzzing underneath my skin even though something has settled deep inside of me since Landon told me he loves me, and I returned the sentiment. It's been a few weeks since then and I've been getting periodic threats even though no one will share them with me. Which, honestly, is for the best. I've had nightmares as it is, and I don't need any more fodder for my subconscious.

It's the weekend and this one, just like the last one, I've been stuck inside Landon's place. I might love it here and find it feels more like home than anywhere else I've ever lived, but, at some point, I need to go outside. Right? At the very least, people need sunshine. I might be getting a lot of dick, but it's not a replacement for vitamin D.

Yeah, even my mental jokes have devolved to the level of a frat boy.

This isn't good.

I'm antsy and it feels like everything is closing in around me. I don't know how much more of this I can take. I need to do something. I don't even know what, but I feel like I'm going to lose it and I can only hope Landon won't be in my line of fire when I do.

He's already beating himself up enough over holding me at a distance for years. I don't know what would happen to his fragile little heart if I blew up at him.

He might be a badass former SEAL who could kill someone with ease, but he's so damn delicate it hurts sometimes. I think my love is shoring him up, but it's hard to tell sometimes. He's not the best at letting me in, even though I can tell he's trying.

Landon presses his hand to my shoulder while I'm anxiously sitting on the couch in his living room, and I let out a yelp of surprise and whip around to look at him so fast I almost fall off the edge. His eyes are assessing as he looks at me. It's an appraisal I can hardly stand right now because it pushes me even closer to my breaking point.

"Piper," his voice is so damn gentle it causes tears to spring to my eyes.

I glance away and gnaw at my lip, unsure of whether I want to break down in tears or yell at him until I don't have a voice anymore.

I know he's trying to keep me safe. I know it. I do. I promise.

Knowing it doesn't make it any easier to swallow.

"Get changed, Button," there's a command in his voice which has me looking up into his earnest eyes. "You're going stir crazy and I've been too selfish to do anything about it because I love you being here so damn much, but that means I haven't been taking care of you properly."

"You've been taking great care of me," I insist.

He shakes his head, his eyes turning fierce and hard. "I've kept you safe, that's true, but I've also kept you from living your life and it's going to end today."

My voice is hesitant, "Are you saying you don't want me here anymore?"

The thought of it, of not sleeping next to him with his warmth curled around me, of

not hearing his morning voice in my ear telling me good morning, of not doing the domestic things which have made us closer recently, makes an ache grow inside of me.

“No,” he barks out making my eyes widen. He takes a deep breath and lets it out slowly, moderating his voice better. “This is your home, Piper, that’s not what I’m saying at all, but we’re going to spend the day out of the house.”

The resolve in his voice chases away my insecurities and I find myself perking up, my voice hopeful, “Really?”

“Yeah, of course.” His shoulders tense for a moment, his voice soft, “Do you trust me to keep you safe?”

I jump up and move around the couch, wrapping my arms around his waist. I melt into him when he wraps his own around me and holds me tight. I murmur against his chest, “I trust you, Landon, with everything in me. I know you’ll keep me safe.” I peek up at him, resting my chin on his chest, “I love you.”

Landon presses his lips to my forehead before pulling away and turning me toward the bedroom where my clothes have mixed with his over the last few weeks. I wonder if he knows he’s going to have to pack up all my crap and take me back to my place if he wants me to leave. I don’t think I’ll have the strength to do it myself.

When I don’t move right away, too lost in thought of me never leaving, he gives my ass a slap to get me moving. The look I send over my shoulder is supposed to be a glare, but it’s nowhere close. His smirk is all I need to see to know my look is the farthest thing possible from annoyance; it’s want with a heaping side of ‘come and get me’.

When he doesn’t follow, I’m not sure if I should be relieved or a little put out. I figure

it's okay to be both. I pull a dress over my head, reveling in the summertime weather that's not too hot yet. Then there's the thought of putting on denim and considering the beard burn he left on my thighs after feasting on my pussy this morning, I'm going to pass.

After I slip on sandals, I'm almost bouncing on my toes as I go back to where Landon is waiting for me. I smile at him so big my cheeks hurt and he chuckles, the amused sound so damn deep it causes me to stutter a step before I get myself under control.

He arches an eyebrow at me from the look of awe on my face, "What?"

I close the distance between us, his eyes running down my body and making it heat a little more. As if the way his laugh wrapped around me and ignited every one of my nerve endings wasn't enough. I wrap my arms around his neck, still a little surprised I get to do it in reality and not only my dreamscape.

"I like it when you laugh," there's honesty in my words and he blinks down at me.

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“You make me happy, Button.” He kisses my forehead and lets out a breath. “So damn happy.”

One of his arms wraps around me and anchors me to his body, the other plunges a hand into my hair so he can hold me in place as his lips descend. I kiss him back, wanting to get closer, needing it. Too soon he breaks away and I try and follow his lips, pressing up on my tiptoes as I let out a little mewl of disappointment.

“Come on, it’s time to get you out of the house for a little while,” his voice is a husky rasp and I know he’s thinking about forgetting about taking me out so he can haul me back to bed instead.

