



# Anarchy (Revolution X)

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**Category:** Action&Adventure

**Description:** Maverick

I was a trained killer before I traded it all for a submissive bride and quiet suburbia. After only a couple of years of my “normal” life, shit hit the fan. The world exploded in Anarchy and chaos.

But then I met her— My perfect little pet.

The only person strong enough to handle me when I unleash the darkest parts of myself I’ve kept hidden for far too long.

Mallory

Being my parents perfect princess? Check!

Becoming captain of the cheer squad while maintaining a 4.0 GPA in college? Double Check!

Surviving on my own when the world goes to hell in a handbasket? BIG. FAT. FAIL.

Until he shows up— My knight in not-so-shiny armor swoops in and steals me away.

He keeps me safe and protects me from the horrors that lie in wait. But he makes me question everything about myself.

I don’t have to be perfect with him— just his perfect little pet.

**Total Pages (Source):** 26

## Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:37 pm*

“On your knees, Aspen. You know the rules.” I growl, her bony knees cracking against the hardwood floors of the dining room. She has been testing me all damn day with her lack of listening skills. These rules have been in place since the day I brought her home two years ago. I’ve spent countless hours training her to be my perfect pet, but she’s still not perfect. Always defiant in little ways. Like right now, dinner is ready, but it was supposed to be done ten minutes ago. She knows that shit pisses me off the most. Aspen claims she isn’t feeling well today, but that’s no excuse in my book. Looking down, her head is bowed, her blonde hair hiding her face from my scrutinizing gaze.

Reaching out, I run my fingers through her frail hair. Today it lacks the usual silkiness and luster it usually carries, but I brush it behind her ear anyway. She has indulged me with my favorite meal today, a pot roast and all the fixings. My finger brushes against my fork when a knock sounds at the door. I sit back in my chair rigid, thinking I am just hearing shit, but the knock comes again.

“Who the fuck is that?” I grumble, pushing my chair back and heading for the door. I stop at the threshold to the dining room and turn back to Aspen. “Stand up, Aspen. No talking unless I give you permission, or you will be spending the evening in your cage.” With that, I turn around and stroll over to the door. Cracking it open just an inch, I peer out. Annoyed when I see a skull face mask greeting me. Familiar, piercing green eyes stare at me.

“Ghost? What the fuck happened to you?” My brows pull together as I gaze at him and push the door open wider. He’s covered in blood, dirt, and from the looks of it, brain matter. While I’m no stranger to bodily fluids, it’s the short curvy girl standing next to him in disarray that has my focus.

“A fucking lot. Long time no see, asshole. I’m cashing in that favor. Let us in before we wake the dead and we all have problems on our asses, Mav.” I grit my teeth as I grab the girl's hand, and push past me, dragging her along. “Lock the door, man.”

“What are you doing here, Ghost?” Irritation and anger fill me with their sudden presence. My eyes track the dirt from their shoes through my clean house.

I decided to humor him and lock the door behind us. Rolling my eyes, I nod my head towards the closest room. His shoulders tense as he leaves the girl behind and wanders into the room. Kicking the door closed, I point a finger at him, “Seriously, man, what the fuck are you doing way out here? We agreed to never see each other again two years ago!” Whisper shouting at him as he stands before me against the wall with his arms crossed over his chest, and one foot kicked up against the white wallpaper. As long as I’ve known him, he’s always been the same. Very stoic with an “I don’t give a fuck” attitude. I wish I was that way, but I prefer to make sure people know my true thoughts and feelings. Ghost heaves out a sigh before pushing away from the wall, and the dirty footprint left on the wall behind makes me twitch and clench my fists. Guess Aspen will be doing extra cleaning tonight.

“Look, I know what we agreed to all those years ago, but if you haven’t noticed already, the world is literally going to shit outside. We were just fighting for our lives back there! Let us stay just for the night, Mav, I swear we won’t be any trouble.” By the time he finishes, his chest is heaving, and I see the desperation deep in his eyes.

“Fine, but there are rules in my house, and you better relay them to your girl. Aspen doesn’t know anything that’s going on outside of these walls. She is clueless, and I prefer to keep her that way. I don’t need her panicking over something we can’t fucking change.” My body trembles with anxiety at the thought of Aspen figuring out what’s going on in the world right now.

“You got it, Mav. No worries, we will be out of your hair first thing tomorrow.”

Ghost reaches out his hand, and I shake it to solidify our deal. He walks away from me and back towards the foyer in search of his girl, and I follow after him begrudgingly.

“Get cleaned up and come eat. I’ll get my wife to set you a place. You can use the guest room. There’s a bathroom inside. It’s up the stairs on the left.” I don’t give them a second glance before I leave them behind and head towards Aspen.

She’s exactly where I left her, against the wall in the dining room, her head bowed and her hands clasped in front of her. “We will be having two guests this evening. Get the table set for them.” I watch as she scurries away towards the kitchen to grab more dinnerware. Racing back so fast that she trips. The dishes almost go flying, but she keeps them grasped in her hands. She gets the table set for Ghost and his girl in record time, which annoys the fuck out of me, because she never has it done that fast for me. Aspen turns back to the kitchen and doesn’t reappear until she’s carrying two glasses, and our guests are walking into the dining room. “Have a seat.” I direct toward Ghost, his girl following closely behind him. After Aspen sets the glasses in front of them on the table, she steps back and just stands there like a ditz. “Serve them, Aspen.” I order, and she gets to it like her ass is on fire.

I eye Ghost’s girl as Aspen serves her, noticing the sour look on her face as she watches Aspen. She has no room to judge how I run my house when she also has a collar around her neck. Glancing over, I see Ghost giving me the stink eye as I watch her. Once their plates are filled with pot roast, mashed potatoes, carrots, and sweet peas, she comes back and kneels on the floor at my side. “Dig in.” I grumble before tearing my eyes away from the girl and focusing on my own at my feet.

Picking up the fork, I take a bite of the meal and struggle to conceal a moan at how good it is. Even if Aspen is grinding on my nerves today, she’s still a decent cook. I scoop up another bite of food and hold it down for her to take a bite of.

“Oh my god. This is amazing.” The small girl says around a mouth full of food. I hear Ghost growl across the table, and it makes me smirk knowing he does remember my rules.

“It’s okay. Thank you. My wife is an amazing cook.” I say with no real emotion behind my words. “I’m sorry. I didn’t catch your name.”

She swallows the mouth full of food she has before replying, “Rue”.

“Rue huh?” I glance over at Ghost, continuing to smirk because I know it pisses him off.

“So, what have you been doing out here in the middle of nowhere, Maverick?” Ghost says, trying desperately to get the attention off of Rue. “Doesn’t look like there’s much to get up to out here.”

“Just living the dream, man.” I reply as I pick up another fork full of food and shove it into my mouth. Ghost knows damn well what I’m doing out here in the middle of nowhere since he’s the one who helped me find this damn place. So I take the comment as a sign to shut my mouth. Ghost starts up a conversation about one of his latest hits, using our code so the women don’t understand.

“The meal was wonderful. May I thank your wife?” Ghost asks. Pride swells in my chest at him following my rules even if he doesn’t want to or agree with them.

“You may,” I reply, leaning back in my chair.

“Thank you, Aspen. It was delicious.” She lifts her head and looks directly at him, which spikes my anger, before replying softly, “You’re welcome.” Regardless of whether I give her permission to speak to them. Aspen knows she’s not allowed to make eye contact with other men. She will pay for it this evening. Ghost clears his

throat, distracting me from my thoughts of punishment.

“We’ve had a rough couple of days. We’ll get some sleep and talk tomorrow, if that’s okay?”

“Tomorrow.” I respond, giving him a nod, and wait as he helps Rue out of her chair and they leave the room. I sit there in silence while I listen to them making their way up the steps. Once I know they are out of earshot I turn towards Aspen, peering down at her, “What did you do wrong, Aspen?” My voice strained as I grip the edge of the table, my knuckles turning white. Her body trembles under my stare, and she takes longer than I’d like before she replies.

“I-I looked at him, sir. I’m sorry, I disobeyed you.” She stutters out.

“Look at me, Aspen.” Her face turns up to me, her cheeks flush, and her hairline has a few beads of sweat on it. “Tell me just how sorry you really are.” I watch as her throat bobs and her thoughts whirl behind her hazel eyes.

“I am deeply sorry, sir. I will serve my punishment in my cage this evening.” Her response is thick, and I know she’s on the verge of tears, but I don’t give a fuck.

“Then go!” The command comes out deep and demanding. Her skinny legs wobble as she makes her way to her feet and scurries off towards our bedroom. I hear the familiar squeak of the cage door as it opens and closes behind her. Placing my elbows back on the table, I lean my head into my hands. I stay there for about thirty minutes before making my way to my room and see Aspen curled up at the bottom of her cage. Eyes wide as she looks up at me through wet lashes. “Get up. You still have chores to do tonight. Once they are finished, I expect you to get the fuck back in there. That’s where you will be sleeping tonight. Oh, and there is a dirty footprint on the wall in the living room; see that it’s cleaned.” She reaches for the door of the cage, swings the door open, and scrambles out towards the kitchen.

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:37 pm*

### Chapter One

#### MAVERICK

The creak of the cage door sounds in the room for the second time in the last few hours. Aspen made it back around two in the morning when she finished her lengthy list of chores. She tossed and turned in there all night long; I don't think she actually slept. I watch her lanky figure crawl from the cage while glancing sideways at the clock blinking five am in bright red. She stumbles a bit when she reaches back to close the cage door, and I catch a glimpse of her splotchy red face and the dark bags under her eyes. I debate on telling her to stop and go back to sleep because what good is she if she looks like she's on the verge of death? However, since we have guests in the home, I let her shuffle out of the dark room instead.

I swing my legs over the side of the bed as the sound of clinking dishes comes from the kitchen down the hall. Smirking to myself that no matter how shitty Aspen feels, she will still do what she's told, or at least do her best to. Padding over to the bathroom, I switch on the shower, waiting for the steam to billow over the top of the glass door. I strip out of my flannel pajama pants, tossing them into the wicker basket in the corner. Yanking the shower door open, I step in and relish at the feeling of the hot water beating down on my body and sore muscles. I swear the older I get, the worse my body hurts, no matter how healthy I eat or how much I work out. The perks of spending your twenties as a hired killer, your body getting beat to shit on a weekly basis. Dropping my head under the spray, I run my fingers through my dark brown hair before slathering it in the cheap shampoo we grabbed from the store. It smells like shit, but our options were limited this time.

Finishing in the shower, I step out and wrap a black towel around my waist. Swiping my hand through the condensation on the mirror, my rugged reflection staring back at me. These years in solitude have done a number on me. The permanent bags under my eyes, a reminder of all the sleepless nights, my thoughts the only thing to occupy my mind. Bracing my hands on the countertop, I hang my head between my shoulders to release the tension building there. When I left my previous life behind two years ago, I thought all I wanted and needed was a wife to build a home with. But I was wrong. I thought she was perfect when we stole her away in the night, but there's something missing. I have no idea what it is, but it's like my heart is vacant, and she's trying so hard to fit into it.

Shaking my head, I lean back up and walk out of the bathroom towards my closet. I fling the door open to snag a pair of black cargo pants from the shelf along with a black T-shirt. Aspen has yet to do laundry this week, which makes me let out an exasperated sigh. I shove my feet into the legs of the pants before hiking them up over my ass, noticing the residual stains that still don the legs from my past work. Zipping them up, I grab a belt from the hook on the back of the door and slide it through the loops before buckling. I toss the shirt over my muscular frame before sliding my socks and boots onto my feet. I grab my watch and laptop off the bedside table, before heading towards the kitchen.

Aspen is hard at work making breakfast per usual. As soon as she sees me walk through the threshold, she's pulling my favorite mug out of the cabinet and filling it to the brim with coffee before setting it in front of my usual spot at the island. The steaming cup of joe awakens my senses, the bitter taste zinging through my taste buds and burning the tip of my tongue as I take a large gulp. I've always loved the taste of plain black coffee. It was convenient, in the past when I had jobs, needing to snag a quick cup of joe from a gas station in the early mornings. Sitting the cup back onto the island, I open my laptop even though the shit doesn't work with the grid collapsing, it's a habit that I have to itch anyway.



The clomping of boots echos down the stairs before Ghost rounds the corner into the kitchen. We nod at each other, and I direct him to take a seat across from me. Aspen sets two heaping plates full of eggs, bacon, toast, and fruit in front of us, as well as passing Ghost a cup of coffee. He takes a hearty gulp and nearly chokes on the shit before swallowing it, which has me chuckling into my own cup. He may be a badass, but he's a pussy when it comes to coffee.

"Damn, that shit is nasty. You got any creamer or sugar?" He directs the question towards me, knowing how I feel about people talking directly to Aspen. I nod before asking Aspen to grab the creamer from the fridge. She leans over and pours some into his mug until he says stop and then returns it to the fridge and goes back to what she was doing. Ghost picks the mug back up and downs half of it in one gulp before setting it back down and picking up his fork. "You know that thing doesn't work right?" He points the fork at my laptop with an eyebrow raised. Rolling my eyes, I shut the lid and pick up my own fork, spearing a bite of eggs and shoving it into my mouth.

"How'd you and Rue meet?" I ask, trying to make light conversation. He goes still for a moment and then takes a bite out of some bacon before responding.

"Oh, you know, just around. Does it really matter, Mav?" He tilts his head, his eyes flicking to Aspen in a silent "you have no right to judge" kind of way.

"Guess not." My shoulders shrug with my words, and we continue to eat breakfast until the forks are scraping the last bit of food from our plates.

"Hey man, can we talk? Outside." Ghost says as he picks his plate up, starting to carry it to the sink. I stop him with my hand on his chest, grab the plate from his hands, and set it back onto the island. His brows scrunch together in the middle with a question blaring through his eyes.

“Yes, we can, but leave the plate. Aspen will take care of it.” The look on his face tells me he’s about to argue with me, but he raises his hands in surrender and walks toward the back doors with me following closely behind. Once we clear the doorway and it shuts behind us, I feel a whack to the back of my head. “Dude, what the fuck!” I turn glaring at him, but mine is no match for the one he’s giving me right now.

“You know what. She looks like death, Mav. Worse than she looked when we rescued her skinny ass!” His whisper yelling makes me feel like a child due to the fact that he is a few inches taller than me.

“You have no room to judge, Ghost. I saw the collar around Rue’s neck last night. What I do with mine is none of your concern.” He glares at me for a moment before sighing, and relenting. “Look, if it makes you feel better, she didn’t always look like that. Yesterday she started looking sickly, but when I asked her about it, she said she was fine. Hasn’t complained once.”

“She doesn’t look good, man, but fine, I’ll take your word for it. We need gas before we can head out. Got any?”

“Nah, but I know where we can get some. Come on.” He follows me down the back steps and across the yard to the small shed in the corner. I grab a five-gallon gas tank, rubber tubing, and a funnel. “There’s some abandoned cars out this way.”

We trek our way down the street to the line of abandoned cars from previous neighbors, and people who were trying to drive as far as they could until the vehicle sputtered out. The first car we come across is a small Honda that we manage to siphon less than a gallon of gas out of. The second one is a large Suburban that we almost overflow the five-gallon gas tank with, which has me curious. If they had this much gas left, then why did they abandon the car here? Doesn’t make much sense to me, then again, nowadays nothing makes much sense.

“Why don’t you want Aspen to know what’s going on?” Ghost finally speaks up on our walk back to the house. It makes me pause and really think about that question, but I never really had an answer for the why.

“Honestly, there’s no real reason. I just don’t want her to panic. She’s been through a lot of shit, as you very well know. We’ve finally gotten into a somewhat good spot.”

“Yeah, but she’s going to find out, Mav. What are you going to do when the zombies show up at your fucking front door some day?” He says as he tosses his hands up in the air with exasperation.

“I didn’t fucking think about that, okay? We exist in our own little world, and I plan to keep it that way for as long as I can.” I finish off not even waiting for him to respond before I walk off towards the house, and he follows behind silently.

When we return to the house, Aspen is elbows deep in soapy dishwater. She doesn’t even look our way when we enter the kitchen. Ghost looks around the kitchen before tramping through the dining room and foyer, coming up empty. Aspen clears her throat before speaking softly to me, “She’s still asleep,” then continues what she’s doing.

“Rue is still asleep, Ghost. You want some more coffee? We can sit out on the back deck.” He nods as he makes his way. Aspen dries her hands on a dish towel before grabbing the same mugs, now clean, from the dish rack and filling them back up with coffee. She steps to the fridge, pulling out the creamer, and putting a heaping splash into Ghost’s mug before handing us both our coffee. Turning towards the back door, she pushes it open and holds it for Ghost to make his way through, then shuts it behind us. We take a seat on the wooden rockers and talk about mundane shit. Mostly reminiscing on the good old days, previous kills, and how civilian life has changed us; mostly me.

Eventually, we make our way back inside and find Rue chowing down on leftover breakfast, and Aspen standing in front of the sink where she was earlier. I notice her face is more red and blotchy than this morning, and her breathing seems a bit labored, but I chalk that up to her working hard to finish her chores. Once Rue is done eating, and they are all packed up, I walk them to the foyer to say my good-byes.

“Good luck, Ghost. Try not to die out there, man.” I say as we clasp hands, our eyes meeting with understanding as he reaches down and grabs Rue’s hand, tugging her towards the door.

“Stay safe, bastard.” He says gruffly as he tugs the door open and pushes them both out, shutting it behind them softly.

I stare at the closed wooden door, worry gnaws at my chest with how serious he was earlier when he told me just how shitty the outside world is right now. I run my fingers through my hair, tilting my head back, and closing my eyes. It does no good for me to stress out about shit that I can’t fucking change. Once I’m centered again, I hear a loud thump coming from the kitchen, which snaps me out of everything. I dart over there as quickly as I can. I round the island and see Aspen crumbled up on the floor in front of the sink. Her chest rising up and down rapidly, sweat pouring down her splotchy face.

“Aspen! Wake up.” I gently shake her, but she doesn’t move. Fear courses through me, because she’s never been sick like this before. I don’t love her, but I don’t want her to die either. Scooping her up in my arms, I head towards our room, depositing her onto the bed and grabbing a wet washcloth from the bathroom. My fingers reach out to swipe her stringy, sweaty hair from her forehead before laying the wet cloth over it. She’s burning up, which concerns me, but I decide to leave her there and let her sleep it off. I give her one last look before walking out of the room and shutting the door behind me before heading towards my office.

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 4:37 pm*

### Chapter Two

#### MAVERICK

The sun is starting to set behind the trees, and I haven't heard a peep from Aspen in hours. I checked on her a few hours ago, and her breathing had slowed so much it looked like it had stopped. I replaced the wet cloth with a new one to keep her cool and then left again in search of food for myself. Making only a cold lunch meat sandwich, because I can't cook to save my damn life, I decide to just head up to bed because there's nothing to do anyway. God, it's been so damn boring these days. Aspen is my only source of entertainment, but even she's been rather dull lately. Opening the bedroom door, the room is bathed in the last remnants of the sun. I notice the bed is empty, which has me walking into the room quickly to look for Aspen. A clatter sounds from the bathroom, but there's no light inside. Aspen typically lights a few candles when she goes in there in the evenings, but it's pitch black, which has one of my eyebrows hitching up.