I don’t know how he has the strength to put some distance between us and I hate the loss of his warmth instantly. When he holds his hand out to me, something flutters inside of me. After I lock our hands together, our fingers twining, we’re off.

I don’t even care where we’re going when we slide into a taxi and head off. It must be someplace with shit parking because Landon does not like going places without being the one driving. I want to look out the window, but Landon starts chatting with me about random things, including telling me some stories about him growing up. I smile when Barrett, Owen and Colt make an appearance in those stories.

I squeeze his hand and speak softly when he looks at me, “You know you have to give it up when it comes to Ella being with them, right?”

He sighs and eyes me, but there’s a playfulness to it which makes me smile. “I know. I’m pretty much over it.” He looks down at our hands, still clasped together and

purses his lips, something he does when he's thinking over his words. "I just wish they would have told me. I hate that they felt like they needed to keep it a secret." When he looks at me again, there is pain in his eyes. "It stung; you know?"

I give his hand a squeeze and pull him close enough to kiss him by gripping his t-shirt. I murmur against his lips, "I know. I'm sorry. I'm sure they were afraid of your reaction. There's still a bridge there, Landon. You need to help with restoring it."

His free hand comes up and cups my cheek, stroking his thumb along the skin under my eye. "I know," he whispers. "I already am, and I'll keep doing it. I don't want to miss out on being an uncle."

I blink at him a few times, the image of us having our own child slamming into me. It's something I've thought about since the first time we were together. I never let myself think about it before because it stung too much. Now, I'm free to fantasize all I want.

My cocky SEAL who shows me he cares in so many damn ways, smirks at me and I melt against him. When he kisses the top of my head, he murmurs, "I can't wait until it's us growing our family."

"Yeah," I dreamily breathe out before I jerk back and gape up at him when his words truly sink in. "Are you serious right now?"

There's a mischievous twinkle in his eyes, but he doesn't answer. Instead, he rasps, "We're here."

I look out the window and notice we're at Central Park and I go to open the door. I love Central Park and I don't give a flying fuck if it's cliché or not. It's never been the closest green space to me in the city, but it's my favorite one. Landon clears his throat, and the sound is enough to make me freeze.

When I look at him, he's got an eyebrow raised. I flash him my most innocent smile and bat my eyelashes at him. With a shake of his head in admonishment, he's out the door and around to my side.

When we're out of the taxi, I link my arm in his, more than ready to experience one of my favorite places with the man I love. I'm smiling so big, I'm sure I look like a tourist, but I don't give a fuck. It's the perfect day for a stroll here.

There's a hint of vulnerability in his voice, "You happy?"

I turn to Landon and nod before asking softly, "You remembered?"

Mentioning my love for Central Park was in passing. I didn't realize he had taken that information and filed it away. I shouldn't have ever doubted him.

He scoffs and gives me a pointed look causing me to blush. "Of course, I remembered, Piper." He shakes his head and kisses my temple, before his gaze sweeps around us.

As much as I wish he could relax, I know he won't because he doesn't want me to be put in danger. Anyway, his protectiveness is sexy as fuck, and it turns me on. I try and press my thighs together as we walk and I soak up the sun, but it does nothing to help me.

"Thank you," my words are filled with gratitude as I give his arm a squeeze. "This is perfect."

I don't know how long we walk, but I don't care. It's not only being out in the sun or being around people which is making this so amazing and recharging. There's something extra special about being here with Landon. It sets me alight and calms me.

Sometimes we chat, but most of the time we walk with quiet between us, but it doesn't hang there. It wraps around me in comfort. Just like Landon does.

Well, when he's not turning me into a pile of orgasmic bliss at least.

"I was thinking," Landon starts out gruffly and my heart skips a beat in anticipation, "it might be a good idea for me to teach you some self-defense."

When I glance at him, he looks so damn sincere I can't help but laugh. It's adorable when his mouth drops open in surprise. It only makes me laugh harder.

"It's not even that funny," I gasp out as I wave a dismissive hand. "I'm not sure why I'm laughing." I take a deep breath and then let it out slowly, getting myself under control. Landon is staring at me curiously now. "I'm a single woman in New York, you don't think I've taken self-defense?"

He seems to puff up with pride for a moment, but then it quickly deflates. He grits out, "Have you ever had to use it?"

There's a madness in his eyes which tells me he would like nothing more than to go out and find whoever might have threatened my safety. I shake my head and try not to moan at the look in his eyes.

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“No, I’ve never had to use it.”

“Good,” he breathes out. “Still, it won’t hurt to keep those skills up.”

I think I fall a little more in love with the man at his words. He doesn’t discount what I’ve learned or think he’s the only person who will ever be able to keep me safe, he only wants to support me.

“You gonna show me your moves, Mr. Sullivan?”

“You got that right, Button,” Landon groans and kisses me softly and swiftly. I know why he does. I know we’re vulnerable. I take one more look at the park around us and then back up to the man I’ve been in love with since the moment I met him.

“Thank you for bringing me here, it was just what I needed.” He smiles down at me before he scans the area again. “Take me home.”

His eyes snap back around to me and he furrows his eyebrows. “We can stay. You’re safe.”

“I know, but I’m ready to go home. I’ve got my fill,” I pause and Landon’s eyes heat, “of the park at least. I could be filled in other ways.” I wiggle my eyebrows at him with a goofy smile on my face.

Landon throws his head back and laughs and, fuck, if it isn’t better than his chuckle. It’s a carefree sound, one which bombs, war, and memories won’t touch. Because it can’t.

“I think that can be arranged,” amusement fill his words and he kisses my temple before he leads me back the way we came.

He’s vigilant and the way he relaxes slightly the moment we’re in the taxi tell me I made the right choice. I know he’ll prove it to me too just as soon as we get home. My thighs squeeze together at the thought.

Orgasms really are their own reward, aren’t they?

CHAPTER 8

LONDON

I never used to hate Mondays, but ever since I've had my little Button in my bed, and I've made sure to take weekends off my opinion on them have changed. Mondays fucking suck.

Getting out of bed in the morning and knowing I'm not going to be buried balls deep inside my girl for most of the day is not a good feeling. Piper's pussy is my damn happy place. I'm not even a little bit ashamed to admit it.

From the moment my eyes popped open this morning, to find Piper sliding out of bed, all I wanted to do was pull her back into the comfortable recesses of our bed and never leave. I reached for her, but she saw me and scurried just out of reach with laughter on her lips and a smile in her eyes as she looked back at me.

Watching her walk into the bathroom naked with her hips swinging was too much to take. I was out of bed and wrapping her up in my arms as the water in the shower heated up. The moment it was warm enough, I was picking her up and pressing her against the wall. Taking her mouth, kissing her, as I slide into her warm, wet depths is the only way to start the day.

The only fucking way.

When I kissed her as I fucked her against the tile of the shower, I promised, "I'll worship your body tonight, but I can't let you start your day without me claiming

every part of you.”

Her eyes sparkled as she looked up at me, her limbs clinging to me. We chased our release with our gazes locked and our love in synch.

A lesser man would think she’s making me weak because she’s the only thing I can think about most of the time, but I know it’s not the case. I think about one of my friends, Blake Higgins, who I helped with an issue his woman was having a few years ago. He’s not the only one in his family who has found their soul mate and are obsessed with their other half. Blake is the farthest thing from weak on this entire fucking planet, so I know being whole, even as you battle your demons, only makes one stronger.

What it doesn’t do is help get through the day when we’re apart.

I have to stop myself from leaving my office and stalking her at the receptionist desk, knowing damn well I’d never be able to stick to the shadows. She’s too much of a draw. I can’t keep my hands off her.

The day might pass slowly, but when it’s finally time to shut the office portion down, I’m more than ready to take Piper into the gym and see what she can do. The thought of her being vulnerable and at risk makes my heart pound in my chest and my soul feel like it’s in a vice being tightened second by second.

I’ve told everyone the gym is off limits tonight. There’s no way I’m going to let anyone else see her in the leggings and sports bra I saw her stuff into her bag this morning. I know she needs to be comfortable, but damn, seeing her like that is only for me. I’m not going to apologize for it.

I move down the hallway on silent feet and stop at the edge of Piper’s desk, watching as she straightens everything up and shuts down her computer. “Hi my little Button,”

I growl, the need I have for her riding me hard.

How the fuck am I going to get through this without taking her down to the mat and fucking her senseless? I guess I could considering I ensured our privacy. My cock thickens at the thought.

Fuck.

First things first. Self-defense, then orgasms.

Piper jumps a little before turning to me slowly, her eyes taking me in. Her words are sassy, “For such a big guy, you certainly move silently.”

I grin at her and shrug, “It’s the training.”

“It shouldn’t be so damn sexy,” she mutters under her breath, but I hear, and her words make my smile grow.

My voice drops and I take a step around her desk, “You think I’m sexy?”

Piper rolls her eyes and waves her hand dismissively, “Of course I think you’re sexy. Have you looked at you?”

I bark out a laugh and pull her chair back from her desk, turning her toward me and grabbing the arm rests on either side of her, caging her as I lean into her. The way her eyes dilate, and her breathing picks up is a fucking turn on. I love how I affect her.

She does the same for me.

I kiss her lips softly, desperately wanting to deepen it, but knowing I shouldn’t. Not right now anyway. “You’re going to show me what you remember, we’ll go over a

few things and then I'm going to take you down to the ground and fuck you until you're screaming my name," I rasp against her lips.

"Make sure you disinfect the mats," the words come from behind us and are full of amusement.

Piper lets out a little squeak of embarrassment, but I don't give a fuck if anyone hears about my plans for my little button. Even more reason for them to steer clear of the gym. I kiss my girl again, pouring all my plans and dirty thoughts into it.

When I break apart from her and we turn toward the hallway leading to the offices, Weston and Easton are standing there with big ass grins on their faces. I flip them off, but all it does is make them chuckle. Piper snorts out a laugh which has me smiling down at her. It shouldn't be adorable and endearing, but it is. Everything she does is.