"Aspen? You in there?" I call from the middle of the bedroom, hearing soft footsteps shuffling towards me. Her slender frame peeks around the threshold, blonde hair hiding her face. "Aspen, you okay?" I ask, concern lacing my voice as I take a step closer to her. She doesn't say anything but makes a weird grunting noise. She takes a stumbling step towards me, dragging her left leg behind her slightly. Her shoulders are dropped, making her arms look like they are different lengths, and her head is tilted to the right awkwardly. "Answer me when I ask you a question!" I yell at her, irritated as fuck that she hasn't answered any of my questions yet. It almost feels like I'm talking to a brick wall as she continues to ignore me and shuffle closer. She's only a few feet from me when she steps into the path of the remaining sunlight, and I

get a good look at her, which has me stumbling backward a few steps.

“Aspen...” I say raising my hands up in surrender, like that’s going to fucking help. Her eyes have taken on a milky, hazy version of her own. Skin still blotchy, but a sliver hanging off on the right side that’s slightly covered by her hair. She lets out a snarl as her head tilts back up, blood and drool dripping from her chin as she lunges towards me. Scrambling back, I barely make it out the bedroom door before she grabs me. I slam the door in her face, catching one of her fingers in the frame. It slices clean off as I force the door to close. Her chilling screech comes from the other side as her mangled finger lays bloody on the floor at my feet. I hear her running into the door on the other side, trying to break free but not being able to grasp the doorknob.

“Fuck!” I scream out for no one else to hear as I tug at my hair pacing in the hallway. My back hits the wall behind me, and I slide down it until the floor meets my ass, tugging my knees to my chest, laying my arms over them, and tilting my head back against the wall. Aspen continues to screech on the other side, which has goosebumps raising on my arms. I’ve seen the videos of zombies on the news before the entire grid went down. I know what they look like and what they sound like, but I have yet to come in contact with one. I’m wracking my brain as to how this could have happened to Aspen. She rarely leaves the house, and she hasn’t left in days. I try to retrace our steps, piecing together anything that makes sense.

There were rumors going around that the new medication they came out with, IntaX, was causing bad side effects. I remember we picked up a bottle last week when we went to the store, Aspen said she wanted to try it to help with period cramps. Since there was nothing else on the shelves, I relented, grabbing a bottle and stuffing it in our basket. My head spins, my heartbeat speeding up as I recall Aspen taking a few of the white pills the other day for a migraine she had. My mouth drops open as I also remember she started to look sickly a few hours later, and she hadn’t slept last night either.

“Fuck, fuck, FUCK!” I scream into the hallway, slamming my head back against the wall, my hands coming up to lay over my face as everything clicks in my mind. Feeling guilty because I took part in this happening to her, even if it was unknowingly. She had no idea what was happening to her, and if I had just clued her into what was going on in the world, maybe I could have stopped it. If I had only taken the fucking time to ask her if she was okay when I first noticed her face flush with fever. I’m an asshole, but not big enough of one to let her go through that by herself.

My eyes go misty, and my hands shake where they are sitting on top of my knees. Dread fills the pits of my stomach, and my mind whirls with what I need to do next. I’ve killed before, so why am I stalling and dreading this so much? I feel nothing past possession for Aspen, but the thought of her lying dead at my feet by my hands makes me want to vomit. Pushing to my feet, I strain my hearing to try and find where Aspen is inside the room, and deadly silence echoes back at me. Taking a deep breath, I straighten, pushing my shoulders back and clenching my fists before I make my way down the hall. The house creaks with each step I take. Finding the coat closet at the back of my office, I grip the cold brass knob in my sweaty palm before tugging it open. Pushing the coats aside, the keypad I haven’t looked at in over a year glares back at me. After inputting the code with trembling fingers, the hidden door pops open, showcasing a dusty staircase behind it. Lights flicker on with each step I take into the dank space, cold chills running up and down my spine, goosebumps erupting over my skin.

Once I reach the bottom of the stairs, it opens up into a decent-sized room with lights showcasing different kinds of weapons I’ve kept hidden down here the last few years. Dust is collecting on almost every single piece. Spinning in a circle, eyeing every weapon before me, a recognizable sense of adrenaline runs through my blood. One that I haven’t felt since the night I brought Aspen to live here with me. Guess it’s only appropriate I feel it again at the time I will be taking her out of this world. Walking quickly to the wall closest to me, I grab a black 9MM off the wall, quickly

inspecting it to make sure it's good to go and filled with bullets. I remove the mag and empty every bullet out except for one. The only one I intend to use this evening.

With the gun gripped tightly in my palm, I make my way back upstairs to my room. Laying my hands along the frame of the door, I tilt my forehead against the wood as I slow my breathing, willing my hands to stop shaking. Pushing off the door frame, I steel my spine and slowly turn the doorknob, pushing it open quietly with the toe of my shoe. Aspen stands by the window, barely visible with the very last rays of sunlight, her blonde hair practically glowing in the dark. I take a few steps closer to her, aiming the gun towards her head, and turn the safety off. The click alerts her, and she spins around awkwardly with a snarl leaving her lips. She takes a step closer to me, and I grit my teeth, preparing myself for the inevitable.

“Aspen, I’m so sorry I couldn’t save you... I’d ask you to forgive me, but I wouldn’t even forgive myself.” My whispered words don’t even seem to reach her as she takes another stuttering step towards me. As my breath whooshes out of me, I pull the trigger. Everything goes in slow motion, the bullet imbedding between her eyes, which go wide and almost seem coherent for just a moment, before she drops to the ground like dead weight. Once I know she’s gone for good, I sink to my knees in front of her, brushing her hair from her face, her dead eyes staring off into space. “I’m sorry I couldn’t be what you needed.” My final words to her feel like they were torn from my chest as a single tear tracks down my cheek for what little feelings I had for her.

My legs eventually go numb beneath me, forcing me to face my next dilemma. I clamber to my feet, my knees threatening to buckle beneath me, and head back down to the basement. Once there, I go to the far left corner and grab my biggest tactical bag from the hook. Wrenching the cabinet next to it open, I stuff it with several non-perishable foods, a water purifier, a flashlight, and a headlamp. Lastly, I stuff in a single-person tent with an emergency blanket. Hefting the bag over my shoulder, I eye the wall of weapons and decide that most of them are pointless to bring with me,



so I settle for the 9MM that's stuffed in the back of my pants, some spare ammo, and a random firefighters axe that I accumulated several years on a job. It's weight is heavy in my palm. I imagine being able to swing and chop a zombie down without them getting too terribly close.

Hauling everything back upstairs, I rifle through my office for any documents that I think would benefit me somehow and stuff them into the bag. I look around the office with emptiness spreading in my gut before I decide it's now or never. Trudging to the kitchen, I tug the junk drawer open on the island and grab the old zippo I keep there for Aspen's girly-smelling candles. I fling the back door open and head towards the shed in the corner of the yard. Yanking the door open, I go straight to the back and grab one of the canisters of lighter fluid from the shelf. Trudging back to the house, my heart rate picks up as anxiety seeps into my veins. Starting in the bedroom, I douse it in lighter fluid before making my way through the rest of the house, finally making a trail out the back door and down the back deck. I toss the canister onto the deck and take several steps back, pulling the zippo from my pocket.

I stare up at the house that has been my secluded oasis for two years now. A place that I thought I would grow old in with my wife. Too bad things don't always work out as planned. I flick the lid of the zippo open and turn the wheel with my thumb, a flame coming to light, flickering in front of my face. Closing my eyes, I take a deep breath before opening them again and throwing the lighter as far as I can. It skids to a stop inside the door to the kitchen, immediately catching on the lighter fluid, flames quickly spreading throughout the house. I stand there watching until the heat from the fire becomes unbearable, forcing me to tear my gaze away and back up towards the woods. At the edge of the trees, I look back one more time, the flames stretching through the bottom level of the house, bursting through several windows, and then I lower my head and start walking to who fucking knows where.

### Chapter Three

#### MALLORY

S weaty bodies push up against me as I move through the crowded party. The music's bass beats through me, making my bones vibrate with excess energy. Alcohol strums through my veins, making my vision blur around the edges, and my anxiety calms from all of the people surrounding me. Bodies writhe together, so close you can't tell where one ends and someone else begins. My skin itches as clammy hands touch my arms, trying to get my attention as I shove through the crowd. A large body jostles me, and my red solo cup tips from my hands and splashes to the floor, soaking my pink holographic wedge feet. Rolling my eyes, I forget about the mess and continue forward into the kitchen, spotting Lisa and Stacy lounging against the marble counter with their own cups tilted up towards their lips. When they spot me, they enthusiastically wave me over, jumping up and down like a couple of kindergarteners. Lord knows why I actually tolerate them, but just like momma always said, who you are seen in public with will always matter more to your reputation than who you see behind closed doors. I know dealing with them is for the better, but I would much rather be lounging in bed in a ratty oversized T-shirt with Rue watching some terrible movie. But instead I'm here in this skimpy dress playing the part my momma taught me to be: a powerful socialite.

My hands reach out to Lisa and Stacy, gripping their sticky fingers in mine as I tug them in for a hug. Their alcoholic breath wafts in my nose, sweet scents of peach and pineapple with the spice of rum assaulting my senses. "Oh my god, I'm so glad you two are here!" I squeal in fake delight as I clutch their bodies close to mine. "I've been looking for you guys everywhere!" Giving them my best million-dollar smile

before kissing them both on the cheek and stepping away. Lisa reaches behind her and grabs an empty red solo cup, her hand swaying as she hands it to me.

“You have to try that punch, Mally!” She points at the big storage container on the island full of jungle juice as I resist the urge to roll my eyes at their pet name for me. I’ve always hated being called Mally, much more preferring the nickname Mal that my real friends use. I turn towards it, gripping one of the ladles, and pour a few heaping spoonfuls into the cup, snagging a few cherries and pineapples as I go. I cautiously take a sip and wince at the amount of alcohol in this, but smile at Lisa all the same. “See, I told you! Isn’t it good? Probably the best I’ve ever tasted!” She says as she leans back against the counter again.

“What have you been up to today, Mally? We missed you at study group.” Stacy finally pipes up, eyeing me with suspicion. Stacy has never actually liked me. She’s always been jealous of my success, whether it's with my grades, money, or the cheer team. Sometimes I feel like she’d gladly crawl into my skin just for a day of being me.

“I had a killer headache after class, so I headed back to the dorm for a nap, sorry guys!” The lie spills out of my lips effortlessly, but it was way easier than telling them I rushed home to get ready for the party with Rue. She hated every second of it, but I insisted on helping her get all dolled up, not that she actually needed the help. The girl is a smoke show all on her own.

“You should really get those headaches checked out, Mally. You seem to have them a lot; what if it’s something really serious?” The crease in Stacy’s forehead looks as deep as the Grand Canyon with her fake concern. I nod my head, telling her that I will be sure to get it checked with my family physician.

We continue chatting about mundane things until Stacy spins me around with a frantic look on her face. “Look, it’s Jason!” Her squeal of surprise pierces my ears,

making me wince at more than just the sight of my ex-boyfriend. “I can’t believe he’d actually show up here, and with her of all people! Mally, you’re so much prettier than she is.” Stacy rolls her eyes so hard I fear they may pop out of her skull. What Stacy doesn’t know is that Jason didn’t break up with me like everyone thinks. I broke up with him because of his vile behavior, but no one believes the girl in these types of situations, no matter how popular she is. Hanging on Jason’s arm is Hannah Stanley, the girl he’s been flirting with throughout our entire relationship.

“Mally, why don’t we go outside? You don’t have to see this,” Lisa suggests in my ear as she grabs my hand. If I’m honest, I couldn’t give two shits about seeing them together; they deserve each other. The last time I saw him, he was balls deep in Hannah after I turned him down. He was drunk, and I was not losing the last thing that I could actually control in my life to him when all he cared about was getting his dick wet. So of course he retaliated and slept with Hannah during a party. I promptly stormed out and sent him a text telling him it was over after that.

“Yeah, let’s just go out back.” I say to Lisa as I tug her towards the door. Stacy is eyeing Jason like he’s a piece of meat before she finally follows us out the back door. She’s always had a thing for every guy I’ve dated, and I always pretend not to notice. We head towards a tree at the edge of the yard. While Lisa and I lean up against it, Stacy stands in front of us, telling us about the newest gossip she heard today. Her words float along the cool breeze as she talks, almost lulling me to sleep until Lisa pinches my arm and winks at me. She knows how much I despise Stacy, because she too despises her, but her momma is just the same as mine. Both of us are forced to live the fake lives that our mommas created for us.

I down the rest of my drink and excuse myself so I can go throw away my trash at the other end of the yard. Pushing through the human obstacle course is a challenge in the outfit I decided to wear tonight. After tossing the red cup into the trash can, a loud scream erupts from the house. My head whips to the side to see what’s going on, my vision turning blurry from the sudden movement and alcohol streaming through my

system. Scream after scream echoes through the air as bodies frantically rush out of the house, tripping over each other to get free of its confines. I turn back towards Lisa and Stacy, and their expressions mimic my own utterly confused one. We all start to walk towards each other, but the mass of bodies leaving the house separates us. The sea of bodies pushing me further into the woods surrounding the house. My feet trip over fallen branches, and I curse my choice of shoes, but I hadn't exactly planned on trekking through the woods this evening.

I stop once I'm about to and catch my breath while looking at my surroundings, trying to find Lisa and Stacy or even Rue at this point. A boy I've seen in one of my classes comes rushing at me with a frantic look on his face, and I yell at him to see what's going on. He's in such a hurry to flee; he knocks me down and doesn't even stop to help me up. "What the fuck!" I yell at his back. Picking myself up, I start walking in the same direction that everyone else was going, but quickly realize I'm lost and no one is around to help me. "Hello! Is anyone there?" I scream out towards the treetops, but only silence answers me. I pull my phone out of my tiny pink clutch, holding it up towards the sky, hoping for a small glimpse of cell service, but the "no service" sign is what stares back at me instead. With a huff, I keep walking, turning the flashlight on so I can see where I'm going this time, but my heel sinks into a hole, making me topple over an unseen cliff edge. My body jolts through the dark air before it collides with the ground again, bouncing me down a hill. My hands claw at the ground, trying desperately to grab onto anything to save me, but everything slips through my fingers like silk. My hip collides with a hard surface before my head smashes into it next. Vision dimming, I look up at the sky. The twinkling of the stars is the last thing I see before darkness invades.

### Chapter Four

#### MALLORY

The incessant pounding in my head is the first thing I feel when my brain decides to enter back into my body. I let out a groan, clutching my head between my hands as I curl my knees into my chest. I can feel the warmth from the sun on my face, but I don't risk opening my eyes yet because I know it will just come with more pain. The cold ground doubles as my bed until the sound of twigs snapping pulls my attention. Footsteps are heading towards me, making my body go rigid with fear but also hope that maybe someone has come to help me. Tentatively opening my eyes, sun rays flood through my lashes, making sudden tears well in my eyes. My vision blurs as three large figures move slowly towards me. Dirty pairs of work boots and tennis shoes stop directly in front of me, obstructing my view further.

"Well, well, well... Look what we have here, boys. A damsel in distress if I do say so myself." The voice coming from the dirty boots to my left.

"Thank God, please help me. There was a party and everything went to shit; now I'm lost." My voice comes out jagged while I use my hands to push myself up into a sitting position. I'm sure I look like a mess right now, with leaves and twigs sticking out of my hair and mud marring my skin. I finally get a peek at the three men standing before me, and they all look vaguely familiar. I'm sure I've seen them around campus before, but I just can't place them.

"Awe, got lost on your own, did ya?" Dirty work boots says, his blonde hair flopping in his face, covering his eyes. He does one of those pretty boy hair flicks to get it out

of his stunning blue eyes that are so distracting I miss what one of the other guys says. Work boots sees me admiring him, and a smirk appears on his face.

“Hey, I asked you a question.” The first pair of tennis shoes says as he nudges my leg with the toe of his black Nikes. I look up at him dumbfounded, because I swear he didn’t ask me shit. “I asked if there was anyone else with you?” He says with exasperation, the brown curls in his hair bouncing as he shakes his head, brown eyes rolling with annoyance.

“N-no. I’m by myself. Like I said, I was at a party, and it turned into chaos. Not sure why really... But everyone was screaming and running. I tripped, fell down that hill, and ended up here.” Shrugging my shoulders at the end of my rambling. The last man on the far right is quiet as he observes me, his blue eyes glittering with mirth. His blonde hair is longer than work boots guy and could probably be put in one of those man buns. He’s the first one to offer to help me to my feet as he stretches out his hand for me to grab. I wobble like a baby deer on my heels, and he steadies me by clutching my biceps.

“Oh Mallory...” Work boots guy tsks at me, shaking his head, a chuckle coming out of his throat. How the hell does he even know my name, because I sure as hell don’t know his. “A pretty girl like you really shouldn’t be out here in the middle of nowhere all by your lonesome.” His smirk growing into a full-blown smile housing perfect straight white teeth. Honestly, he’s beautiful, and I’m almost ashamed that I don’t know his name. I’m so distracted by his prettiness that I don’t notice the man bun guy creeping up behind me until his thick arm is wrapped around my neck.

Panic surges through me as my body goes into fight or flight mode, and it’s currently chosen to fight. I bring my heel back hard, catching him in the dick; he wheezes and drops to his knees behind me. The other two guys are momentarily distracted as I bolt to the right, getting as far away from them as possible. Work boot guy demands Nike guy to get me, and his feet pound at the cold earth hard as he charges after me. My

heart feels like it's going to beat out of my chest. I am not built to run like this, especially in these heels. Tree branches snag at my short dress, ripping holes in it and scratching up my skin. A large log is in my pathway, and I send up a silent prayer to whoever is listening to get me over the damn thing. I leap into the air like I've seen those track people do with hurdles, but as I'm sailing over the top of it, a hard body collides with mine, taking me to the ground.

The impact of not only the ground but also the human boulder on top of me has the breath whooshing from my body. The man seems dazed for a second, also phased by the impact, giving me a moment to scramble back away from him. A wheezing laugh comes out of his sinister-looking mouth as he watches me try to get away like it's the funniest joke he's ever heard. I back up into something hard, swinging my head around, my eyes connecting with the pretty blue ones of work boot guy.

"Come on, baby, how about you be a good girl and stay still for me, yeah?" Talking to me like I'm a scared animal as he crouches down next to me. My breathing starts to pick up, and I gulp in a lung full of air before releasing a high-pitched scream. Pretty boy's face goes from boy next door to the devil you may know in less than thirty seconds. His hands wrap around my neck and push me back onto the ground, thick thighs straddling my hips. "You really shouldn't have done that. We could have done this the easy way, Mallory, but you always did like to play hard to get." He chuckles as he squeezes his hands around my neck. I scratch at his arms, trying to get him to let up, but he doesn't; if anything, it eggs him on more. My vision wanes for the second time in 24 hours as I float slowly into darkness; the last thing I see this time is sparkling blue eyes.

\* \* \*

I am rudely awakened by falling off of something and onto a scratchy floor. Angry voices surround me, all jumbled and hard to hear over the roar of an engine. Rough hands grab under my arms and tug me back up onto whatever I was lying on, my



head lands on something warm and cushiony. I peek my eyes open and look up into a pair of blue eyes, his blonde hair pulled back into an actual man bun this time. He grins down at me when he sees me staring back, his fingers running through my hair, making my skin crawl.