Piper stands up and grabs her bag, which I take from her immediately. She glares at me, but there's no heat behind it. When I shrug, she just rolls her eyes in response. Yeah, I might not be perfect, and I might have pushed her away for way too fucking long, but now Piper is mine and I'm going to treat her the best I can.

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Piper's voice is chipper, "Are you guys coming to the gym with us?" She tilts her head as she looks at them, "I know you usually work out after work, but it doesn't look like you're dressed for it today. Is there," she scrunches her eyebrows and looks toward her now dark computer, "some client thing which wasn't on the schedule?"

Easton scoffs, "Your man made sure to tell us the gym is off limits today."

Piper gasps, "What?" She shakes her head, her voice insistent, "That's ridiculous. Of course, you can use the gym. Landon is just going to go over some self-defense stuff with me."

Weston barks out a laugh, "You might be the person who keeps us on track, Piper, but there's no way I'm going against the boss on this one."

I smirk down at my woman before I tuck her into my side. "That's right. No one is going to see you in your workout clothes, little Button. Just accept it."

She rolls her eyes but doesn't say anything else. With a goodbye, we leave the twins to do whatever they do, and I lead my woman deeper into our office space and to the gym. I only breathe a sigh of relief when we enter and it's empty.

When we head into the locker room to get changed, it takes everything in me not to take my woman right here and now, pressing her hands to the lockers and popping her hip into the perfect position so I can slam into her from behind.

It's fucking tempting as hell, especially when I see her ass in her leggings. Some things should be fucking illegal, and my woman's ass is one of them. Then covered in

lycra which is like a second skin? Holy shit.

I force myself to walk out the bathroom and into the gym, but I don't look back to see if my woman is following me. I can't. If I look at her now, I won't be able to get anything else done.

She captivates me and holds me in the palm of her hand without any effort. She's perfectly compact with curves in all the right places. I know exactly what she looks like under the little bit of clothes she has on and knowing is a fucking tease. How much she turns me on is obscenely obvious with the shorts I have on.

I don't know how I'm going to do this being so hard, but I'm going to have to figure it out.

Only when I'm in the middle of the floor do I stop and turn around. The view of my woman walking toward me, her hips swaying with her body practically exposed to me and her hair in a messy bun on top of her head has me groaning. The way her eyes light up and the cheeky smile she gives me tells me she knows exactly what she's doing to me.

I reach down and adjust my cock without a shred of shame. When she blushes as she watches the movement, I can't help but grin.

My voice is husky and filled with warning, "You're playing with fire, Button."

Piper makes a humming sound but doesn't respond as she stands in front of me and readies herself. I'm a little surprised at her stance and that juxtaposition of being proud and pissed comes over me. My woman only smirks up at me as if she knows the battle going on inside of me.

"You ready?" She taunts me and I fall in love with her just a little bit more.

We go through some basic moves and different holds and with each one, the pride I feel grows. She knows her self-defense and I'm so damn relieved I almost forget about the fact that she's felt the need to be good at this because she knows the dangers out there.

I hate it.

I gnash my teeth together as I stomp away from her to grab some bottles of water. When I turn, I jump a little because Piper is right there and looking up at me with concern in her eyes.

Her question is cautious with a hint of vulnerability, "What has you so mad, Landon?"

I sigh before I open one of the waters and hand it to her. As I run a hand along my jaw, my fingers running through my beard, my voice is thick with emotion, "I hate you know all of that because you needed to keep yourself safe." She opens her mouth, but I cut her off with a shake of my head. "Don't get me wrong, I'm damn proud of you, but I still hate it."

Piper takes the bottle of water from me, making sure the cap is on before putting them down and wrapping her arms around my neck. When she pulls me down to meet her, I don't resist. Why would I? She kisses me sweetly, but with the way she's pressed against me, I can't help myself and deepen it immediately.

I growl against her lips and lift her. The feel of her legs wrapping around my waist as she grinds down against the ridge of my cock is almost too much to take. As I stride through the gym and back into the bathroom, I mumble, "Work out time is done."

She giggles and it is music to my ears. I move quickly, undressing us and starting the shower. When her feet are firmly on the ground, I wash her efficiently because I can't

help myself. I need her.

I drop to my knees in front of her and pull her leg up over my shoulder, staring at her wet pussy. “So fucking pink and perfect,” I groan. “I need to taste you, Button.”

When her nails scrape against my scalp and she takes hold of my hair, I dive into her. I run my tongue up her slit, collecting as much of her taste as I can. Flicking the tip of my tongue against her clit has her moaning and tilting her head back. Her knees buckle when I suck her clit into my mouth, but I have a hold on her and I’m not going to let her fall.

I’ll never let her fall.

“You taste so fucking good,” the words are growled against her and I’m not even sure if she can hear or understand me.

“Please,” she keens.

I’ll always give her what she wants. I adjust my hold so I can pump two of my fingers into her. Looking up at her, seeing her reaction to me, has me harder than fucking stone.

“Your pussy is begging to come, Button,” I grit out through my teeth, trying to keep control of my own body. Watching her and feeling her is almost enough to send me over the edge, but I’m not going to come again until I’m inside her. “You need to come all over my tongue so I can fill you with my cock.”

When I suck her clit back into my mouth and I nip at it with my teeth, she screams out her release. Watching her fall apart is fucking glorious and I know I’ll never get tired of it.

We're not done in this shower, not by a long shot. The hooded eyes she watches me with as I stand tells me she knows exactly what is about to happen and how much she wants it too. When she leaps at me, I catch her easily, pressing her back against the wall and plunging into her tight, wet heat at the same time.

The next time we come, it's going to be together. I can't wait to give her pleasure for the rest of our lives. She deserves nothing less.

CHAPTER 9

PIPER

Sometimes bliss makes you stupid and careless. It's the only excuse I have for the position I'm in right now. I shouldn't have ignored the threats, even if I haven't seen the ones which have come in after the first one. I shouldn't have left the safety of Sullivan Protection, even if I was trying to do my job.

It was stupid.

I've never stared down the barrel of a gun before, but now I'm in a dirty as fuck alleyway doing just that. The woman aiming at me looks disturbed to a point I'm not sure if I'm more scared because of the gun or the look in her eyes.

Fuck.

Landon is going to spank my ass if I get out of this in one piece.

When lunch time rolled around and the guys were still in a meeting, I figured it wouldn't be a big deal for me to walk a few blocks to the deli we order food from. I thought I'd be safe considering it's the middle of the day and I wasn't going very far. I was wrong. I know it now.

The only good thing in this situation is I don't have any regrets when it comes to my life. I finally told Landon how I feel, and I've been so damn happy since the moment the walls between us crumbled. I should have remembered the only reason things

happened between us was because I was in danger, and it snapped him out of his excuses.

Now? Fuck. If this goes badly, I know he'll never forgive himself. He'll never let anyone else into his heart. He'll let himself fall victim to his demons again. It'll be all my fault if it goes down that way.

All for some fucking sandwiches.

I hold my hands up and keep my voice low, "Look, I don't know what you want, but I have some cash. I'll give it to you."

The maniacal laughter coming from her chills me to the bone even with how hot the day is. She shakes her head and sobers when I try and inch away from her since her laughter caused her to drop her gun slightly. I freeze when the barrel is pointed at me again.

As much as I hate to admit it, all my self-defense training goes out the window. All I can feel is the fear and the need to flee. I hate how it makes me feel weak. I hate how much power it gives this woman.

"You think I want your cash?" Her voice is lyrical, but in a creepy, taunting kind of way. "I don't. I want you out of the way?"

"Out of the way?" Maybe if I can keep her talking, I'll be able to figure something out. "What are you talking about?"

When she narrows her eyes at me, I hazard a glance over her shoulder to see people walking past the mouth of the alley, but no one looks our way. I've always liked how you can feel anonymous in the streets of New York, but right now I hate it. I hate it so damn much.

She seethes, “Don’t even think about it. If you scream for help, I will shoot you.”

I straighten my spine and try to exude as much confidence as possible. “Won’t you shoot me anyway?”

She sneers at me. “Yeah, I will. You’re in my way.”

I wish I could stomp my foot in frustration, but I can’t. Tears prick at the back of my eyes, but I can’t let my emotions get the better of me. Not right now. My life is on the line. My future with Landon is on the line. I can’t let myself get pulled under.

I shake my head and soften my voice to a gentle plea, “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

She barks out a laugh. “You’re a lying slut.” She takes a step toward me, but I’m thankful there’s still some distance. I know what a close-range gunshot wound would do to me. Sometimes the job I have is a blessing, but right now it’s a damn curse. “You tried to take Ezra away from me and I can’t have that. I can’t.” Her voice drops and is deathly calm, too fucking calm, “He’s mine.”

“Ezra?” I scrunch up my face. I knew this had something to do with Ezra since the photos used for the first threatening card has the photos from our dinner, but hearing it said out loud is something different. It knocks me off balance. “I’m only Ezra’s friend. We grew up together.”

“He hugged you and you kissed his cheek,” she screeches the words and I flinch.

“We’ve known each other forever.” My mind is whirling so fast. I wish I could see Landon one more time, but I can feel the situation ramping up with every heartbeat. I know I don’t have a lot more time and I don’t know how to talk this woman down considering she’s not listening to a thing I say. “I’m very happy and in love with

someone else. Not Ezra,” I put as much conviction into those two words as I can, hoping she believes me.

She seems to falter for a moment, but then her eyes narrow and she shakes her head sharply. “You’re lying. You’d say anything right now. I saw you. My Ezra looked at you with love in his eyes. Love that should be mine,” her voice is getting louder and louder with every word and the crazed look in her eyes only gets more severe.

I whimper with the thought of dying here. I don’t want to. I want to get to be in Landon’s arms again. I want to be able to tell him I love him. I want to wake up with him wrapped around me, just one more time would be enough. I close my eyes for a brief moment and remember how damn good it felt this morning. He was so warm and comforting. I could feel the love between us like a living thing.