“Was kinda worried you weren’t gonna wake up there for a second.” He chuckles, and I push myself up into a sitting position, scooting all the way over to the other side of the truck. Clutching at the door handle and pushing my whole body weight against it, I wave my hands and bang against the glass in a wave of panic. Hoping that a passerby will notice me. “Seriously? May as well save your energy for what we have in store for you, pretty girl.” That makes me pause and turn back towards him. I cross my arms over my chest and squeeze my thighs together. Tucking my legs underneath me to show as little skin as I can.

“Who are you?” The question comes out of me with venom making the two men up front cackle like hyenas.

“Finally asking the good questions, baby.” Pretty boy says as he drives the truck with one hand on the wheel. “I’m Chad; you’d think you’d know my name since we’re in the same chemistry class.”

“Derek.” Nike shoes say from the passenger seat, not even bothering to turn around to look at me.

“Last but certainly not least, I’m Jake. We have psychology together. The asshole up there is in your business class.” He points at Derek, rolling his eyes.

“Okay great... Now that I know who you are, what am I doing here?” I end in a screech, pounding my fists against the car seat. We sit in awkward silence, none of them daring to speak. The truck veers off the main road onto a partially gravel one that I’m pretty sure no one has driven on in years. I’m jostled in my seat as Chad hits

every damn rock and pothole in this road. After what feels like an entire hour of bouncing around in the backseat, we pull out into a grassy alcove within the wall of trees, a log cabin sitting in the middle. Once the truck comes to a stop, all three look at me, and it makes my stomach roll and my skin crawl.

“Where are we?” I whisper out.

“You’re new home. At least until we think you’ve learned your lesson. We’re nowhere near Louisiana anymore.” Jake responds and ends in a chuckle.

“What the hell do you mean we’re not in Louisiana anymore!” I screech out because I swear I haven’t been out long enough for us to be in a whole other state.

“You’ve been out for days. Ever heard of chloroform? It truly is a beautiful thing.” I stare at him in horror at his admission before he continues on, “Do you like games, pretty girl?” Jake asks, and I shake my head like a demented bobblehead because I know what he’s about to say next will not be a good time for me. “Awe, that’s too bad... Because you baby are the game, and whoever breaks you first, wins.” He finishes with a wide smile on his face, as if he’s telling me I won the lottery. I let out an ear-piercing scream, turning around and reaching for the door handle again, but then my head is slammed into the window and everything goes dark for a third time.

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### Chapter Five

#### MALLORY

My head feels like it's splitting into two, as if I'm on a tilt-a-whirl at the county fair, and it instantly makes me pissed. If their goal was to give me a concussion, then they just might have succeeded. Either that or the mass amount of chloroform they've used on me is taking its toll.

Something hard nudges my side, convincing me to wake up more, but I really don't want to. I'm not ready to face the horrors that are sure to await me. When I don't comply, the nudge turns into a full-blown kick to my ribs, making me whimper and curl into myself.

"Wake the fuck up already! We want to play." I open my eyes to see Chad crouched in front of me, a not-so-friendly smile on his face. He grabs me by my hair and wrenches me into a sitting position until we are face to face. "You know, if you weren't such a stuck-up bitch, this wouldn't be happening." He says, his head tilting to the side. My mind whirls with thoughts on how and when I was a stuck-up bitch to him, but I keep coming up blank. "You don't remember, do you?" Chad whispers after analyzing my clueless expression. He leans in with his mouth next to my ear, warm breath wafting over it, his teeth nipping at my earlobe. In any other situation, this might turn me on, but right now I feel like I'm going to hurl. "Guess you'll find out soon enough." He jumps to his feet, his fingers still tangled in my hair, as he drags me across the floor towards the door.

My heels bang against the wooden floor as I kick and scream, my nails scratching his

hands, wishing he would let go. I don't particularly love my blonde hair, but I'd rather not have a large bald patch in the middle of my head either. He pulls me over the threshold before using his entire body weight to toss me into the middle of the next room. My body hits the hard floor with a crack as I roll to a stop in front of a black leather couch. I lay on my back, stare at the vaulted ceiling and try to catch my breath. My head flopping to the side, I check out my surroundings, which isn't much. A large flat-screen TV is mounted on the wall with a small table underneath it. Multiple sets of footsteps echo through the almost barren room as they walk towards me.

Once again, I'm staring at the three pairs of dirty shoes that belong to the assholes who kidnapped me. Jake is the first to squat down to my eye level. He reaches out and pets my hair almost like you would a puppy, admiring how soft it is. Derek squats down next with an inquisitive look on his face, as if he's trying to figure out what to do with me. Chad just stands there and drops some leather objects on the floor in front of me without saying a word. Jake picks them up, turning them over in his hands before grabbing my wrists and sliding the cuffs on so fast I don't realize what's going on until it's done. Jake uses the chain between the cuffs to drag me to my feet, legs shaking with soreness from muscles I didn't even know existed.

"Here's what's going to happen, Mallory. You're going to be our good girl and follow all of our directions, and you just might make it out of this in one piece. Nod if you understand." I go ahead and nod my head because what other choice do I have at this point? Jake walks me out the door by my cuffs like a dog on a leash. We trail around to the back of the house, and what I see immediately makes me jolt and plant my feet to the ground. Jake notices my resistance and the sun-shiny face he's had this entire time clouds over while he tugs at the cuffs, making me trip and fall flat on my face. My nose bounces off the grass, and I'm surprised it doesn't start bleeding with the impact. Next, I'm being dragged across the ground by my wrists, twigs, and small rocks cutting into my skin as we go. Once I'm where they want me, Jake drops my cuffs while they all stare down at me.

My eyes start to water with what I see behind the guys. A stump between two trees and several ropes dangling down to the ground. Tears track down my cheeks unwillingly as Chad and Derek hoist me up onto the stump. Jake holds me around my thighs as the other two each grab a cuff and secure it to the ropes to my sides. Tugging the ropes tight, my arms are spread high above me, forcing me to be on my tiptoes even in my high wedges. Arms already burning with the effort I twist and pull at them, trying to loosen the ties, but all it does is make everything tighter.

“Please don’t do this!” I yell at them, my voice breaking. They are all standing in front of me with matching expressions that promise pain. “I-I have money! If you let me go, I’ll get it for you, I swear!” At this point, I’ll give them anything if they just let me go. I am sure what they have in store for me will break me in more ways than one.

“Sorry, baby, but it’s time that you pay your penance,” Chad says to me as he brandishes a knife from his back pocket. He flips it open and walks to me, slowly dragging it down the middle of my dress until it flutters off my body and to the ground. I start to curse myself for insisting on wearing this strapless dress after Rue said she liked the T-shirt one better. I wobble before them on the stump in my heels and my black lacy thong. “Damn Mallory, if I had known this is what you were hiding under your clothes all this time, I would have done this sooner.” He looks at me, biting his lip before he leans forward and runs his nose along the seam of my panty-clad pussy making me squirm with unease.

My breaths come out in short puffs, and I feel like I’m going to hyperventilate as Chad uses the knife to snap the sides of my thong and it falls from my body. Leaving me standing there naked, my body flushes with embarrassment. No man has ever seen me naked before, and I had no intention of having that happen anytime soon. Chad runs his hand up the outside of my thigh, eliciting goosebumps from my skin. I feel another pair of hands grab my tits from behind, squeezing them hard, making me cry out with pain. A sharp pain explodes across my pussy and I look down in shock

as Derek slaps my pussy again with what feels like his entire strength, making me scream. My pleas for them to stop fall upon deaf ears, their hands wandering my shivering, naked body. Then all of a sudden the touching stops completely as their attention turns away from me to something else.

A twig snaps at my right hand side, and I hear footsteps coming closer. The guys surround me almost like a dog would when they are guarding their dinner. I follow their line of sight as a man emerges from the woods, making me still on the log I'm standing on. My tears flow faster knowing I'm standing in my damn birthday suit not only in front of these douchebags but a stranger as well. The man is older and much taller than the guys, more rugged, like he's been living in the woods for a while. He's wearing a black T-shirt that stretches over his muscles, and I know he's hiding one of those yummy V's under there. Black tactical pants are stretched over his thighs, and black muddy combat boots adorn his feet. Brown hair is swept back from his face with what looks like gel, but it could very well just be grease. His chiseled jaw is clenched, and his blue eyes are hard as they sweep over my body, making my entire body shiver and sway on the toes of my heels. The gun that he has clutched in his hand makes me nervous, and I start to tug at my ropes again to no avail.

“Hey man! There's plenty to go around over here; we really don't mind sharing.” Chad pipes up when he sees the gun, a friendly smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. The man tilts his head and looks at me like he's trying to solve a puzzle. He takes a few steps closer, his eyes trailing between each man before me. I open my mouth to speak, but a hard smack slams across my ass, making me screech in pain instead. “She deserves everything she has coming to her, so you might as well join in with us.” Chad waves his hands at me like I'm the prize of the show, and the three of them back up, giving him several feet of space.

The man walks up to me; he's so tall that he's almost eye level with me. His rough hand sliding along the outside of my thigh makes me tremble. The warmth of his palm and the way he caresses my leg confuse the shit out of me because he almost

seems caring. I tilt my head to the opposite side and squeeze my eyes shut to try and prepare myself for what's next.

“Look at me, little one.” His voice is deep and smooth like Bourbon, his tone commanding but not in a frightening way. I sweep my eyes to his instantly, pleading with them for help. Once our eyes connect, there is a shift in his demeanor. He leans closer to me, his hand now grabbing my thigh tightly, while his other one still holds the gun. “You’re going to be okay; you got me?” He says it so low that I almost miss it. I sniffle and nod my head at him in acknowledgment. “I need you to close your eyes. Do you think you can do that for me, beautiful?” He says with a tilt of his head, and then the hand that was clutching my thigh comes up and grasps my chin, forcing me to look at him. I try to nod my head but he shakes his. “Use your words.” He growls. Taking a deep breath, I whisper that I understand and close my eyes. As soon as everything is black, I hear three consecutive gunshots sounding, the noise piercing my eardrums, a scream crawling up my throat so loud it rivals the sound of the gunshots.

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### Chapter Six

#### MAVERICK

The most beautiful cries I've ever heard float around me while I trek through the woods. I've been at this for weeks now, and I'm over it. Mainly over the loneliness, and man, I'm horny as fuck too. My beard has grown out longer than I've ever had and the only shower I was able to take was days ago at an abandoned truck stop.

The whimpers get louder the farther I walk, and it makes me hard, my cock presses against the zipper of my pants. The closer I get, the easier it is to make out what the woman is blubbering on about; in the distance, I see figures in a clearing. Some I can recognize as men, so I pull the gun from my waistband and make sure it's loaded. I haven't had to use it once since I burned my house down, and I'm hoping I still won't need to use the precious ammo. I walk out of the trees and into a small clearing where three men are standing surrounding a woman tied to the trees in nothing but a pair of pink holographic heels on her feet. It's silent for a moment while we all stare at each other, and I take my time looking over the beautiful creature laid out in front of me.

Her blonde hair is long and down to her waist; it's dirty with leaves and twigs stuck in it. She's thin but has an athletic build to her, and I guess she may have some gymnastics or dance training with her muscle tone. Her blue eyes look like little pools of crystal blue water as tears fall from them down her face. She makes eye contact with me, those weeping sapphires pleading for help, and in that moment I decide she's mine. I take a step closer to her, and the blonde one in the middle speaks up.

"Hey man! There's plenty to go around over here; we really don't mind sharing." I



tilt my head and look up at the woman, seeing the truth about what this whole situation is. Stepping closer, I look over each of the assholes standing guard in front of her. Her pouty lips open to speak, but a hard smack slams across her ass, making her screech in pain and making me see fucking red. “She deserves everything she has coming to her, so you might as well join in with us.” Blonde boy waves his arms at the whimpering woman, showcasing her like a rare art piece up for auction.

I take it as an invitation and walk up to the woman, almost eye level with her pretty eyes. Sliding my hand along the outside of her thigh makes her tremble like she’s never been touched by a man before. Her body stiffens beneath mine like she’s preparing for me to rain pain down on her.

“Look at me, little one.” I demand of her. Her tearful eyes sweeping to mine, pleading so prettily for help. For a knight in shining armor to save her. That makes something snap inside of me, my hand grabbing her thigh tightly while the other one holds my gun firmly inside it. “You’re going to be okay, you got me?” I say so low that I see the wheels turning in her head, trying to understand. She snuffles and nods her head at me in acknowledgment. “I need you to close your eyes. Do you think you can do that for me, beautiful?” I say with a tilt of my head, the hand that was clutching her thigh coming up and grasping her chin, forcing her to look at me. She tries to nod her head in acknowledgement again. Fuck that. I want to hear her words. I want to hear what her voice sounds like while thick with tears, so I shake my head, “Use your words.” I growl. She takes a deep shuttering breath before her melodic voice tells me she understands. The sound goes straight to my already hard dick. When she squeezes her eyes shut, I raise the gun, aim it at the blond man holding a knife by his side, and pull the trigger. A bullet is embedded in his head, and he drops like a sad sack of potatoes. The other men stand there stunned, making it easy to pick them each off next in quick succession. All the while the beauty next to me screams at the top of her lungs.

I tuck the gun back into my waistband and reach up, pressing my hand against the

woman's mouth, silencing her ear-piercing screams. Her eyes fly open, more tears spilling from her eyes as she whimpers into my hands. Her feet slipping on the stump, sending her swinging to the side until I wrap an arm around her legs to steady her. "Shh, little one. You're going to wake the dead if you don't stop fucking screaming." I say to her and wait until she's quiet before removing my hand from her mouth. I step up onto the stump with her, my arm around her waist, reaching into the strap of my pack for the knife that I keep there. Flicking it open, I cut the rope from her left arm and then her right. Both arms flopping down at her sides like dead fish. A sob creeps out of her mouth from what I'm assuming is the blood rushing back into her limbs from hanging there as long as she was.

After ensuring that no stray splinters will get stuck in her ass, I assist her in descending from the stump on unsteady legs and place her on its edge. She squeezes her thighs closed, trying to mold them together, and wraps her arms around her chest, shielding herself from view. Her pretty head hangs down between her shoulder blades, hair falling over her face like a curtain trying to hide her from me. I crouch down before her and sweep her hair behind her ears, grip her face in both of my hands, and tilt it up towards me. She snuffles and shivers in my grasp as I look her over. She tries to pull away, trying so hard to hide from me, but I won't allow that shit, so I grip her face tighter.

"Where are you from, sweetheart?" I soften my voice like I'm coaxing a skittish animal out of hiding.

"L-Louisiana." She manages to stutter out. "But I don't know where I am now. They knocked me out and then took me, so I have no idea how long we drove for." Her voice cracks as she finishes talking. Fuck me. I know she's going to freak out when I tell her she's not in Louisiana anymore. She seems young, college-age if I had to guess.

"Welcome to Alabama." I say with a soft smile. She stares at me like I have three

heads and starts shaking her head, repeating no over and over. Fuck, she's panicking. Guess I called that one. I brace one hand on the stump next to her and grip her chin firmly with the other before I get in her face. "Breathe, baby." I command her, her pupils blowing as she stares at me. "Come on, you can do it. In." I mimic how I want her to breathe by inhaling slowly and then blowing it back out. "Out. That's a good girl." I praise her when her breathing becomes normal again. Her small hand comes up and wraps around my wrist, holding on for dear life. "You're okay. You're mine now, and I always take care of what's mine." I lift the hand that I braced on the stump to run my fingers through her knotted hair, somehow still soft and silky after everything she's been through.

"Thank you." She whispers, her soft voice floating on the wind.

"What's your name? Unless you want me to call you, little one, for the rest of your life." That makes a small chuckle come from her throat, bobbing against the hand that I have held there. I let go of her neck and sit back on my haunches, studying her.

"Mallory. You?"

"Maverick... But I think I prefer that you call me sir." A blush rushes to her cheeks at that, running down her neck and chest. Her rosy nipples harden, making my cock jump from the sight.

"Okay... sir." The way she says Sir almost has me mauling her right there on the fucking stump. I've been called Sir before, but not like this. Aspen did it to appease me because she didn't like being punished. The way Mallory says it is like she wants to say it, and she believes that's what I am.

"Let's find you something to wear and get the fuck out of here." I grab her hand in mine, and we head towards the log cabin in search of some sort of clothing. Hopefully finding some shoes too, because the ones on her feet are going to make her

break a damn ankle.

I drag her through the back door of the cabin, heels clacking against the wooden floor as I lead her over to the couch. She follows behind me like a lost puppy, and it almost warms my icy heart just a bit. “Sit. I’ll look around; see what I can find.” Looking back at her on the couch, she’s slouched into herself, like she’s hoping the couch will swallow her whole. I head towards the first door in front of me, pushing the knob open. The whole damn room is empty, besides some smears of mud and a few red spots that I deduce to be blood. This must have been where they kept her before they tied her up in the trees. I slam the door a little too hard and then grasp the knob on the door next to it, pushing it open so hard it slams against the wall behind it. Thank fuck there’s a bed and a dresser in this one. Rummaging through the dresser, I found some black sweats and a gray T-shirt. She will be swimming in these, but it’s better than walking through the woods naked. I find a thick pair of socks stuffed in the far corner of the drawer and grab those as well and head back towards her.

She hasn’t moved an inch from where I left her; I feel a sense of pride seeing that she has followed my commands even if it was unintentional. I kneel on my knees in front of her and undo the clasps from her heels that are around her thin ankles before sliding them both off her feet. Red marks adorn her ankles where the straps have rubbed her pale skin raw. I slip the socks over her feet first, rolling the cuffs down so she doesn’t look like a little old lady in the tube socks. Slipping the pants up her legs, I direct her to stand so I can tug them over her small but luscious ass. It bounces slightly when the waistband gets stuck on it. Once they are loosely in place around her waist, I tie the strings tight in an effort to hold them up. Lastly, I direct her to hold her arms up before pulling the T-shirt down her torso, her nipples hardening with the intimate action of being dressed by someone else. She stares down at her toes, her face flushed, and her hands twist in front of her. She’s ashamed, and it pisses me the fuck off.

### Chapter Seven

#### MALLORY

Maverick dressed me so tenderly that it made my stomach swoop with nervous butterflies. Every man who has touched me before this has been rough and only out for their own pleasure. But he treats me like I'm a treasure, like something to keep and cherish. The feelings coursing through my chest make me uncomfortable, so I just stare down at my feet, waiting for what comes next. Wondering if his kindness is all false niceties and his claws are about to come out and rip me to shreds. He grips my chin in his hand, tugging my face up to look at him, and it makes me flinch back, but he holds me tightly in place with his other hand on my waist.

"I'm not going to hurt you, pet." He whispers, almost like he's offended that I would even think such a thing of him. But how could I not when I just met him only a few minutes ago? "You're beautiful. You will not be ashamed of your body or me caring for you, do you understand?" I just stare up at his demanding gaze because I don't know what the hell to say. He can't tell me how to feel, can he? When I don't give him the answer he is looking for, he tugs me closer to him. So close that I can see the black flecks in his iris and the slight wrinkles on his forehead. "I want you to listen to me and listen to me well. You are mine. I don't give a fuck who or what you were before this very moment. Right now, and going forward, you belong to me. Your mind, your body, and your soul. Do. You. Understand?" He growls out the last part, making me tense up. Gazing into his eyes, I see just how serious he is. It makes me tremble with nerves, fear, and lust. No one has ever talked to me like that before.