Now, I’m cold, even on this summer day, and surrounded by trash and who the fuck knows what else.

I’m never eating a sandwich again if I get out of this.

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I open my mouth, but nothing comes out. I've told her the truth and there isn't anything else to say. "I'm sorry if that hurt you," I hedge.

When I glance over her shoulder again, I almost let the tears fall when I see Hale and Blaze walking on silent feet toward us. Relief tries to fill me, but I push it away. I'm not safe yet. I won't be until I'm in Landon's arms.

Where is he?

"Hurt me?" She spits her words at my feet, full of venom and hatred. "You destroyed me." I want to scream and ask why she's not taking out her anger on Ezra, but I know that would be stupid and unhelpful. It doesn't matter that I'm the focus of her ire and I need to keep myself together. Just a little bit longer. "He's mine. I'm his biggest fan. I've been to all his games. He loves me," her words are spoken with such desperation and pain it takes my breath away.

"I promise," I take a deep breath and let it out slowly, "I'll stay away from him. You can have him."

I don't know if my approach will work considering telling her the truth hasn't helped, but when her shoulders relax slightly a little bit of hope blooms inside of me. Blaze and Hale are so close, I can see the fear in their eyes. Hale puts a finger in front of his lips as if I wouldn't keep quiet about their approach or something.

Yeah, announce to the person who is clearly in a mental health crisis that the calvary has arrived? I don't think so.

“He’s been tainted now,” her lip curls up with her words. “I’ll be dealing with him next, but you’re first on the list. You stole him from me. I want him to feel the same pain I did. There’s only one way to do it and I’ve been waiting and watching for the perfect opportunity.”

It’s a flurry of movement when Blaze reaches out and hits her wrist in such a way that she drops the gun. It clatters to the ground at the same time Hale wraps his arms around her and she starts to thrash. The tears I’ve been holding back now fall down my cheeks.

“Clear,” Blaze shouts toward the front of the alleyway at the same time police cars screech to a halt at the entrance and Landon comes around the corner.

My feet move without conscious thought. I start to run to him, needing his arms around me, needing his warmth. Hell, I’ll even take his anger right now. I’ll welcome it and accept it.

Because I was stupid, and I made the wrong decision. I put myself in danger.

When I reach him, I don’t slow down, but he’s ready for me. I hit his body at full speed, and he grunts from the impact.

“I’m sorry,” I sob the words and cling to him as his hands soothe up and down my back. I’m shaking in his arms and try to burrow deeper into his chest. “I’m so fucking sorry, Landon. I know you’re mad. You have every right to be mad. I was stupid. I shouldn’t have left the office. I’m sorry. I love you so much. I’m sorry.”

He makes a shushing sound and pulls me back enough from his chest that he’s able to cup my cheek with one of his hands and angle it up so he can look into my eyes. There is anger there, which I expected, but there’s also relief, concern and love. I latch onto that and hold firm.

“I might turn your ass a beautiful pink with my hand later, little Button, but right now,” he lets out a relieved sigh, “I just want to hold you.”

The woman starts screeching and I crane my neck around to find the police cuffing her. Her eyes are crazed when she looks at me. They’re full of so much hatred that it causes me to shiver. Landon holds me tighter and lets out a low growl causing me to look back up at him.

“Are you okay, Piper?” His eyes are full of so much concern and worry as he looks down at me.

I nod slowly and swallow hard, trying to get my thoughts and my body under control. It feels like I’m right on the edge of losing it, but I can’t. Not right now. I need to be strong. I know I’m going to have to answer a lot of questions.

“She’s sick,” I whisper and close my eyes, trying to find a glimmer of empathy. It would be far too easy to write her off or to blame her for her actions. Yes, she’s responsible, but it’s clear she also needs help. I’d rather focus on that than how much she scared me. “She’s obsessed with Ezra.”

“Ezra Payne,” Landon growls his name with a look of possessiveness in his eyes. I hide my smile because, even if I’m not going to admit it, I love the way Landon cares about me and the way he shows it.

“Yeah,” I close my eyes and try to keep it together. When I open my eyes again, he’s looking at me with infinite patience. “You know we’re only friends, Landon. It’s all we’ve ever been.”

“I know,” he sneers, “I still don’t like it.”

I chuckle under my breath and nod. “I know, but it’s all we’ll ever be. He has his own

soulmate and it's not me.”

Landon pulls me closer to him and even though it's completely inappropriate given the situation, I can feel the evidence of how much he wants me pressed against me. “You're mine, Piper,” he grits the words through his teeth.

“I know.” The screeching is dulled when she's helped into one of the police cars and it calms me; I find I can breathe easier. “She thought I was stealing Ezra from her because of the dinner. It's why she was targeting me. She thought taking me out would pave the way for her to be with him.”

Landon cups my cheeks, his eyes boring into mine. “I will never let you be harmed.” He kisses my forehead and murmurs against my skin, “You were so damn brave and I'm proud of you.”