"Yes... I understand, sir." I gulp in a gasp as his lips slam down onto mine. His lips

are soft and pillowy, and his tongue is warm and wet as it prods at the seam of my lips, trying to get in. The last time a man kissed me like this, it was sloppy and gross, but this man? Fuck, he's going to turn me into a puddle on the floor. Our tongues tangle together in a fight for dominance that I very quickly lose out on when he sucks mine into his mouth. My hands coming up, nails digging into his chest, tipping up on my toes to get closer to him. He bites my lips, making me yelp in surprise and then soothing the sting with his tongue. The heat between my legs grows hotter than it's ever grown before. I rub my thighs together to stave off the heat and wetness starting to pool there just from this simple kiss.

We pull apart, gasping for air, his forehead leans against mine, warm breath fans in my face while his hand trails down my neck and chest before landing on my other hip. My hands clutch his shirt between my fingers as I war with all of the contradicting feelings churning inside of me. I know he can sense my unease when he turns us sits down on the sofa and pulls me on top of him. His arms holding me tightly in place, like he's afraid I'm going to jump ship and flee.

“What's going through that pretty head of yours, pet?” He inquires while tilting my head down to his, eyes boring into mine with an intensity that makes me shiver. Is everything with this man so damn intense?

“I-I um.. Well, I...” All I do is stutter in my panic while I try to voice all the many thoughts swimming through me.

“Stop.” He demands in a voice that makes me stiffen on his lap. “Take a deep breath, and try again.” I do as he says, my lungs inflating with air that I hold before releasing. I do it a few more times until I feel my mind start to relax and piece my thoughts together in actual sentences.

“No one has ever kissed me like that, taken care of me, touched me, or made me feel like I was about to melt into a damn puddle before.” He looks up at me like he

genuinely can't believe what's coming out of my mouth. I run my hands down my face and then clutch them in my lap before I continue. "Every man who's ever come in contact with me has only ever cared about their feelings and desires. No one has ever taken the time to think about my own. Damn, I'm really putting myself out there with this one, but I've only ever come with a vibrator by my own doing." The absurdity of that last confession makes me fall into a laughing fit until tears are streaming down my face, turning into full-blown hysterics. Embarrassment flows through me, and I leap off Maverick's lap, ready to bolt away from here. I don't get very far as his thick arms wrap around my waist, and he carries me to one of the rooms, then tosses me unceremoniously onto the bed.

I bounce on the bed until I come to a stop in the center, scooting back against the headboard, and pulling my knees to my chest. Maverick walks towards me until his thighs hit the edge of the bed. He looks me dead in the eyes as he takes off his T-shirt and tosses it to the side before balancing on one foot to unlace his boots and tossing them one by one into the corner. All while continuing to stare into my eyes, his gaze getting heated like I've never seen before.

"W-what are you doing?" I stutter out, trying to back away further, but there's nowhere else to go. He's silent as he tugs his socks off of his feet before placing one knee on the bed. I hold a hand out towards him in earnest, "Stop! Please, what are you doing?" My voice screeches, cracking with fear that I was right. This man's kindness has worn off, and he's about to finish what Chad and the others started outside. A sob creeps up my throat, my vision getting blurry with tears at the revelation that I guess I was never meant to feel good around men.

"Look at me!" He commands so loudly it makes me hiccup. I look up at him for a split second before turning away from him and burying myself in the corner, hoping I will become invisible. I feel the bed dip as he scrambles up onto it towards me. He rips my hips out from under me, pulling me down on the bed until I'm flat underneath him. A gut wrenching sob wrenches from my chest when he wraps one hand around

my throat while the other holds my shaking hands above my head. "Mallory. My beautiful pet, please look at me." He whispers, his nose skimming my tear-stained cheeks. "Please." The tenderness in his voice shocks me so much that I do look up at him through my wet eyelashes. "I am not going to hurt you, Mallory. At least nothing more than you can take, and it will feel good when I do it." He smirks, and my eyes bulge with confusion. "I want to make you feel good; make that pretty pussy pulse and weep just for me. I'd say it's a shame no man has ever been able to do that for you, but I'm rather possessive, and it turns me the fuck on knowing I'll be the first man to make you come." Maverick's tongue slips from his lips as he licks the tears from my face, groaning from the salty taste of them. "Now, are you going to be my very good pet and let me make you come? Or do I need to tie you down like a bad one? Your choice, but either way you'll be coming on my tongue." His dirty words make me gasp in shock, my nipples being a traitor and tightening, straining against the thin material of the shirt.

"I'll be a good pet for you, sir." The heated whisper leaves my mouth as his lips come crashing down against mine again. He's rough with his kiss this time, nipping at my lips, thrusting his tongue into my mouth, and forcing the pleasure upon me.

His hands come up underneath my shirt, tugging it swiftly over my head, my nipples tightening even more in the coolness of the room. Maverick gives me one last kiss before leaning back on his feet to admire me in all my topless glory. I try to cover myself with my hands, but the look he gives me makes me stop and lay there under this inquisitive gaze.

"You're such a beautiful creature." He whispers, thick with lust, running his hand up my stomach to my chest. Flicking his finger against my hard nipple, making a gasp come from me. "Has anyone ever played with these pretty pink nipples before, pet?" He tilts his head to the side as he rolls both of my nipples between his fingers, tugging and pinching them. My back arches off the bed in pleasure that I've never felt before, almost seeming to go straight to my pussy too. I clench my thighs together,



and he notices, letting out a smirk. “I’m going to take that as a no then.” The words come out fast before his mouth descends onto one of my nipples, sucking it deep into his mouth as his other hand pinches and pulls the other. A squeak tears from me when I feel his teeth graze against it. Maverick looks up at me through his lashes, as if he’s trying to decide what to do next. It’s then I feel his sharp teeth biting down on my nipple while his other hand twists the other one hard.

A moan rips from me as my chest pushes my breasts closer to him in a silent request for him to give me more. “Guess we like a little pain with our pleasure, huh?” He growls when his mouth finally lets go of my nipple. He leans back on his feet again, looking down at my breasts, and I follow his gaze. My nipples are red, puffy, and glistening from his saliva, and they almost seem to have their own pulse now. He leans down, pulling off my socks, then reaches for the waistband of my sweats, pulling them down my legs and tossing them over his shoulder. I pull my knees up, squishing my thighs together, my heart almost pounding out of my chest with nerves. He has no idea that I’m a virgin, and the fear of him tossing me to the side and leaving me here because of it courses through me. Both of my exes were quick to tell me how much of a prude I was for being a twenty-one-year-old virgin. Telling me no man would ever want to take it now because there has to be something wrong with me. My breaths come out in little puffs, my eyes darting across the room as I try to scoot away from him. In my panic, I don’t see or hear Maverick move until he’s in my face, slapping me across the cheek.

### Chapter Eight

#### MAVERICK

She is freaking the fuck out right now. One second I'm staring down at her glistening pussy and the next she's absolutely terrified, hyperventilating, and trying to back away. I call out to her, but it doesn't break through her panic, so of course I come up with something that will break her out of this. My hand reaches out and slaps her across the cheek as I lean close into her little bubble of hysteria. I really wasn't sure if this would work or if it would make it worse, but the shock of the slap has her eyes widen and find my own.

"You're okay, pet. Whatever bad shit is running through your head right now, I want you to forget it. Let me replace it with something good." Her pretty eyes tear up as she listens to me talk. She stays silent as I wait for an answer, starting to squirm under my gaze. Tilting my head down to lean my forehead against hers, I whisper, "I'm not going to fuck you, Mallory. Well... not yet anyway. I plan to have my dick inside you very soon, but right now this isn't about getting my cock wet. This is only about you and your pleasure, pretty girl. Let me give it all to you."

I trail my lips down her neck, nipping at her collarbone. Her eyes travel with me as I lick and kiss down her body. Once I get down to her pelvis, she tenses up beneath me, but I run one hand up her thigh to calm her while the other holds her waist down. Gently, I part her legs, and I am greeted with the prettiest pussy I've ever seen in my goddamn life. I've seen a lot of pussy in my life; it kind of comes with the territory when you are a hired hitman to dispose of used-up sex slaves. But Mallory's? My fucking God, the sight of it makes me groan. She's completely bare, her dusty pink

lips glistening in the light. I run my finger across her seam softly, making her jump from my touch, spreading her wetness over her. Her whole body shivers at my touch, thighs tensing around me, and her breathing hitches. Leaning down, I lick up her essence, my taste buds firing with pleasure from the sweetness of it. I've never tasted a pussy sweeter than this.

A groan leaves me when I part her lips and inhale her musky scent. She wiggles her hips, trying to get away from me, and all it does for her is make me tighten my grip and glare up at her. A pitiful whimper swoops out of her, making my cock even harder than it already is. Finally, like a man starved, I lean down and start to devour her pussy. The sudden contact has her hips shooting off the bed and a squeak coming from her parted lips. Sucking her clit into my mouth, my finger prods at her entrance, her hands tugging at my hair. Slowly inserting one finger into her, trying not to hurt her while lapping up her juices to distract her, until I hit resistance and we both freeze. Her eyes are wide; she's leaned up on her elbows watching what move I'm going to take next, but the only thing that I want to do right now is take her innocence with my cock.

"Mallory..." I say with a questioning voice, hoping she won't make me actually say it. I haven't touched a virgin since high school. I should've pieced it together though with how she was acting earlier, and I mentally kick myself for that. Peering up at her, her eyes start to water, her body trembling with a new sensation, fear. Her emotions start to shut down right before me, muscles tensing under my touch, and eyes going blank. She's trying to dissociate, and I'm not going to have that shit. I reach my hand up and bring it down hard against her pussy. The slick slap ringing through the room, a squeak escaping her puffy lips. "Stay with me, Pet." I groan out, but her eyes are still vacant, still trying to pull back into herself. "You don't get to fucking hide from me, Mallory. I want to see every broken and fucked up part of you." I slowly start to rub circles into her clit with my other hand, trying to relax her as much as possible.

“Yes, sir...” The words stumble out of her lips. Part of me wants to back away and leave her in this bed to keep her pure, innocent, and sweet. But the other part? The part that wins is the one that wants to watch her break into pieces. To corrupt her, taint her innocence with my depravity. Removing my finger from her pussy I use it to rub circles around her clit, the other one reaching up to capture her nipple, twisting it between my fingers.

“What I would give to drive my cock into your tight pussy right now and claim what is mine .” I growl out, rubbing her clit faster, her breathing increasing as my fingers pluck at her nipple harder. “When I fuck you, you will beg on your knees for your Master to rip your innocence from you.” She moans at the mental image I plant in her head, and that’s all I need to continue. Pushing up onto my knees, I continue my assault on her pulsing clit while leaning down to take one of her nipples in my mouth, flicking my tongue against the taught peak. Her hips are moving against my hand on their own accord, her own hands reaching up to grip my biceps, nails digging into my skin. Her moans are getting more wild, hips stuttering in their tempo, and I know she’s about to explode. Bracing myself on my knees, I reach down and slap her breasts one after the other, the skin turning pink under my touch, and that’s exactly what she needed.

Her pretty cries of ecstasy nearly make me come in my pants like a hormonal teenager. Her eyes squeezed shut tight, while her back arches off the bed, thrusting her pussy further into my hand. I rub her clit through her orgasm, working her through it until she’s a limp noodle on the bed before me. Waiting until her eyes finally flutter back open, “Open your mouth for me, pet.”

Then bringing my fingers to my mouth, drenched in her juices to suck them off one by one before leaning back over her. Her mouth is wide open, waiting patiently for what I have to give her. I spit onto her tongue, and she holds it there, her pupils dilated, waiting for my next order. “Swallow it.” Her puffy lips from our earlier kisses close as she swallows it down, then she sticks out her tongue to show me it's

gone. "Such a good girl for me." I say as I run my thumb across her bottom lip before smashing my own to hers, taking her breath away.

She lets me kiss her until I'm satisfied, not once complaining. She's just as enamored in me as I am in her. We finally pull away, and I scoop her up bridal style, then walk to the bathroom next door. The only thing in here is a vintage clawfoot tub, toilet, and sink. I place her gently in the tub before stripping myself of my clothes and climbing in behind her to turn the water on. It takes a bit before it warms up, and I'm almost worried there's no hot water at all. Once the warm water starts to spray from the faucet, a relieved breath leaves us both. Along the wall next to the tub are various soaps and other body products. I grab some lavender-smelling bubble bath and pour it under the running water, filling the tub until it's just about to spill over.

Mallory leans back against me, as comfortable as a cat laying in the sun, her legs stretched out before her, eyes closed, and head tilted back against my chest. The only thing missing is a purr emanating from deep in her chest. I let her relax against me in the warm water before I grab a washcloth from the stack of towels behind me, pour some more lavender-scented soap onto it, and rub it into her sore muscles. I start at her arms and work my way to her toes, being gentle but still making sure to get all the dirt and grime off of her. Finally, I wash her hair and then tend to myself before pulling the plug from the bathtub. I cringe at how dirty the water is as it drains from the tub, and I wish for a shower so bad, but we make do with what we have at this point. I wrap my pet up in a warm towel and carry her back to the bedroom, dressing her in new sweatpants, a T-shirt, and warm socks.

We walk back out to the living room, and I direct her to sit on the sofa while I explore more of the house, looking for food or anything else we can use. In one of the closets I manage to dig out a warm jacket and a pair of boots that I think may fit her, or at least get her by until we can find her something better. I also end up finding some cans of ravioli and manage to get the damn things open after chiseling away at them with a knife. Walking back over to the sofa, I set the jacket and boots on the floor

next to me, handing her a can of cold ravioli with a spoon, and plop down on the other end, pulling her feet into my lap. She doesn't even question or complain about the cold ravioli, just grateful that she's getting some form of food in her stomach, and it amazes me. Any other woman I've known would have been quick to complain about eating cold ravioli out of a can. We eat in silence, watching the sun set behind the trees, until night officially falls, sweeping us into darkness.

### Chapter Nine

#### MALLORY

I am fucking sweating, like I'm laying right up next to a damn furnace. I try to push away, but iron rods pull me tighter against the furnace, which makes me panic. The heat is becoming overwhelming, sweat dripping from my forehead. Kicking my legs out to push away, I make contact with something hard, and a groan sounds in my ear. Finally peeling my eyes open, I'm staring into Maverick's irritated blue eyes, and embarrassment floods through me as I realize he's the culprit of all the warmth. This is twice in twenty-four hours that he's made me hot and bothered in different ways.

"Good morning, Pet." His gravely morning voice drifts through my ears, and I swear I could listen to him tell me the most boring story on earth, and he'd still get me worked up.

"You are smothering me to death, let me up." His brow arches, arms tightening against me, refusing to let me go. "Please! You're too hot!"

"I wasn't aware there was a thing as being too hot, pretty girl." The smirk on his lips reflects the humor in his words. His arms finally loosen, letting me free.

Bolting up from the couch, I promptly strip the thick sweatshirt from my body, and the cool air in the room assaults me. Chills running through my body, nipples pebbling, goosebumps rising to the surface. I relish in the feeling of the sweltering heat leaving my skin until a throat clearing pulls me from my thoughts.

“If you wanted to get naked, then why didn’t you just say so?” My arms dart towards Maverick, his lips curling up to the side, eyes full of lust. Pulling my eyes down, I take in the view of my naked chest, completely forgetting I didn’t have anything under the sweatshirt. In a panic, I cross an arm over my chest, the other one reaching for the sweater discarded on the floor. Before I can grab it, Maverick already has it clutched in his grip and tosses it behind the couch. An irritated gasp leaves me, having me cross my other arm over my chest. His big hands reach out and grab my hips, dragging me towards him and forcing me down onto his lap. Once I’m positioned over his knees, he gently grabs both of my wrists and drags them behind my back, holding them hostage in one of his hands. “You don’t get to hide from me anymore, Mallory. I don’t know who made you feel so shitty about your body, but starting now you’re done thinking like that. If I had my way, you’d be walking around naked every minute of the day.” He leans forward, placing a kiss between my breasts, his other hand drifting up my stomach and chest before clasp around my neck, forcing me to look into his eyes. “Every inch of this body is mine now; do you understand, Pet?” I nod my head, but then quickly realize that’s not what he’s looking for when his hand tightens around my throat, cutting off my breath. “When I ask you a question, you are to use your words, Mallory.” My hips start to wiggle in his lap, trying to chase something to soothe the ache there.

“Yes, sir, I understand.” I finally wheeze out when he lets up on my throat just enough for the words to slip out. Maverick’s hand releases my wrists from behind my back and comes up to pinch and roll my nipple between his fingers. The sensation sending sparks down to my already needy clit, a moan slipping through my lips, my own hands coming up to clasp his wrist. The hand around my throat tightens again, dragging my head down towards his own.

“I want you to keep your hands behind your back for me, so I can play with these pretty tits. Do you think you can do that for me, baby?” My head immediately shakes no, because there's no way in hell I’m going to be able to not touch him while he’s playing with my nipples like a fucking guitar. “If you’re a good little pet for me, I’ll



let you come again, how does that sound?” The hand playing with my nipples drifts down until it’s between my thighs, applying pressure where I need it most.

“Yes, sir, I’ll be a good pet for you, I promise.” The words coming out in a needy whine, my hips pressing down against his hand, trying desperately to get more relief. Bringing my hands behind my back, I clutch them there for dear life.

Maverick’s head immediately dives down, his lips catching my nipple between them, teeth nipping at the hard bud. The hand around my throat snakes up the back of my neck and tangles in my hair at the back of my head, dragging it back at an uncomfortable angle. His warm lips trailing over to my other nipple, sucking it hard into his mouth, like he’s trying to suck the soul from my body. Maverick’s hand against my core leaves, and a whine sounds from my lips, which rewards me with a bite against my nipple. The hand finds the waistband of my sweats and tugs it down to make room for him. Palm laying against my pussy in a way that has my clit pulsing with need.

“Ride my hand for me, and make yourself come.” His words catch me off guard, causing me to still against him. I’ve never gotten myself off in front of anyone before. Always behind closed doors with a vibrator in my hand, and I have neither of those right now. The heel of his hand pressing harder against my clit making me gasp. “Come on, baby, you can do it. You want to please me, don’t you?” A shiver runs through my body, because fuck do I want to please this man more than anything. No idea why either, because I just met him, but damn, I think I’d walk through fire just for him to tell me I’m a good girl again. I start to move my hips against his palm, my swollen clit rubbing against the heel of his palm in just the right way, sending fire down my spine. His hand against my scalp tightens almost painfully, and his hand between my legs presses harder against my pussy, giving me exactly what I need and making my hips go into a wild bucking stride. His lips capture my nipple again, sucking and nipping at it, driving me crazy. The wetness between my legs is multiplying as I chase the high that’s just out of reach. My breaths come out in short

puffs, my nails dig into my wrists, as I try desperately to keep them behind my back so he will let me come. “Fuck, that’s a good girl. Come for your master, Pet. Show me how good you can be for me.”

His deep, raspy words are what finally fling me over the cliff. Stars burst behind my eyes, my back arching impossibly, hands flying out of my clutch and diving into his hair, tugging at the strands, as I ride through my orgasm. He holds me there, letting me grip his hair between my trembling fingers. Once my breath comes back into my lungs, I swoop down and capture his lips with my own, the force clacking our teeth together. Maverick’s arms wrap around my waist; he leans back against the couch, dragging me down against him. I feel the wetness on his hand against my back, and it makes me groan into his mouth. We kiss until my lips go numb, and I’m sure they will be bruised later. When we finally pull apart, we are both breathless, our sweaty foreheads leaning up against each other as we just exist in this little bubble we’ve created.

“Watching you come apart against me has to be the most beautiful thing I’ve ever fucking seen. I don’t know how much longer I can wait until I bury myself in that tight pussy of yours, Mallory.” The words make me gasp and tremble against him. My pussy is already sore from all the touching it’s had just within the last day. “But unfortunately, we need to get moving. Find a different place to hold up in. We’ve been here too long as it is.” His hands come up and sweep my hair back away from my face, tucking it behind my ears. “Let’s get you dressed, get some stuff together, and get the fuck out of here, yeah?” I give him a quiet okay, worried about what is waiting out there in the world for us.

Hopping up off of his lap, I reach for my sweater but decide against it. Heading for the bedroom to root through the dresser for a T-shirt. Finding a faded black one, I push my head and arms through the hole, and the damn thing is huge on me. Between the shirt and the sweats, I look like a toddler wearing their parents’ clothes. With an eye roll, I reach down to the hem of the shirt, tugging it up and tying it in a knot

against my stomach, and tucking the tail up inside the shirt. It's still big around my shoulders but tight against my waist, with a slice of skin showing across my stomach. I shrug my shoulders before walking out of the room and finally grabbing the sweater from the floor and tugging it over my head.

Maverick is rooting through the kitchen and stacking random supplies onto the countertop. "There's not much here to work with, so we'll have to find somewhere to get more supplies, but these will do for now." A few packs of microwaveable rice, cans of ravioli, corn, and bottles of water line the counter top. He picks up two bags and plops them onto the countertop next to the supplies. Putting the heavier items in one and the lighter ones in the other. Handing me the lighter pack, I swing it onto my shoulders and buckle the strap across my breasts, adjusting the straps until it's comfortable. "I found some boots for you; they're over by the couch. They're going to be too big, but they're better than those pink death traps you were walking around in earlier." I walk over to the couch and plop myself down, then grab the boots and drop them in front of me.

"Are you sure I can't just wear my heels? These are ugly as fuck, Maverick." My face scrunches up at the dirty black boots before me, dreading putting my feet into them. Even though I'm wearing thick socks, the thought of wearing some man's sweaty shoes repulses me.

"Yeah, I'm sure. Put them on, Mallory, now." The demand in his voice makes me second-guess my smart ass retort. Slipping the boots onto my feet and tying the laces tight so they don't slip off. I stand up, and I feel like a clown in these things.

"You can't be serious! Look at them; they look like clown shoes!" I whine, flopping my way over to him in my new flippers.

"They're not that bad; quit being dramatic." He rolls his eyes, and I open my mouth to tell him where he can shove it, but the glare he gives me makes me slam my mouth

shut. I cross my arms over my chest with a huff, and I know I look like a pouting two-year-old with how ridiculous I look in this get-up. “Calm down; we will find you something else as soon as we can.” He ushers me towards the door, and I flip flop over to it, swinging it open with all my might. It bounces off the wall, nearly hitting Maverick in the shoulder. He grabs me so hard it makes my head spin, and then he presses me up against the open door; his body grinds me into the hardwood. “Quit being a fucking brat. Would you rather me let you trek around the woods naked in your pink heels? Because if that’s what you want, then go for it! But if you break an ankle, you’ll continue to walk on it, cause I’m not going to carry your fucking ass after you didn’t listen to me.” I hate that he’s right about me breaking an ankle. There’s no way I can walk through those woods in those things; I almost broke an ankle running from the party. Finally relenting to his demands, he sees the surrender in my eyes and pushes back away from the door, giving me room. He grabs my hand and drags me away from the door, slamming it closed with his other one.

“Where are we going to go?” I whisper when we make it into the cover of the trees, suddenly scared shitless that we are out in the open.

“Honestly, I have no fucking idea. But wherever we end up, I will keep you safe.” He echoes his promise with a reassuring squeeze of my hand. It doesn’t take away all of my worries, but it takes the panicking edge away enough for me to stumble after him.

### Chapter Ten

#### MALLORY

We've been walking for hours, and my feet hurt like they do after I've cheered at two back-to-back games. The sun is starting to set behind the trees, the air getting colder as the darkness descends. I've already tripped over numerous branches and have also almost broken my ankle falling into a hole with these flippers on my feet. I know I have blisters on my feet, and the thought of them popping and getting infected makes me groan. Sadly, I've already been there and done that in my cheer career. Maverick has offered to carry me several times, but I've refused because he's already carrying the heavier pack on his back, and I know it's taking a toll on his shoulders. I've offered to switch him packs a few times, and he's turned me down every time, saying he's more than capable of shouldering the weight.

We start to head down a hill, my hand clutched tightly in Maverick's keeping me anchored to his side, but my numb and sore feet trip over themselves, sending us both careening down the hill. My arms swing out trying to grab onto something to stop my descent, but all that gets me is a branch cutting into the skin of my arm. The burning pain has a scream ripping through my throat until it's whipped out of me when I hit a hard surface. Arms wrap around me as we come to a stop at the bottom of the hill. Maverick's heaving chest under me has me gasping in relief until the pain in my arm reminds me that I'm hurt. I hiss as I sit up and slide off of his chest, plopping down next to him. Blood seeps from a slash in the sleeve of my sweater, making my heart race at the site. Maverick sees it and pushes my sleeve up, revealing the damage makes us both gasp, him in shock and me in pain.

“God damnit!” His words of anger cause tears to slip out of my eyes and a sob to escape my lips.

“I-I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to.” Suddenly scared he’s going to punish me for falling and getting hurt while we’re in the middle of nowhere with nothing to help us.

“Shh shh, it’s okay, Pet. We’ll get you all fixed up. Here, let’s wrap this around it until we can find somewhere to set up camp and I can fix it properly, okay?” His words are going in one ear and out the other as I watch him strip his belt from his waist and tighten it around my arm, above the wound that’s flowing with blood. I whimper at the sharp pain that ripples through my arm as he tightens the belt so tight my fingers start to tingle. “Hold this up, okay?” He tilts my arm up, and I hold it there with the other hand. He helps me up and then picks me up bridal style against my protest.

Looking around, he spots a cluster of rocks and heads towards it. Plopping me on top of one of the flat ones at the bottom, he places his bag beside me, unzips it, and takes out a thick roll of cloth from the bottom. I eye him suspiciously as he starts unrolling the fabric, revealing several metal poles wrapped up inside of it. He rolls out the fabric and starts digging poles into the ground and pushing others into various holes in the fabric. He tightens some of the rods, and they start to form arches, finally revealing a tent. Laughing to myself at how dumb I am for not knowing what that is, but to be fair, I’ve never slept in a tent a day in my life. Once he has it set up where he wants it, he walks around the small clearing, gathering various sticks and setting them up several feet away from the tent. Next, he goes farther into the woods. I stare after him curiously, watching as he grips a large fallen log and starts dragging it over to him. I stand to go help him, and he glares at me, telling me to sit my ass back down.

Once he’s satisfied with his setup, he grabs a metal zippo from his pocket, flicking it open and leaning down to set the sticks on fire. The fire flickers, barely catching until

it bursts into an orange flame, illuminating the night around us. Maverick walks back over, snagging his pack up off the rock next to me. He offers me his hand and helps me up. He steers me over to the log and pushes me down onto it as he takes a seat next to me, the pack settling between his feet. The warmth of the fire finds me, and it almost makes me purr with how good it feels. Maverick pulls out a black case from his pack and sets it on the log between us, as well as a bottle of water and some gauze.

“I’m going to take the belt off, and then we need to get your sweatshirt off.” He doesn’t wait for me to acknowledge him before he starts removing the belt and yanking my sweater up over my head. My head feels dizzy with all of the different sensations, and I’m sure the blood loss. He replaces the belt around my arm and grabs my wrist, dragging it towards him and laying it over my knee. “Keep it there for me, beautiful. This is probably going to hurt, but we need to get it clean to see what we’re working with.” He unscrews the cap of the water bottle and starts to gently pour it over my wound; my teeth grit together from the throbbing pain. He uses a piece of gauze to wipe away as much of the blood as he can, the belt helping to make the blood still seeping from my arm turn into a trickle. “Damn, this is going to need some stitches.” He shakes his head with a curse, and I go to pull my arm away from him, clutching it to my chest.

“No fucking way, Maverick! Just wrap it up with the gauze and it will be fine.” My body shakes from the pain coming from my arm and the fear of him coming near me with a needle. He glares down at me with unsaid words that almost, just almost, put the fear of God into me. “I said no! No needles, please.” His face softens when he catches onto my irrational fear of needles. I know it’s stupid, but damn those bitches hurt, and the thought of them poking into me multiple times over and over makes me want to vomit.

“Mallory, we have to. It’s too deep to heal without them. We can’t risk an infection when we are nowhere near a functioning hospital.” I keep shaking my head, scooting

back across the log. His hand snakes out, gripping my thigh, keeping me from moving any farther away. “I’d rather not have to do this out here, but I’d also rather not have to hack your arm off because of an infection either. But it’s your choice, I suppose.” The thought of him having to hack my arm off with the axe that he leaned up against the log behind me when we got here makes me still in my haste to get away. I weigh my options in my head, and it pisses me off when I come to the realization that I’m going to have to sit here while he stabs me over and over like a voodoo doll.

“Fine, just do it. B-b-but be gentle, please...” Stretching my arm back out to him with a whimper, he clutches my wrist in his hand, tugging me closer to him until I’m right where he needs me. He opens the box next to him and pulls out a small white bottle before opening a plastic pack of needles, some thick thread, and some scissor-looking things. He sets them all out on a piece of large cotton next to us. Flipping open the cap of the bottle, he pours the clear liquid over each instrument before bringing it over to my arm. His hand clutching my wrist tight in his own, his eyes drilling into mine with warning. “Do it.” I say through clenched teeth, definitely not prepared for the burning pain that awaits me. As soon as the liquid hits my wound, a whimper seeps out of me, and I try to pull my arm away, but Maverick holds it in an iron grip.

“Don’t touch it or I’ll have to sanitize it all over again.” His warning has me clutching both hands into fists, resisting the urge to pull away. He picks up one of the sinister-looking needles and threads the thread, and then picks up the scissors-looking things, which I realize are actually some type of forceps. He leans down and positions the needle next to my wound as he looks up at me with regret in his eyes. “Brace yourself. If you thought the alcohol hurt, then this will feel like absolute hell.” The tip of the needle starts to pierce my skin, and a scream rips through my throat as he pushes it through, catching it on the skin on the other side of the wound. It feels like he’s ripping me open and trying to scoop my guts out as he pushes the needle through the other side.



“Please stop! It hurts too much!” I let out a sob, but he doesn’t even stop. He just keeps going, sticking me like his own embroidery project. My arm shakes against his leg, and my vision blurs with tears. “Maverick, p-please!” He looks up at me with pity in his eyes, his hands stilling next to my skin. “Knock me out!” His brow quirks at my words, like I just asked him to shove a knife through my heart. “Make me go to sleep.” The words come out in a whimper. He gently places the torture instruments back onto the cotton next to him and stares down at me.

“Are you sure that’s what you want?” He asks as he snips off the end of the thread that’s currently sticking out of my arm. I shake my head yes frantically, my chest heaving, tears and snot dripping down my face. “I need your words, Mallory.”

“Yes! Knock me the fuck out already!” As soon as the first word leaves my mouth, his hands are around my throat, squeezing like a vice.

“Shhhh, it’s okay, Pet.” He lowers me back onto the log, the jagged bark digging into my back, his hands continuing to squeeze, cutting my air off. “Close your eyes; it will all be over when you wake back up.” His face starts to blur before me, the edges of my vision going black. He squeezes so hard I know I’ll be wearing a necklace of bruises tomorrow. My vision finally goes black, my body going numb. I feel like I’m floating in a black abyss, and the last thing I feel is the touch of his lips on mine.

### Chapter Eleven

#### MAVERICK

I 'm almost ashamed that my dick got hard when she asked me to knock her out. Watching the light fade from her eyes was just as beautiful as watching her come. As soon as she's unconscious on the log, I rush into action. Honestly, I'm worried she's going to wake back up during this process, and if that happens, I will have to tie her down. I'm seriously cursing myself for not bringing more heavy-duty pain killers, but I also didn't plan on picking up a stray out here either. I transfer the supplies to the ground, resanitize them with the alcohol, and plop down on the hard earth next to them with the fire warming my back. Gently I grasp her wrist in my hand and lay it over my knee and say a prayer for whoever the fuck is listening that I can get this done without any interruptions.

The first stitch feels like I'm dismantling a bomb as I hold my breath and push the needle quickly through her skin. It stretches like elastic before it finally pokes out the other side. More blood flows down her arm, but I pay it no mind as I keep going all the while checking to make sure she's still out. Ten stitches later, she's still comatose, and I've finished the job. Picking up the alcohol, I spill it over her arm before wrapping several layers of gauze around the wound and securing it with medical tape. I lay her arm across her chest and grab the compact double sleeping bag out of my pack and drape it over her. Next, digging around and snagging out the only two cans of ravioli that we have left. I use my knife to chisel away at the tops of them and nestle them both at the edge of the fire. By the time she wakes back up, they should be warm to eat, which I'm sure she will appreciate after all that shit.

After about twenty minutes, Mallory stirs on the log behind me, a groan slipping from her lips. She turns over, and if I wasn't sitting next to her, she would have tumbled off the log. I steady her back into her spot; her brows are pulled together in the middle, lips pursed in a cute little scrunch.

"Welcome back to the land of the living, Pet. How are you feeling?" She takes a moment to contemplate what I asked, assumingly assessing her body for her pain levels. She opens her mouth to speak, but then thinks better of it and raises her injured arm to inspect it before finally answering.

"I feel like I just got used as someone's voodoo doll, so how do you think I'm feeling right now?" I let the sass in her voice slide because I know she's in pain, but that doesn't stop the glare I send her way in warning. "A seven out of ten." She finally answers with a roll of her eyes. As beautiful as those eyes are, I'm so tired of seeing them fucking roll around in annoyance. I reach out and grip her chin in my hand, forcing her to look me in the eyes.

"Let's get one thing straight, Pet. If I see you roll your eyes one more time, I'm going to bend you over my knee and spank that ass red. I don't give a fuck if you're injured or not." Her eyes go wide with shock. I don't think anyone has ever talked to her like I have these last few days. She definitely strikes me as someone who's used to being on the top of the food chain, always in control, and never letting her walls down. "We need to get something into your stomach after all that mess. Need to keep your energy up; we're heading out at first light." She let's out a whine as she shifts her body to slide down the log and onto the ground next to me, bringing the sleeping bag with her. I drape the fabric over both of our laps before digging out some sporks I snagged at the last house from my pack and handing her one. I grab a thick sock out of my pack and fold it in my hand twice before grabbing a can of ravioli out of the fire and handing them both to her. She sniffs the steam from the can and practically moans from the smell. I grab another sock and grab my own can, stirring the contents before taking a bite. I don't care what you think, but hot ravioli hits so much different than

the cold shit.

“Thank you.” Mallory’s soft voice drifts to my ears. Glancing over at her, she’s just staring at her can of ravioli, not even taking a bite yet.

“For what?” I mumble around a bite of food, the heat of the inside burning my tongue on contact.

“Feeding me. Fixing me. Just taking care of me. I didn’t think you actually would when you told me that you would care for me back at the house. It’s kinda weird having someone else care for me. I’m used to just taking care of myself.” Her head hangs, still staring at the steaming can of food.

“Eat, Mallory.” My demanding voice leaves no room for her to disobey me, so she finally digs in and pulls out a ravioli. She is much smarter than I am, because she blows on this one to cool it down before popping it into her mouth, moaning at the taste, making me smirk. “Also... You’re welcome, but don’t thank me for this shit going forward. I told you that you’re my Pet now, and all of that comes with the territory of owning you.” She nods at my words, seeming too tired to argue with me, and we finish eating in silence.

There’s something peaceful about sitting by a fire late at night, in the middle of nowhere. But there’s also something nerve-wracking about it too. I’m grateful that we haven’t attracted any zombies yet, and I’m crossing my fingers that it stays that way, but I’m not sure how long our luck will get us. The fire starts to slowly die down while Mallory starts to nod off next to me. I grab a bottle of water from her pack, handing it to her, before grabbing my own and using it to clean the sporks and drinking the rest myself. By the time I’m done packing everything back into both packs, she’s guzzled down the whole bottle and throwing the remains into the fire pit.

“Come on, we need to get some sleep before it gets too late.” Picking up the sleeping

bag first, I toss it over my shoulder, grabbing both packs in one hand, and then reach down to help Mallory to her feet. Directing her towards the tent, unzipping it, and ushering her inside. I lay the sleeping bag down in the middle of the tent, with the packs in the corner. "It's not the Ritz Carlton, but it's better than nothing. Hope you're good with sharing." I shuck my T-shirt off and toss it in the corner with the packs before unlacing my boots and adding them next to the door. Mallory hasn't moved from her crouch by the door since we entered the tent. "Well, what are you waiting for? Take your boots off, and get in." I tuck myself into the sleeping bag, waiting for Mallory to get her ass in next to me. She takes her sweet time discarding her boots before slipping in next to me, her head instantly laying on my chest.

I fall asleep with my hand tangled in her hair and her soft snores echoing through the tent. A few hours later I'm shaken awake by a frantic Mallory, and I instantly grab the gun and flashlight from the ground that I had laid out next to me. "What is it?" I demand, scrambling out of the sleeping bag and crawling towards the door of the tent. I unzip the zipper and peer out, sweeping the flashlight side to side, and the only thing out there is fucking trees and silence. "There's nothing there; go back to sleep." I say with annoyance, lacing my voice and turning back towards the sleeping bag.

"Wait! I know there's nothing there; I have to pee, Maverick!" Her mouth is turned down into a frown, fists clutched at her sides, and she's swaying back and forth. I raise my eyebrow in disbelief that she would actually wake me up for something like that. "I'm serious, Mav, I have to go!" The pitiful whine in her voice almost makes me laugh.

"Okay, then go; I'm not stopping you." I say with a laugh as I lay back down on the sleeping bag and hand her the flashlight.

"Uh, where am I supposed to go?" The complete stupidity of her question catches me off guard, and I burst out laughing. "Stop laughing at me! Seriously, I need to pee so bad, Maverick, I can't hold it anymore!" Her eyes glaze over with unshed tears, and

that quiets my laughter, because that's when I realize she's never been camping a day in her life.

"Fuck, okay, come on." I grab the flashlight back from her, and we both shuffle out of the tent, zipping it back up behind us. I walk us about fifty feet away from the tent before stopping and pointing the light at a spot on the ground, making sure there's nothing harmful around our feet. She just stands there looking at me like I have three heads. "Well, what are you waiting for?"

"What do you expect me to do right now? I thought you were taking me to the bathroom!" Her squeal echoes through the trees.

"Do you fucking see a bathroom anywhere, princess? If you haven't noticed, we are in the middle of nowhere. Squat and piss!" I say with a growl as I sweep my arms out around us to emphasize the empty woods around us.