When he wipes my tears away, I feel bolstered by his faith in me and his strength. The day isn't over, not by a long shot, but I know he'll be at my side. Not just today either; I know he'll be right next to me for the rest of our lives.

CHAPTER 10

LANDON

I thought I was having a heart attack when my phone notified me that Piper had left the building. Considering I was in a meeting with my core team at SP, I knew she didn't have an escort. Fear and anger were warring inside of me, and I didn't know which one would win.

I barely said a damn word as I stormed out of the office, but my guys were hot on my heels. When we approached the alley where the tracker in Piper's phone told me she was located, we could hear the shouting. It was in that moment fear won out.

It took Easton and Weston to restrain me from barreling into the alley. All I could see was red as my greatest fear was being realized. I couldn't bear the thought of seeing the only woman I've loved hurt because I wasn't there to protect her. I could hear Piper's sweet voice trying to diffuse the situation and it felt like my heart was being sliced into ribbons with each word.

She was so fucking brave.

I was so damn proud of her.

I was so afraid for her.

Blaze got in my face and gritted out, "Hale and I are going to go and get your girl. You're too close to this and you running in there like a damn bull is not going to help

matters.”

I heard his words, but they did nothing to calm me. He nodded at the twins restraining me which is when I noticed Remington pulling strings with the police. It helps to have friends in all kinds of places. It still didn't relax me, but I knew people would be hauling ass to get here as soon as they could.

I was seething. I was screaming in my head with all the fear my body could hold. I was beside myself with the thought that it wouldn't be enough, and they wouldn't be able to save her.

I could only imagine what my life would be like without my sweet Button in it.

Easton tried to soothe me, “They're going to get her. You know Hale and Blaze. You've trusted them to have your back and now it's time for you to trust they have Piper's back.”

I choked out, “I can't lose her, I just got her.”

Weston chuckled under his breath, “It took you fucking long enough to get your head out of your ass, but you don't need to worry. You'll have plenty of time to give her all the reasons to wonder why she loves you back.”

I snapped my head over to him and glared with the fury of a thousand fucking supernovas. It didn't do a damn thing to wipe the smirk off his face. When I realized he was intentionally getting a rise out of me so I could focus on something other than Piper being in danger, my body sagged slightly.

“Thanks for having my back,” I whispered the words, but I know they heard me.

The moment I heard Blaze shout, “Clear,” I shook off the arms holding me and raced

around the corner into the alley. The battle between anger and fear was back and I know Piper could read it on my face, but I was also so fucking relieved to see her safe and whole. With her running toward me, I braced for impact and was so fucking happy to hold her in my arms again.

The promise I made her to spank her ass is so very real, but the glimmer in her eye, even after her ordeal, tells me she's looking forward to it and will take her punishment like the good girl she is. I don't know how long I hold her, basking in her warmth and how big her fucking heart is, but it's not long enough.

She looks up at me, confusion on her face, "How did you know I was out of the office? How did you find me?"

I smirk down at her, "I've been tracking your phone since the moment you started working for me, Piper."

I could have told her it was only since the attack, but I'm not going to ever lie to my little Button. Not today, not tomorrow; fucking never. She needs to know how I've always felt about her, how deep that love has always been, anyway. I won't apologize for my obsession with her, and I have no reason to do so.

Her eyes widen and she jerks slightly in my arms, but I hold her tight, not letting her move away from me. I'm barely holding on here as it is. I could have lost her.

I shake my head slowly, "I'm not going to apologize for it. I'm not sorry. I won't lie to you. I did put an alert on it since the threats though, which I didn't do before. I would just check in on you sometimes and see where you were. I didn't go and see what you were doing, but it made me feel better when I would know where you are."

"Landon," she sighs as if I'm the most exasperating man she's ever known, but the way the tips of her lips turn up I know she's fighting a smile. "I should be pissed at

you, but,” she shrugs, “I just don’t have it in me.”

“It’s my love language, Button, get used to it.”

Piper throws her head back and laughs, but when the police approach us about her statement, she turns serious. I hate it, but it’s necessary. They can ask their questions, but I’m not letting her go while they do. I don’t think I can.

It takes far too long for us to get through the questions, which include my team producing all the evidence against the woman who was brandishing a gun and threatening the love of my life, but I grit my teeth and bear it. Barely.

It’s not until I have Piper back at my place that I feel like I can breathe easier. It was close. Too fucking close.

Piper reaches for the handle of the car, but glances back at me before her hand connects. I don’t know what she sees on my face, but whatever it is makes her drop her hand. I’m around to her side and hauling her up and over my shoulder without really thinking about my actions. I stomp us down the street and to our place, knowing there’s no fucking way I’m stopping for anything.

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My hand is a vice on her thighs, but Piper doesn't protest, and I don't stop until I'm in our bedroom. I can't. I need to feel her, I need to know she's safe. I need her. It's just that simple.

When I slide her down my body, her big, beautiful eyes are blinking up at me, a nervousness in her gaze which has me smirking. She should be nervous. The war in me is turbulent as fuck and I'm not sure which side will win. I'm not angry at her, not really, but I'm angry at the situation and the fact she put herself in it. I also know she sincerely regrets it.