"You have got to be kidding me right now. No fucking way!" Mallory shakes her head and starts to back up and head back towards the tent.

"I fucking swear, Mallory, if you don't squat and piss right now, I will make you."

"Yeah? How the hell do you plan on doing that?" She stands a few feet away with her hands planted on her cocked hip, her head tilted to the side, eyebrow raised.

"Do you really want to find out, Pet?" I take a step towards her, and she just stands there, eyeing me, trying to decide which path she wants to take. I would love to humiliate her right here in the woods, but I am also not sure if she will be able to take it.

"Fuck you." The venom in her voice makes me laugh, and I toss the flashlight to the ground at our feet and lunge at her. Grabbing her around the waist and tossing her

onto the ground on her back. Her breath comes out in a whoosh as the wind is knocked out of her lungs.

“Just remember, you chose this.” I lean over her and whisper into her ear before flipping her onto her stomach. Her squeal of surprise pierces my ears. I hold her down with a knee on her back while I pull off her boots that she didn’t even bother to lace up and then shimmy her pants off, tossing them behind me. Her pale ass glows in the moonlight, making my mouth water with the urge to lean down and bite her perfect cheeks. “Last chance, Mallory, because I promise you, you aren’t going to like what comes next.”

“Fuck you! Get off of me, you damn caveman!” She wiggles under my knee, trying desperately to get away.

I replace my knee with a hand on the back of her neck, squishing the side of her face into the leaves and dirt below her, and using my other hand, I lift her hips up from the ground and force my thigh under her pelvis, laying my other arm across her lower back and applying pressure. She screams once she realizes what I’m trying to do, her hands clawing at the ground, trying to pull away from me, and the pressure on her bladder. I push harder, her back popping in the process, and then I hear the loud stream of her piss finally releasing along with her sobs. Her back shakes with her sobs, and her body goes limp in my arms as her bladder empties. I hold her in that position well after she’s done peeing, letting her lay there and cry in her humiliation. Once all I hear is quiet sniffing and the rustle of the trees, I let up on her back and neck, falling back onto my ass on the dirt, and pulling her into my lap. Her head hangs, hands clasped in front of her, like a child after a punishment, and damn the sight goes straight to my dick.

“Next time I tell you to do something, you do it, Mallory. Nothing about this is going to be glamorous, and you’re going to have to get over your prissy self if you want to survive. There’s only so much I can do. You have to put in just a little effort here

too.” I grip her chin between my thumb and forefinger, tilting her face up to mine. The moonlight glinting off the tears that stain her red cheeks. Small, insignificant scratches litter the side that I had pressed into the dirt.

“I-I’m sorry, sir, I understand. It won’t happen again.” She says with a hiccup and a snuffle, but I know all too well that it will happen again, and I will relish the next time I humiliate her for disobeying. I help her to her feet, dressing her first in her sweatpants, and then slip her boots back onto her feet. We walk back to the tent hand in hand, ushering her inside and straight to the sleeping bag. It’s not long before her snores fill the tent, and I’m finally able to fall asleep myself.



### Chapter Twelve

#### MALLORY

Can you die from embarrassment? I'd really like to right now, especially after last night. That was the most mortifying thing I have ever experienced, and I accidentally flashed an entire crowd my thong once at a football game when I forgot my spunks. I've been staring at the side of the tent since I woke up about an hour ago, trying to muster up the courage to leave it and go face Maverick. I heard him leave the tent earlier, and he hasn't returned since. Part of me thinks he's mad at me for last night's events, and that is almost worse than the embarrassment that I'm feeling. How did he even know how to do that in the first place? I didn't know that you could just force someone to pee against their will, which makes me wonder even more about his past. I let out a groan and roll onto my back, contemplating if I want to leave the cozy sleeping bag and face the music. However, the demanding voice outside the tent now gives me no choice but to get up.

"Mallory, I know you're awake. Get your pretty ass out here so you can eat." His voice sends shivers down my spine. I can't tell if he's angry because his voice always has an edge to it when he speaks in that dominating tone. I shake my head and throw the sleeping bag off of me and lean up on my knees in search of my clown shoes. I spot them in the corner of the tent; I snag them by the tops, pull them onto my feet, and stumble out of the tent. Maverick is sitting on the log by the fire, his elbows resting on his knees, hands clasped between them, eyes transfixed on the glowing embers. I shuffle towards him, plopping down onto the other side of the log, as far away as I can get and clasp my hands in my lap, a blush creeping up my neck. "Here, I expect those to be empty before we leave." He thrusts a bottle of water into my

hands and a cup of instant rice along with a spork. I stare at the bland food, my stomach growling in hunger, but my taste buds are already refusing the tasteless food.

Maverick continues to stare at me while I'm staring down at the offending food in my hands. He starts to open his mouth, I'm assuming to yell at me, but I shove a warm bite of rice into my mouth before he can say anything. I have to fight back my instinct to gag around the rice. I actually hate rice with a burning passion. It reminds me of maggots, and the thought of them eating their way out of my insides does make me gag, and I nearly vomit up the few bites I was able to scarf down. Maverick looks over at me with concern. I tell him I'm just fine, take a deep breath, and eat the rest of the rice in record time. Once the last bite has passed my lips, I grab the water and gulp it down. When the last grain of rice slides down my throat, I'm able to breathe a little easier. Now I just have to not think about the maggot-looking grains wiggling their way through my intestines.

We sit in silence, listening to the fire crackle away before us in the early morning air. The awkwardness in the air could be cut with a knife; my anxiety has me bouncing my knee and twisting my fingers in my lap. I can see his hands white-knuckling the log beneath us, and his jaw is clenched tight like he's forcing himself not to say anything to me. He's going to make me speak first, which has my stomach dropping into my ass. I can't stand being a disappointment to anyone. My momma always made sure she knew when I disappointed her, refusing to talk to me for weeks on end, isolating me in my own home. The fear of Maverick doing the same has me on the verge of a panic attack. There is no way I will survive out here on my own.

"I'm sorry!" I blurt out into the silence. His jaw relaxes from its tensed position, knuckles letting up on their steel grip on the log, and it makes me breathe just a bit easier. "I'm sorry for being such a brat last night. I know there was no excuse for it. As I am sure you have figured out already, I am not used to living like this. I'm not ashamed to say I grew up with a silver spoon in my mouth, so all of this is a lot to take in all at once." I pause to take a deep breath, watching Maverick's expression

when he finally swings his head towards me. The look on his face is more pity than disappointment, which is relieving but also annoying. I'm far from a charity case. "Please don't look at me like that. I may be a bit of a princess, but I can help. I'm not as fragile as you think I am." He finally lets out a smile at my final words. I'm able to breathe normally again and relax.

"I shouldn't have yelled at you like I did last night, and for that I apologize. But I won't apologize for my other actions. You fucked up, and you needed to learn your lesson. I'm sure that won't be the last time either." He smirks, and I hold back my eye roll because I'm not in the mood to serve another punishment right now. "I will do my best to be more patient with you, but you also need to remember that we are in survival mode right now. When I tell you to do something, you need to do it. I'm telling you for your own safety, got that?"

"Yes, sir, I got it." I say with a smile, and the weight on my chest has all but dissipated now.

"Good. Now come show me just how sorry you really are, Pet." He has a wicked smile on his face, and my mind is whirling with what he could possibly want from me as an apology. Wracking my brain, going through all of our time together the last few days, I come up completely blank. I remember watching a video late at night in my dorm where a woman was submitting to a man. It was one of the hottest things I've ever watched if I'm being honest with myself, and I decided it's worth a shot. I rise from the log, walk between him and the fire, and kneel down between his knees. My knees spread slightly, hands laid on top of my thighs with my palms facing the sky, and at the last minute I decide to bow my head for good measure. "Hot damn..." His words come out thick with desire and approval. Maverick threads his fingers into my hair, tilting my head back so our eyes meet. "You're a good girl, Mallory. A little bit of training and you could be perfect..." His thumb slides slowly across my bottom lip. "I accept your apology." He punctuates his words with a deep kiss against my lips; when he pulls away, I chase his hips and whine when he doesn't indulge me.

We both hear the snap of twigs coming our direction at the same time. Maverick is already on his feet, his gun in his hand, before I even have a chance to get to mine. I peek around his back to see what's going on, but he just shoves me back behind him again. "Hey! What's going on?" I try to push around his back to see what's going on, but he moves to be in my line of view again. Well, two can play at that game. I turn around and jump over the log so I can finally see what's happening, and what I see has me furrowing my brows. "What the fuck?" I whisper, taking in the five people that are ambling towards us. I use that word lightly because they're more like limping. "Was there a Halloween party, and we missed the memo?" A laugh leaves me as I ask Maverick, but the look he gives me has my insides rolling.

"Get the fuck behind me!"

"Why?" I say, shrugging my shoulders. I can handle a few people trying to prank us. "Hey losers! Get out of here! I promise I'm much nicer than he is." Saying it with a smile gracing my lips and my thumb pointed at a fuming Maverick.

"Mallory, I'm being serious! Get behind me, now!" His yell makes me wince, and the people seem to perk up and limp towards us faster, making me take a step back.

"Did you fuckers hear me?! I said, leave! We were having a moment, and y'all really kind of ruined it." I cock my hip to the side and put my hands on them so they know I mean business. The one in front snarls, his mouth foaming, blood dripping from the side.

"Fuck! Mallory, those are zombies!" Maverick grabs my arm and hauls me over the log, pushing me back behind him.

"W-w-what? Those are real? I thought it was just some hoax made up by the government!" I yell with a screech, clutching onto the back of his shirt.

“No, Pet, zombies are very much real. Why do you think I have all this shit and we’re trekking through the damn woods?” His words come out through gritted teeth, and he starts to back us up towards the tent that the axe is leaned up against. The zombies track our every movement, getting closer and closer. My heel bumps up against the tip of the axe, and Maverick reaches down and snags the handle in his hand; tucking his gun into his waistband, he hefts the axe up and poses at the ready.

My heart feels like it’s going to beat out of my chest. The snarls and shuffling coming towards us are all I can hear in my ears over my heavy breathing. I can’t die like this. There’s no way in hell I’m going out by a fucking zombie. I lean back from Maverick, searching around me until I spy a large tree branch lying a few feet away. I clutch it in my hands and heft it up on my shoulder, walking around Maverick to stand next to him.

“What the fuck are you doing?” He looks at my weapon with disbelief and doesn’t see the first zombie lunging at him. I swing the branch down onto the zombie’s head, and he crumbles to the ground before us. Maverick doesn’t miss a beat as he brings the axe down across the zombie’s neck, severing his head from his body.

“Let me help!” The command comes out more like a terrified squeal as the sight of the officially dead zombie curdles what little contents are in my stomach. My hands tremble around the tree branch due to its weight and my fear.

“I really appreciate that, Pet, but you will be more help if you just get BACK!” The last word comes out in a yell, and the blade of the axe almost grazes the top of my head as he slices the head clean off of a zombie that snuck up behind me. That is officially my cue to sit my ass down.

I scurry back behind Maverick and huddle up between a few rocks, hoping they will block me from view if this all goes sideways. Maverick is stalking the last three zombies as they creep closer to him. He leaps to the left and decapitates the next one,

blood spraying across his chest, drenching his T-shirt and making it plaster to his pecs and abs. The sight makes my stomach flip, and I scold myself because this is so not the time to be thinking about how hot he is. The next zombie lunges at Maverick, and he manages to jump back at the very last minute, swiping the axe at the zombie's leg, cutting it off at the knee. The zombie tips over and lands on its side and starts using its hands to army crawl its way towards him, and Maverick brings the axe down on its neck, severing it from its body. Holy fuck, why was that so hot? I squeeze my thighs together to alleviate the growing heat between them. Maverick finally hacks off the head of the last zombie and drops the axe to the ground at his side. His chest is heaving as he surveys the area, making sure he got each and every one of them. He looks like a sexy avenging angel, his shirt plastered to his torso from sweat and blood, hands clutched at his sides, jaw set in an "I mean business" type of way. All I can think about right now is jumping his bones, which is rather unfortunate in our current situation.

### Chapter Thirteen

#### MAVERICK

Why can't she listen to what she's told? When will she learn? The feelings I felt when she stepped out behind me, not once, but twice, had me questioning everything. I've never felt that way towards a woman, especially not one that's ten years younger than me and a prissy princess. Watching her try to fight off zombies with a tree branch would have been comical, but seeing that zombie come up behind her had a switch flipping in my brain. All I saw was red. I wanted to burn the world down just for her. Shrink her down and carry her around in my pocket. Somehow I managed to kill all five zombies, and I was really starting to get worried by the third one down. I've killed people before, but decapitating them is a whole different ballpark. You really have to throw your weight into it, or it's not going to happen. Once they're all lying in parts scattered over the ground, I take several moments to compose myself before I turn around to face Mallory. I'm expecting her to be huddled between the rocks, crying her eyes out in fear, but what I see is the complete opposite.

She is in fact huddled between the rocks with her legs clutched to her chest, but her eyes? Fuck me, those eyes are full of fire, and I know she's wet between those luscious thighs. I contemplate stretching her out on the ground and fucking her senseless, but I made a promise to her that she'd beg for me to fuck her, and I plan on keeping that. I walk towards her and stretch my hand out in offering. She clutches it and gets to her feet, all the while staring at me like I'm a snack she'd like to sink her teeth into.

"Come on, we need to pack up, and get the hell out of here." I don't spare her another

glance before walking towards the tent to dismantle it. I pull out everything from inside the tent and direct Mallory over. "Can you take that stuff and start packing up the packs?" She nods and gathers the items, then trots towards the fire to gather the supplies that were left there. I get the tent rolled up and packed away in the compact pouch, making my way over to Mallory. She sticks her hand out for the tent, and I place it into her palm. She sets it inside one of the packs, and hands me a bottle of water and a granola bar. Another bottle of water is set out next to her, but no other snacks. "You need to eat too, Pet."

"I didn't do much work, Maverick. I'll be fine. You need it more than I do after that." She gives me a small smile before taking a swig of her water bottle. I decided not to argue with her, because that really was a lot of work, and I could use the boost of energy from the bar. I stuff the bar in my pocket and grab each pack, assessing their weights, and pick the heaviest one to swing up over my shoulders. Placing the bottle of water in the side pouch, I wait for Mallory while she relaces her boots and puts her own pack over her shoulders. She turns to me with a smile on her face, and she looks so damn cute in her outfit that is way too big for her and the large pack on her back. I fight back a chuckle and wave her forward, guiding her through the trees and brush.

After about an hour of walking and listening to Mallory huff and puff behind me, I finally hear the telltale sign of a stream up ahead, and I sigh in relief that we can refill our water. She's been irritated the whole time, and I know it makes her even more irate that I've ignored her obvious annoyance.

"Hey, there's a stream up there. Sounds like it's to our right." She huffs again with a groan but follows after me anyway. I've heard her little whimpers that she's been trying to hide from me. If I were a betting man, I'd bet that her pussy is drenched right now. I know a sexually frustrated woman when I see one. I won't lie and say I'm not horny too, because knowing that she is really has me worked up. But I won't let her see that until she's ready. We exit the trees into a small clearing, and a creek with crystal-clear water lies in wait before us. The water seems deep enough for us



both to wash the dirt and grime from our skin. Mallory tosses her pack onto the ground with a thump, not caring about anything inside of it, and stomps over to the edge of the water, her boots splashing in the low water at the shore. “What’s your deal? You’ve been annoyed this entire hike, and I’m fucking over it, Mallory.” She breathes out through her nose and crosses her arms over her chest, just emphasizing my point. “Are you really that pissed that you have to pee out in the woods? You’d think you’d be over it by now after having to stop three times in the last hour.” My words make her gasp, and if it were possible for steam to come out of her ears, it would be there.

“Are you serious right now? Don’t pretend that you don’t know why I’m annoyed right now!” She stomps over towards me, the tips of her boots touching mine, her angry face tilted up towards me. “This is all your fault that I’m like this!” She uses her finger and pokes me in the chest to punctuate her words. I stare at her silently just to see what she’s going to do next during her burst of feistiness, and I’m rewarded with a shove to my chest. The surprise of it pushes me back a few steps, but I let her shove me again until I’m backed up against a thick tree trunk. “You can’t just get me hot and bothered and leave me hanging, Maverick!” She pulls her hand back, ready for a slap, and my restraint breaks. I grab her wrist with one hand and her waist with the other, swinging us around and slamming her back into the tree. “What the fuck!” She screams in my face, tugging at her wrist and trying to push me away with her other hand.

“Is your pretty pussy needy, Mallory?” I grab her other wrist and hold them both over her head with one hand while trailing the other hand down her body until it reaches her pussy. “If you were horny, all you had to do was tell me, Pet. I told you that I always take care of what’s mine.” I grind the heel of my palm against her clit, and the warm wetness trickles out of her sweatpants onto my palm. She pushes against me, trying to get me exactly where she wants me, but I pull my hand away from her, eliciting a moan from her lips.

“Please, Maverick, stop being a tease!” Her needy whimpers are music to my ears.

“Tell me what you want, baby.” I trail kisses down her neck, nipping at that sweet spot at the base near her collarbone.

“Fuck me already! Make me yours, please, sir.” She pushes her hips towards me, grinding her pelvis against my hard cock that I want to impale her on. But alas, she hasn’t said the magic words yet. I release her and walk over about five feet to the right into a grassier patch of earth. The patch of earth that is about to be drenched in sweat, and the last piece of her innocence.

“Get on your knees, and crawl to your Master.” I stand with my legs slightly apart, and beckon to her to come like the little pet that she is. Mallory doesn’t even think twice before she’s dropping to her knees and crawling towards me at the fastest pace I’ve ever seen. I’d be laughing at how ridiculous she looks if I weren’t so turned on right now. When she makes it to me, she leans back on her heels, spreading her thighs with her hands palm up and her head bowed. “Very good. Now, beg me.”

“Please fuck me, sir.” She whimpers, and if I were a good man, I’d push her down, rip her pants off, and fuck her right then. But I never claimed to be a good man.

“Not good enough. Beg me like you mean it, Pet.” I reach down and cup her chin in my palm, lifting her eyes up to me. Her hands are trembling against her thighs, and her eyes are full of lust. The tip of her pink tongue flicks out, and she licks her dry lips. I feel her swallow against my palm, and I grip her chin tighter.

“Fuck me, Master, rip my innocence away and make me yours. P-p-please...” She stumbles on the last word, showing how nervous she really is behind her needy bravado.

“Now that’s a very good, Pet. Strip for me. Show me how wet your pussy is.” I take

one step back from her, fists clenched at my sides and my head cocked, peering down at her. Mallory takes longer than normal to process my words; just as I open my mouth to scold her, she whips her sweater and T-shirt up over her head all at once. Baring her beautiful breasts to me, her pale skin glowing under the sunlight peeking through the trees. She stumbles to her feet, almost tripping over as she kicks her boots and socks off one by one, flinging them in different directions with zero care. Lust-filled eyes meet mine when she reaches for the waistband of her sweats and tugs them slowly down her legs, watching me the entire time. I have to clench my fists tighter and dig my heels into the ground to avoid taking her right then and there. She tosses her pants somewhere behind her, kneeling back down onto her knees, then plopping onto her ass before me, her legs hiding the view I so desperately want to see. “Show me.” It comes out in a deep growl, thick with desire.

A coy smile graces her lips as she slowly spreads her thighs, baring her dripping pussy to me. The sight of it makes me nearly crumble to my knees with need. Her lips pink and swollen, craving my touch. Arousal dripping down onto the grass beneath her, making it shine in the sunlight. Mallory’s small fingers slither down her body to her pussy, spreading her lips wide for my viewing pleasure. “Take what’s yours, Master.”

### Chapter Fourteen

#### MALLORY

He's staring at me like he wants to devour me whole, and right now I just might let him. The pulse in my clit is immense, and I can't resist rubbing it in circles under his heated gaze, the wetness providing no resistance. A moan escapes my lips as the throbbing in my clit gets worse. I rub it faster, not able to stop with how good it feels. Throwing my head back, I shut my eyes, relishing in the euphoric feel of the sensation and the knowledge that Maverick is watching my every move.

"Fuck..." His words get lost in the wind, or maybe they just get lost in the melody of my heartbeat pounding in my ears. Reaching down, I start to insert a finger into my pussy, determined to make this feeling go away before I explode, but an iron grip wraps around my wrist. Eyes flying open, they collide with Maverick's blazing blue eyes. I don't get any words out before he flips me over onto all fours. My knees digging into the hard ground beneath us, the grass doing nothing to shield the bumpy rocks below. My fingers clutch at the grass, nails digging into the dirt as his hand wraps into the hair at the back of my head, pushing it down towards the ground until my cheek is one with the cold grass. The soft blades tickle my nose with every hasty inhale of breath I make. His other hand clutches my hip and pulls it back towards him. "Fuck, Pet... What a beautiful sight you are, dripping and kneeling before me." The hand on my hip drifts away, only for a moment, before it comes down hard on my ass cheek, a squeal breaking through my lips. A searing pain jolts through my body, but as I'm about to protest, it turns quickly into heat that goes straight to my already throbbing clit. "I'm not a good man, Mallory. I'm going to break you apart, rip you open, and look at everything inside of you. I will ruin you for any other man,

and I don't give a flying fuck how you feel about it.”

His possessive words have my pussy clenching around nothing, beckoning him to take it for himself. I push my hips back against him, trying to give him the hint to fuck me so hard that I forget the horrors that we're living in, just for a moment. His hand grips my hip again, the hand in my hair gripping so tight I'm almost scared he'll leave a bald spot, and then I feel the slick head of his cock at my entrance. Pushing my hips back, I chase his cock, showing him exactly where I want him most. Maverick doesn't make me wait and slams into me in one thrust. Pain rips through me, it feels like he's tearing my insides apart. A cry falls from my lips, tears pooling in my eyes before dripping down my face. He doesn't wait for me to adjust; he just starts taking me brutally. The searing pain in my pussy has me scratching at the ground, dirt and grass getting stuck under my once perfectly manicured nails. The pain is almost enough to make me want to stop this sinful act, but soon it ebbs and flows into something I've never felt before. He's hitting a spot inside of me that sends bolts of pleasure straight to my clit.

“This pussy is mine. I will kill anyone else who touches this. You got me, Pet?” His brutal pace doesn't cease; he tugs my head up from the ground, pulling me to my knees, the hand in my hair sneaking around my neck in an iron grip. “Answer me!” His grip loosens on my neck just enough for me to choke out a few words.

“I'm yours, Maverick. I think I've always been yours, waiting for you to find me.” I say through ragged breathing, my hand drifting up and back, gripping his hair between my fingers.

“That's right, baby.” His hand on my hip drifts down between my legs and strums my clit, making my back arch in his grip. Goddammit, I didn't know that sex could feel this fucking good. My pussy clenches around his cock, trying to suck him further into my body, the pulsing in my clit reaching a crescendo. “Come for your Master, Pet.” He doesn't have to tell me twice, the pleasure dam breaks just with his first word.

Stars collide in my vision as my orgasm rips through me, my sight going black, and I feel like I'm consumed with Maverick's touch. His hands gripping me tight against him, using my body for his own pleasure, wringing every last drop of my orgasm out. His thrusts start to stutter as he reaches his own climax, hand rubbing tight, almost painful circles around my clit. My thighs start to shake with an impossible second orgasm. A whimper drifts from my lips, and I try desperately to pull away from his touch. "Come on, baby, give me another one, you can do it." His pleasurable coaxing has a scream bursting from my lips as I detonate, flinging Maverick over the cliff with me. I go limp in his arms, and he pushes me back onto the ground. Holding my hips up in his grip as he takes his last bit of pleasure, wringing every drop out of us both.

I can feel his heaving chest against my back; we're both slick with a sheen of sweat. Maverick pulls out of me gently, and then rolls me over onto my back. His hands were holding my thighs wide open, his eyes glued to the sight before him. I look down to see what he could possibly be admiring down there, and the mess waiting for me has a blush blooming on my cheeks. My pussy is streaked with come and pink remnants of my innocence. Utterly embarrassed, I try to pull my thighs closed to shield him from the mess of my destroyed pussy, but he holds them tight in his grip and glares up at me through his lashes. "Don't ever deny me a meal." What the fuck is he talking about? I'm not really sure how he can be thinking about food while he's staring at the massacre between my thighs. Before I can even ask him what he means, he's diving between my legs, warm tongue lapping up the mess that he made. As my pleasure starts to ramp back up again, he's back on his knees and leaning over my face. "Open." The one-word command has my lips springing open, tongue sticking out in offering. He spits the contents in his mouth onto my waiting tongue, and I have to resist the urge to gag. The look of pride in his eyes has me steeling myself, holding the contents on my tongue, waiting for my next instruction. Drool starts to drip from the corner of my mouth, but I wait there like a good pet. "Swallow the last pure part of yourself, Mallory, because going forward all you'll ever be is my dirty little pet." Tucking my tongue back into my mouth, I swallow down the contents with a gulp.

“That’s my good girl.”

His praise sends a shiver down my spine, straight to my abused core. How is it even possible that I’m getting wet again after all of that? Maverick rolls to my side in the grass, and pulls me onto his chest. My head lies against his sweat-covered skin, his heart beating to an erratic tempo under my cheek. Fingers brush through my hair, softly untangling the knots that formed there. I can feel his come dripping from my pussy, and the warm, sticky feeling has me rubbing my thighs together. He seems to notice my discomfort and pushes us both up to a sitting position. I open my mouth to ask what he’s doing, because honestly, I’m exhausted and completely content with lying here covered in come and sweat. Without a word he scoops me up bridal style and carries us over to the stream, wading in until the water is just above his knees. He sits on the rocky stream floor with me in his lap, lukewarm water flowing over my waist, having my nipples pebbling and goosebumps erupting on my skin.

Reaching down, I scoop up some of the water and use it to wipe the dirt and sweat from my face and neck. Maverick mirrors my movements and then turns me around to sit between his legs. He grips my thighs and spreads my legs open, baring me to the lukewarm current, but before I can even think about closing my legs again, he has them trapped with his own, anchoring my legs where he wants them. A gentle hand comes to the apex of my thighs, and with the water and the pads of his fingers, he wipes away the remnants of our hookup in the grass. Once he’s satisfied with my cleanliness, he washes my back and arms off. I motion for him to turn around, and I do the same for him, the dirt and grime streaking off his back in ripples. Maverick stands from the water, walking towards the packs, and pulls out a T-shirt, using it to dry his skin. While he’s drying, I lean back in the water and do my best to scrub the dirt and oil from my stringy hair. As soon as I resemble a drowned rat, I make my way over to Maverick on the shore, and he starts to dry me off with the already damp T-shirt. We both dress in our previous clothes, and it makes me groan having to put them on over my clean skin.

“Is there any way we can get some new clothes? Preferably ones that actually fit? ” I say as I hold out my arms to my side to emphasize just how much I swim in the clothing. Maverick appraises me and finally sighs and gives me a nod.

“Yeah, I’m sure we can find you something somewhere. Let’s get going before it gets dark, looks like it’s only about one in the afternoon if I’m correct with the sun.” He points up to the sky with one hand while reaching into one of the packs with the other. He takes out a weird straw thing attached to what looks like a giant IV bag. Maverick walks over to the shore, his boots sinking into the sand, and motions me towards him. “Here, hold this for me.” He says while handing me the bag, and he takes the straw thing and sticks it into the water and presses a button on the side. Water starts to shoot up the clear tubing and into the bag, quickly filling it. Once it’s full, Maverick clicks the button again and then screws a cap at the bottom of the bag before dislocating the straw and tubing. He grabs the bag and walks back to his pack, securing it to the top handle with a carabiner clip. “In a few hours this should be purified enough for us to drink.” He slips the pack onto his shoulders and helps me with the other, and then grabs my hand and starts to tug me away from the stream. “We better get a move on.” I look behind me as the stream gets smaller in my view, sad that we have to leave this beautiful memory behind, but excited for the prospect of finding new clothes.



### Chapter Fifteen

#### MALLORY

My feet are killing me, but the pain is a reminder that they haven't fallen off yet. I have no idea how long we've been walking. I'm sure it's been a few hours since the sun is starting to fall behind the trees now. We haven't talked much this entire time other than asking for a pee break or Maverick making sure I'm feeling okay. I've been telling him I'm fine, but actually I feel like I've been beaten to a pulp. My legs, feet, and pussy throbbed in pain with every step. If he can see through my lies, he sure doesn't show it. Eventually Maverick steers us through a set of trees, and we come out onto a road. A gasp leaves my mouth, and I drop Maverick's hand to do a little happy dance in the middle of the road. "Finally!" I scream out into the void, twirling around in circles, and then it hits me that I have to look like a toddler right now. My cheeks heat as I stop and look over at Maverick standing at the side of the road; a smile is plastered to his face, his eyes twinkling in the sunlight.

"Don't stop on my account." He motions for me to continue, and with a laugh I do. I twirl and shimmy in the street like I'm on a Broadway stage, but my boots ruin my performance when I trip over them. Before I smash into the asphalt, I land in a set of steel arms. Maverick holds me up and grabs my hand before flinging me right side up and twirling us around in circles and then dipping me back down. The shock on my face has him belting out a laugh, "Didn't think an asshole like me could dance, huh?" He pulls me back up, gripping my waist with one hand, the other one letting go of my hand and gripping my cheek. His lips smash into my own, and we get lost in our own little bubble again before reality crashes back down and we break apart. "Let's follow this road and hope it leads to some kind of civilization." He plants a kiss on my

forehead and grabs my hand again, towing me along with him.

We don't have to walk long until we come across a series of buildings. Maverick pulls us to a stop, his hand going to the gun tucked into his waistband as he looks around, making sure it's safe. I peer around his back and let out an excited squeal, which has him spinning around and slapping a hand over my lips. We stare into each other's eyes; mine excited, but his are blazing with anger. I relax my shoulders because I don't blame him for being angry right now. When he's satisfied that I'm not going to squeal like a stuck pig again, he lets go of my mouth. "You can't make loud noises like that, Mallory! We don't want to attract any unwanted visitors if you catch my drift." He says to me in an angry, harsh whisper.

"I'm sorry! I was just excited. We haven't seen anything in over a week, let alone a mall!" Well, I don't think this really counts as a mall, but it's close enough. Several shops are spread out before us, ranging from clothing and food to hunting. We seriously hit the jackpot right now, and I can't help but bounce on my toes. Maverick sets his pack at our feet and slides the hunting knife out of it and thrusts it out for me to take. "What do you want me to do with that?" I say in confusion as I roll the heavy thing around in my hands.

"I want you to take it and use it if you have to." His words are ended with a roll of his eyes and the absurdity of seeing him do that has a giggle slip through my lips. "See if you can find some new clothes and preferably things that will hold up on our trek. No fucking dresses and skirts, Mallory. Make sure you find some good boots too. I'm going to head over to the hunting shop and see if I can stock up on ammo and other things we may need. Scream if something goes wrong, got it?" I'm actually surprised he's letting me go off on my own, but also grateful for the alone time as well.

"I got it, sir. Thank you!" I whisper-shout, as I jog towards the nearest clothing store, quickly finding out it's only full of children's clothing. I leave and make my way swiftly to another one a few doors down. The door has been ripped from its hinges,

lying broken on the front sidewalk. The window in the front is completely smashed, and I start to worry that this place has been ransacked already. I step gingerly over all of the smashed glass, and I'm greeted with the best thing I've seen since before this nightmare happened. Racks upon racks of clothing and shoes await me. Managing to contain my squeal of excitement, I start to rifle through the lines of clothing, pulling out various pairs of jeans, leggings, shirts, and sweaters. I make my way to the back of the store, finding a dressing room. A sense of relief and normalcy flows through me as I shut the dressing room door behind me. Setting the clothing on the little bench, I make quick work of removing my own clothes and putting the first outfit on.

The jeans are ripped at the knees and fit me like a glove, making my ass look even more perkier than it already does. The shirt is sticking to me like a second skin. I twirl around in front of the mirror admiring the outfit and then stop cold, remembering Maverick's words to find functional clothing. With a sad sigh I take the outfit off and fling it into the corner. Looking down at my options I snag up a pair of leggings and slide them on with another T-shirt and hoodie. These fit almost as well as the other outfit, and look like I'm going to attend a bonfire after a tailgate party. I chalk this outfit up as approved, removing it, folding it up, and setting it aside. The last pair of jeans and shirt sits there staring at me. I know the shirt won't fly with its low V-cut neckline, so I don't even bother with it, but slide the jeans over my hips. They fit perfectly with zero holes in them, thank god. I squat down to test their flexibility, and I'm happily surprised that they fit and feel this good. I decide to keep them on and throw on the shirt and hoodie from the other outfit. I decided to throw both pairs of leggings into my pack. Sitting on the bench, I haphazardly put my clown boots back on before slipping my pack back onto my shoulder.

Tossing the door open, it bangs loudly against the wall behind it, making me jump. Determined to find another shirt and a new pair of boots, I turn to walk back towards the racks of clothing, but the sight before me makes me stop dead in my tracks. My heart jumps in my chest, hands going clammy as I reach to the side pocket of my pack slowly to pull out the knife. The sweat gathering on my palm almost makes me

drop the knife to the floor, but I manage to grip it tight before it slips through my fingers. A small group of zombies had filtered through the broken doorway while I was distracted with trying on clothes. I do a headcount and come up with seven standing around in the racks of clothing. I have no idea how the hell I'm going to get out of this shit alive. I can't yell for Maverick, or I'm going to alert them of my presence. So far they haven't seemed to notice my existence here. I take a few cautious steps out onto the shop floor, and still none of them notice me. Clutching the knife in my shaking hand, I step closer towards the door currently blocked by the zombies. The closer I get to them, the more erratic my heart beats and the sweatier I get.

Somehow none of them have noticed me inching closer to them, and it truly boggles my mind. They were so vicious when they attacked Maverick and me, but now they are absolutely clueless to my presence. I sneak behind one zombie, and the stench coming off of him is enough to make me gag. The small noise makes another one of the undead twitch in my direction, but it's like they're looking through me. What the fuck is going on? I walk past another one, and now I'm in the middle of the clothing store surrounded by them. Looking around me to pick the easiest path out of this hellfest, I spot something pink hidden among the racks. I tug it out, and it's the sweetest T-shirt I've ever seen, adorned with orange butterflies. I peek inside and let out an excited gasp that it's my size! The gasp makes every zombie in here turn towards me. Several of them take a few steps closer to me, but then they turn around and start limping back the other direction. My brow furrows with confusion. I lift my shirt to my nose and smell it and then smell under my armpits just to be safe and wrinkle my nose. I definitely smell human, so not really sure why I'm not desirable to them, but whatever floats their boat. Clutching my shirt to my chest, I turn towards the door and decide I should just make a run for it.

“Mallory, DUCK!” The loud shout catches me off guard, and my head whips to the open doorway, Maverick standing there with a rifle in his hands. “Get the fuck down!”

### Chapter Sixteen

#### MAVERICK

I watch Mallory's perfect ass as she jogs towards the clothing store, shaking my head at her excitement. A niggling worry bounces around in my chest for letting her go clothes shopping by herself, but I tell myself I gave her a hunting knife for a reason. Knowing damn well she wouldn't know how to use a gun, and honestly I'm not even sure she would even know how to use that knife either. The image of her surrounded by zombies pops into my head, and I make it my mission to get what I need as fast as possible. I sprint towards the hunting store a few doors down from the clothing shops. The door is already open and hanging from the hinges. Pulling my axe from its place at the side of my pack, I grasp it in my hand, ready for anything to pop out. Browsing the aisles, I don't see shit that I need, and I start to get frustrated because how the fuck can a hunting store have nothing useful? I walk towards the back of the store hoping that all the good stuff is back there, and I stop dead in my tracks.

Standing a few feet from me is a woman covered in dirt with ratty hair. Her eyes are wide with surprise, but then they narrow in determination. In her hand is a machete and a pair of sparkling pink combat boots that look like the perfect size for my Pet. If there were a God, he'd be shining his light on those boots right now with harps and angels singing in the background. The woman follows my line of sight and grips the boots tighter in her hands.

"I'm gonna need those. How about you drop them there and scurry off?" I take a step closer to her, and her stance stiffens.

“I don’t think so. I found them first, and I don’t think pink is really your color.” Her sneer makes her face even uglier.

“Look, I don’t have any qualms over fighting a girl, so it would be in your best interest to just leave them there and walk away.” My hand tightens on the axe, waiting for the impending fight.

“And I don’t have any problems fighting a grown man!” She yells back, and her feistiness is really admirable. I’d probably enjoy it if my girl weren’t a few stores down walking around in clown shoes.

“Suit yourself.” I toss my axe at her head so fast she isn’t able to make a move herself. The sharp edge plants itself in her skull. Blood spilling down her face, her brain not yet catching up to her injury as her eyes drift up to me, and she finally stumbles back and falls to the ground. Walking towards her, I grab the boots from her hands before they get her nasty blood on them, and also grab the knife too. The more, the merrier. Rifling through her backpack, I find some protein bars and water flavoring packets that I stuff into my own bag for later.

Once I’m satisfied I’ve taken all the useful shit off of her, I head towards the back in hopes of finding what I really came in here for, and I’m greeted with the jackpot of supplies. The first thing I grab is a bigger backpack that I promptly stuff everything inside my own into. Then I scan the walls and come up with a box of ammunition for my handgun as well as a fully loaded assault rifle and extra ammo for that, which I stuff into my pack. Next come more first aid supplies and shelf-stable dehydrated food. Finally swinging my new pack onto my shoulders, I cringe at its weight, but it’s still lighter than anything I’ve ever had to carry with me while on jobs. I attach the axe to the side of the pack, hang the boots around it, grab the rifle, sling the strap around my neck, and head towards the door. On my way out I snag a few chocolate bars that I think Mallory will be grateful for.

I walk down the sidewalk in front of the shop, my boots crunching over broken glass and other debris. Peering into the window of the store that I saw Mallory disappear into, I see that it's empty. I arch my brow and keep walking to the next store. I notice the door and windows are all smashed on this one and I hope to fuck Mallory isn't in this one, but sure enough I see her blonde hair through the broken edge. But I also see several zombies surrounding her. I watch silently, trying to devise a strategy to destroy these fuckers, but I notice that none of them are bothering her. My mind whirls as I watch her and listen to her gasp excitedly while tugging a pink shirt from the rack. My hand tightens around the rifle in preparation; a few zombies turn towards her and then turn away like she's a ghost! What in the hell? I see her sniff herself and almost let out a laugh at how ridiculous she looks doing it. She shrugs and starts to turn towards the door, and I decide it's time to exterminate these disease-ridden beings.