"Strip," I bark out the command and my little Button's delicate fingers come up to start unbuttoning her blouse. I watch her movements, needing to see her bare in front of me to confirm she really is okay. When she's naked, I groan and speak to her as I undress. "I know you're sorry and you know what you did wasn't the best idea you've ever had."

"It really wasn't," she scrunches up her face, her eyes on the ground and shame pinkening her cheeks. She croaks out, "I'm sorry, Landon. I'm so fucking sorry."

I cup her face and tilt her head up, our skin exposed to the other, heightening everything even though we're not pressed against each other. "I know you are, Button." She gives me a little smile and I chuckle darkly. "I'm still going to spank your ass because you took at least ten years off my life." I close my eyes for a minute and all I can hear is the fear in Piper's voice as she tried to diffuse the situation. "I can't lose you."

When her hands wrap around my wrists, my eyes snap open. She whispers sincerely,

“You won’t.”

I’m not sure if we’re talking about the danger she was in or in the way life can fuck with you by pushing people apart, but either way I believe her. I don’t know how she can make such a promise, but it’s genuine.

“You’re moving in here permanently,” I don’t bark the words, but there’s a command in my voice. “After I spank you, I’m going to slip the ring on your finger I’ve had waiting for you for longer than I care to admit and we’re getting married. You have two months, tops, to plan it.”

Her mouth drops open and her eyes turn glassy with unshed tears. She squeaks out, “Landon?”

I pull her against my chest, our skin sighing in contentment at the contact. “I know you heard me, Button. You’re moving in. We’re getting married. That’s just how it is. I love you and I already wasted too much time. No more,” I shake my head and kiss her forehead, murmuring the words again there, “no more.”

There’s surprise and awe in her voice, “You have a ring for me?”

I laugh and squeeze her slightly before releasing her and sitting on the bed. When I look up at her, it’s so clear she’s a fucking angel. The light finds her and halos her, it lends its magic to her, and she gives it back in spades.

I pull her down over my lap, my arm holding her in place across her back as my other hand starts to knead her ass. I grunt, “Of course I have a ring for you. I knew the moment I met you there was no woman other than you who would be my wife. I didn’t buy it that day. It was about a year later when I happened across it. I’ll get it for you and slip it on your finger once you’ve been punished and we both find our pleasure.”

Her voice is cheeky, “Aren’t you supposed to ask me?”

I spank her, watching her skin pink, her gasp music to my fucking ears. I keep them relatively light but increasing in intensity until I’ve spanked her 20 times. Only when I’m satisfied with the way her ass has reddened and how wet my little Button is, do I answer her.

“I’m not going to ask you, Piper. I don’t need to ask you. It isn’t a choice because you’re mine and I’m yours. I want the world to know it. I would put up a fucking billboard in Time’s Square to prove it, but we don’t need it.” I pick her up and scoot back slightly on the bed, moving her to straddle my lap. Her eyes are glazed over with lust and all those good endorphins, but she’s also keen and listening to my every word. “We might not need the truth in lights, but we do need this.” I cock my head to the side, my words coaxing, “Don’t we?”

Piper wraps her arms around my neck and rises onto her knees, sinking down on my cock in one drop. Fuck. She’s so fucking hot and wet. I can feel just how much she enjoyed her punishment. It’s almost too bad she’s not a little brat.

“Yes,” she whispers against my lips when she leans into me, “we do need this.” She kisses me softly but pulls back before I can deepen it. “I can’t wait to be your wife, Landon.”

My hands clamp down on her hips to help her move. With her tits right in my face, I take full advantage, my lips wrapping around one of her hard nipples and then the other. The sounds she makes, the whispered pleas and the desperate moans, ramp up the desire between us.

It doesn’t take long before the pace becomes frantic. I know she’s thinking about the same thing I am—how close we were to losing each other. I wouldn’t have survived if something horrible had happened to her today. I thought I had demons before, but it would be nothing on the shell of the man I would become without my little Button in

my life.

Our mouths fuse together, and we pour everything into kissing each other, all the pain, the fear, the worry, the anger. I can feel her walls clamp down around me just as my balls draw up and the base of my spine tingles. I know there is no way I'm holding this one back so I can get her to fall over the edge again.

I'm too close. It was too much. We need this. The release. The explosion. We need it so we can find stability again, so we can put this behind us and look toward the future.

We come together, finding the edge and not caring when it drops out from below us, falling freely and completely. Because we know that when we come down, it will be to find each other again. And again.

"Next time I'll savor you. I'll show you how much I care for you; how much you are my world." I press my forehead against hers, our panting breaths loud between us, but neither of us are bothered by it. "My little Button," I look deep into her eyes, "I love you."

Her smile is filled with joy, and it banishes the last of the fear and the anger of knowing she was in danger. "I love you, Landon."

My cock stirs with her words and her grin turns naughty. Yeah, we won't be sleeping for a while. We have so much to celebrate. Life. Love. Light. Forever.