"Mallory, DUCK!" I yell. She looks up at me with a shocked expression on her face, clutching the pink shirt to her chest because of course, she's more concerned about a fucking shirt than getting out of there. I pull the rifle up and aim it at the first zombie's head. "Get the fuck down!" Mallory drops to the floor like dead weight, her hands going over her head, and I start firing at them like it's target practice. The first zombie's head explodes with the bullet's impact, spraying blood everywhere like confetti. In quick succession I take them all out one by one, none of them even making it out of the store. Their dead bodies lay in piles surrounding Mallory on the floor. Making my way over to Mallory, I hear the crunch and squish from the glass and zombie parts under my boots. "You can get up now." Her head pops up, and she looks around her at all the decomposing bodies scattered around and then looks back at me with admiration. She gets to her feet and leans down to grab her coveted pink shirt, and that's when all hell really breaks loose.

"Maverick, what the fuck! You got blood on my new shirt! Do you not see how cute this thing is? You have got to be kidding me!" She throws the shirt at my chest and crosses her arms, stomping her foot on the floor like a toddler. "I basically risked my

life to get that damn thing! None of them were even bothered by my presence, so why did you even waste your time and bullets?" She throws her hands up in the air with the most irritated sigh I've ever heard.

"Yeah, about that... why weren't they interested in you?" I raise my brow at the question. I know we both have to be thinking.

"How should I know? I came out of the dressing room, and they were just there!" She waves her hands around at the zombies piled on the ground. "I started walking through them and even made some noises, and they didn't even care. Some of them looked at me, but it was like they were seeing through me. I didn't feel like questioning the fact that I was still somehow breathing, and not their chew toy, ya know?" Honestly, she has a point. If I had been in that position, I wouldn't have questioned it either. As soon as I showed up and yelled for her, they all turned towards me and started to shuffle in my direction. They most definitely noticed me and wanted to tear me apart.

"It's just fucking weird, don't you think, Mallory? I've never heard or seen them act like that towards humans. But I guess it doesn't matter now, does it? Anyways, I grabbed you a few things you might enjoy." I set my pack down at my feet amongst the bodies, finding a clean patch of flooring and pulling the boots from hanging around the axe to hold out to her. The squeal that pierces my ears is deafening.

"OH EM GEE! Maverick, they are so pretty!" Her delighted smile is so bright it's almost blinding, and I can't help but smile back at her. She sits on the ground where she's at, carefully avoiding the pool of blood next to her, and tugs off her current boots, flinging them behind her. Pulling her new pink boots onto her feet, she ties the laces up and then stands, spinning around like a ballerina. "They fit perfectly! How did you know my size?"

"I honestly just guessed, but I'm glad they fit. I also grabbed you this as well." I hand



her a chocolate bar, and her eyes light up again. “Please, for the love of all that is holy, do not screech like a banshee again.” Her eyes are about to roll out of her sockets with that comment.

“Thank you for this. Well, for everything really. Thank you for taking care of me, sir.” Her ending word has my heart beating faster, and I would love to fuck her over the top of these dead zombies right now, but damn, we really need to get out of here. She leans up on her tiptoes and kisses me softly on the lips; kissing her back is enough to pacify my craving for her body for the moment.

“Let’s get the fuck out of here, yeah?” I hold my hand out to her, and she grasps it in hers. “I’m sorry about that shirt. I’m sure you can find another one eventually. Looks like you were able to find some clothes though.” I nod towards her new outfit that fits her perfectly and also follows the guidelines I set for her.

“Yeah, I was able to find a few pairs of pants, a T-shirt, and a sweater, but that’s about it.” Her frown tugs at my heart, and I vow to find her another pink shirt when we come across another strip mall. I pull on her hand, guiding her through the dead zombies and out the doorway.

### Chapter Seventeen

#### MALLORY

The crackle of the fire and the crickets chirping are oddly peaceful. Who knew I'd turn into an outdoorsy girl? Well, I wouldn't classify myself as outdoorsy, but I'm trying here. I'm sitting between Maverick's spread thighs, my head back against his chest, his back against a fallen log. We didn't walk too much farther after we entered Georgia. I insisted that I could walk farther, but Maverick could see straight through to how tired I really was. We veered off to the right and into the dense trees, finding a small clearing where Mav set up camp. I tried to help him with the tent, but it ended up in such a jumbled mess that he sent me out to collect branches and twigs for the fire. I aced that assignment though, no problem; seeing his eyes light up with pride and surprise when he saw me come back through the trees with my arms full of dead branches made the good girl in me purr. After the fire was going strong, he pulled out some cans of soup from his pack and set them by the fire, then tugged me into his lap. His hands have been combing through my hair for the last several minutes, and I'm almost on the edge of sleep when he nudges me to scoot over so he can grab the cans with a sock-covered hand. Pulling the tabs on the cans, he hands me one along with a spoon.

The smell of beef stew assaults my nose, and the smell is so scrumptious I let out a moan, my stomach growling in response. A few weeks ago I would have wrinkled my nose at this, and requested something else, but not today. I start shoving the food into my mouth, burning my tongue in the process, but it doesn't stop me from continuing. "Mmm, this is so good!" I say, around a spoonful of stew. "What is this? And please tell me you have more in that magic pack of yours!"

“It’s just some random stew I found in the hunting store. I think the label said Dinty Moore on it before I tossed it in the fire.” The chuckle that leaves his chest tells me that he’s never been around someone who gets this excited about all these little things. “And yes, I did grab a few more things of this, so I’m glad that you like it.” He says as he leans over and wipes some gravy from the corner of my mouth. We continue to eat in silence, well, as quietly as I can be when I’m shoveling this stew in my mouth like I’ve never eaten before. Maverick seems to be lost in thought while he eats, staring at the fire. The glow illuminates his strong jaw and thick beard that has grown from lack of shaving. His straight nose and long eyelashes flutter against his cheeks every time that he blinks. Why is it that men always have nice eyelashes? The lines around his eyes are the only thing that actually gives away that he’s not in his early twenties. Come to think of it, I don’t think he ever told me how old he really was. That thought is the domino that tips them all over, questions racing at top speed through my mind about who this man really is. I mentally scold myself for being too distracted by his prince charming hero act to really get to know him. I place the empty beef stew can down next to me along with the spoon. My hands drop into my lap, and my fingers twiddle at the same speed that my thoughts are racing right now.

“Go ahead and ask what question has you so worked up, Mallory.” How does he always know what I’m feeling before I know what I’m even feeling?

“There’s more than one question.” I decide that is the safest answer, giving me more time to think about what questions to ask him.

“Go ahead then.” He says, nodding his head and setting his now empty can of stew down on the other side of him. His knees come up to his chest, thighs spread, hands splayed across his knees, and head tilted back onto the log, eyes glued to the starry sky.

“Are you a killer?” I blurt out then slam my hands across my lips. That is so not what I wanted to ask first.

“Yes, next question.” The shock in my gasp must be apparent as he swings his head and eyes towards me. Deep down I knew he was a killer, because not just any person can kill that many zombies at once all by themselves. He lets out a deep sigh. “You can’t tell me that you didn’t think I wasn’t one. Fuck, I killed those douchebags who had you without even blinking.” My hands drift back down to my lap, mulling over the words he just spoke to me so nonchalantly.

“Tell me.” The resolve in my voice is enough for him to start spilling all his secrets.

“I worked for a man who ran a trafficking ring. I was the one they called when they needed someone disposed of.” His eyes are blank, and the careless way that he says it sends shivers down my spine.

“So you’re saying you were what, a human exterminator? Who exactly were you told to kill?”

“Pretty much, and I killed whoever they wanted me to. A client who didn’t pay? Okay, done. A woman who wouldn’t fall in line? Yep, got it.” He says with a shrug of his shoulders and no remorse in his eyes. My heart rate speeds up with the seriousness of my situation right now and how damn stupid I was to just go with him willingly.

“So you just... killed whoever they wanted you to with no questions asked? What if it was a little girl?” My screech echoes through the trees, and I jump to my feet. He meets my eyes and rises slowly to stand before me, peering down at me with a cold gaze.

“If it was for the right price, then yes.” His I don’t give a fuck shrug sends me over the edge, and I push him back, but of course he doesn’t even budge.

“What if they ordered you to kill me, then what?” I pound my fists against his chest,

and his eyes roll in their sockets.

“Never. You’re different, Mallory, and you know it.” His words should comfort me, but they don’t.

“Am I the only one? Or do you usually have a different flavor each week?” I cross my arms and pop my hip out to the side, glaring at him.

“There was one before you, but I ended up killing her just the same.”

“What was her name?” My response comes out soft as my mind whirls with the possibilities.

“Aspen... she was with me for several months until she turned, and I shot her in the head and left her to burn in my house.” His emotionless eyes swing towards the fire, and his lack of attention towards this serious situation irritates me.

“Y-you just shot her and left her for d-dead?” I try my best not to stutter, but the words come out choppy anyway.

“Yeah, that's typically what you do with a zombie.” He says as he picks up a stick and stokes the fire as he speaks.

“How did she turn? What was she like? Why did you keep her that long? Will you keep me for a few months then get rid of me the same way?” All of the questions spill out like uncontrollable vomit.

“Slow the fuck down and take a breath. She turned from some contaminated medication. She was... a slave. Nothing like you at all. I didn’t feel anything towards her like I do with you.”

“You didn’t answer my last question.” Fear of his response since he avoided the question the first time makes my heart rate spike again, goosebumps rippling over my skin.

“I won’t answer it, because I can’t promise you that I won’t kill you in the end. But if it gives you comfort, then just know I won’t kill you just because I’m done with you. There will be a good reason if I need to.” He continues to stoke the fire, adding a few more branches to the flames. It in fact does not give me comfort. Knowing that I’ve been sleeping next to a cold-blooded killer and giving him my virginity has me feeling ashamed and like I need to puke my guts out.

“I need to pee.” I announce to his side profile and don’t even wait for him to answer. I walk into the trees until I can barely see the flicker of the fire and his shadow looming beyond. I relieve myself, and then I move towards a tree and slide down it to sit at the base of it. Hugging my knees to my chest and looking up at the stars, I contemplate how I ended up in this mess. I went from head cheerleader to slumming it in the forest with a killer; my mom would be so thrilled, I think with heavy sarcasm. I sit in the darkness by myself until my ass falls asleep. Not once did Maverick come to check on me. I think he took the hint that I needed some space.

I have no idea what I’m going to do now. Do I stick with Maverick to save my own skin? Or do I put on my big girl panties and leave him? Each option comes with various pros and cons, and my head starts to hurt while I mull them over. God, I wish Rue and Noah were here. They would know what to do in this situation. They always have the answers and know what to do. It makes me anxious knowing I’m all alone out here and have to make this decision myself. I frantically try to remember what Rue would tell me to do as I reminisce about the lazy nights we spent together. I can vaguely hear her voice mocking me and telling me to get far away from this man. But it honestly scares me shitless thinking about being on my own during all of this.

I heave out a sigh, pushing myself to my feet, and walk back towards the campfire

with my painful decision looming at the front of my brain. Maverick is perched on the log; his head swings towards me as I walk back into the clearing. I stop next to the log, debating on if I should sit and talk to find out more about him, but I just don't have it in me. "I'm going to bed." I don't wait for him to respond, and I head into the tent, zipping the flap behind me. I root through my pack and make sure it's ready to go, and solidify my hasty plan. I slide under my new sleeping bag Maverick snagged for me and arrange it over the top of me so he can't tell that I'm still fully dressed. I close my eyes and send up a silent prayer that I can pull this off, but I'm not too confident because honestly, running away from an ex-hitman is kinda stupid. Especially one who is utterly obsessed with you.

Maverick stays outside for so long that I'm about to throw my plan out the window and go to sleep, but then the zipper of the tent slowly opens. I brace myself and keep my eyes closed, trying to control my breathing as much as possible. He slides into the sleeping bag next to me, and within a few minutes his soft snores are slipping through his lips. How the hell does he fall asleep so fast? I wait until I'm positive he won't wake up before I slip out from under the sleeping bag. His face is slack and peaceful; I almost feel guilty for leaving him here like this. I steel myself and crawl quietly to my pack, swinging it over my shoulders. I look back longingly at my sleeping bag, feeling sad that I will have to leave it behind, but there's no way I'll be able to get it out of this tent without waking him up. I managed to get the tent's zipper open enough to crawl out. I'm too scared to try to zip it back up without waking him, so I just turn and run like hell. I have no idea where I'm going, and it's dark as fuck out here with no flashlight. I scold myself for not thinking this plan all the way through, but I keep going anyway. My boots pound against the hard ground, crushing leaves and sticks in their wake. My chest burns with the exertion that I haven't used in weeks, but I ignore it, determined to get as far away from Maverick as possible.

### Chapter Eighteen

#### MAVERICK

I knew what she was planning the second she left to go pee, and she didn't come back for nearly fifteen minutes. She never takes that long, even when she's secretly taking a shit. The look in her eyes solidified her plan when she came back to the clearing and said she was going to bed. It took everything in me to not barge after her and tie her up in that tent. If she wants to run, I'll gladly chase her bratty ass. I sit on the log until the fire burns out, and the only thing left is the low glow of the final embers trying to stay alive. Before I head to the tent, I grab a length of rope from my pack by my feet, tying several knots strategically and shimmying various lengths of the rope under the log. Once I'm satisfied with my work, I zip up my pack and leave it by the log, not even bothering to bring it into the tent with me because I won't be in there for very long anyway. I grab the hunting knife from the side pocket of my pack and tuck it into the back of my cargo pants. My sweet pet has another thing coming if she thinks she can get away from me this easily. I'll show her just how ruthless I really can be, and I guarantee that when I'm done with her, she'll never want to run from me again.

Reaching the tent, I unzip it, crawl inside, and zip it up after myself. I shuffle around by the door, pretending to take my boots off, then crawl inside my sleeping bag. As I lie on my back, I cross one arm over my chest and throw the other one behind my head. I feel her tense beside me, a soft gasp leaving her lips. She sucks at being incognito and pretending to sleep. Honestly, if there was an award for the worst escape artist, she would win it, but I let her have her few minutes of fame anyway. I let out a few fake snores, just waiting for her to make her move. She finally slips out



from the sleeping bag. She shuffles through the tent like a damn elephant in a china shop. The hiss of the tent zipper is loud as it permeates through the air; I hear her hesitate at the door of the tent for a few moments before she bolts from the tent. Her boots pound against the ground; she's not even bothering to hide the fact that she's running at this point. I count to twenty before I push myself out of the sleeping bag, and calmly make my way out of the tent.

I can hear the deafening pound of her boots through the forest, and the pink shimmer on them is like a beacon beckoning me forward. I take a deep breath and begin the chase, my boots pounding in the same rhythm as hers. She's in such a panic to escape she doesn't even take notice that I'm gaining on her. Her blonde hair whipping behind her like a white flag of surrender that I don't intend to obey. The rush of adrenaline coursing through my veins is like a drug; God, I have missed this feeling. It's been far too long since I've gotten to hunt like this. My muscles throb under the strain of unused breath punching out of me in fast succession, but in the end it still doesn't faze me. Mallory stumbles over her feet and almost goes tumbling down, but she catches herself at the last minute. Peeking behind her she finally makes contact with me, her eyes frightened and vulnerable. She's like an open book, spouting out all of her emotions right there, and damn does it make my dick hard.

A scream pierces the air, and she scampers off, but doesn't get too far before I tackle her to the ground. Her small body wriggles beneath mine on the hard ground, trying desperately to get away. I flip her over like she weighs nothing, straddle her hips, and use one hand to grab both of her flailing arms to hold over her head. The other hand grabs the hunting knife from the back of my pants and holds it to her throat. Her struggling immediately ceases when she feels the hard steel under her chin. Her hair is a mess, scattered across the ground and her face, heaving breaths fanning it back and forth. I do her a kindness by pushing her wild hair back from her face and place the knife below her chin again. Her expression is as close to seething as you could possibly get. I have yet to see her this pissed off, and I hate to say that I like it.

“What you running for, baby?” I taunt her and press the knife harder against her neck, making a small nick, a drop of blood trickles down her snow-white skin. “I really thought that we had hit it off. I’m offended that you would try to leave without even telling me goodbye.”

“Fuck you!” She says through gritted teeth, eyes narrowing with determination.

“So much anger in such a little girl.” The taunt rolls off my tongue, and I relish in the look of outrage that paints her pretty face.

“I’m not a little girl, you fucking psycho!” Her struggles resume, with her slender wrists tugging at my hands and her hips bucking up against my pelvis, which makes my cock painfully hard. “Get the hell off of me!”

“If you act like a little girl, then you’ll be treated like a little girl. You think I’m a psycho? I’ll show you just how fucking psycho I can be, my pet.” I say as I lean down and bite her lower lip, eliciting a gasp from her. I grab her by the hands before she can respond, pulling her to her knees in front of me with my hand knotted in her hair. She’s fuming and tries to get back up to her feet, but I push her down with a hand on her shoulder, and the knife pointed at her face. “Ah ah ah, bad little pets get punished, and I dare say you’ve been very bad. You’re going to walk back to camp naked. If you want to show your ass so badly with that attitude of yours, then you might as well do it for real.” I motion to her clothes for her to strip, but she just stares up at me with that defiant gaze. “Strip, Pet, you won’t like the consequences if I have to say it again.” She rolls her eyes before pulling her shirt over her head and shrugging out of her pants and boots. It’s not long before she’s kneeling before me in all her naked glory.

“Well, now what? It’s fucking cold out here, Maverick.” Her taut nipples and the goosebumps erupting over her skin echo her words. I step away from her and point back towards camp, my eyes beckons her forward. “You aren’t serious. I thought you

were joking. I can't walk back like this!" I shrug my shoulders, pick up her clothes, and walk over to her pack that was discarded during our struggle. I swing it over my shoulder and start walking back to camp, knowing that she will follow me because she really has no other choice.

Eventually her annoyed footsteps follow after me, crunching through the dead leaves. Her lily-white ass pushes past me as she power walks back towards camp, my chuckle floating after her. Once we break through the trees, she darts towards the tent, but I grab her arm and tug her to the log instead. As soon as she sees the ropes tied to the log, all hell breaks loose.

"No! You can't!" She digs her heels into the ground, her nails claw at my arm, drawing beads of blood. I wrestle her into my arms, pinning her arms to her side with my own. "Mav, please!" Her small feet kick back at my shins, and I grit my teeth at the sharp pain. Dragging her over to the log, I push her face down onto it, the bark digging into her delicate skin, marring her flesh before I even get a hold of it. Straddling her back, I manage to get her arms tied into place to lessen her flailing. "What the fuck are you doing!" I'm silent as I continue to strap her down to the log while dodging her kicking feet. Once she's tied in place, I walk away and start the fire again, the flames immediately ignite, casting a warm glow on her body. Stepping back, I admire the beautiful sight before me. Her back heaving with every breath she forces from her lungs, arms and legs tugging at the binds around her limbs. She looks over at me, tears swimming in her eyes. I twirl the knife between my fingers and step back up to her. Running the sharp blade of the knife down her back, she jolts, and a snuffle drifts out of her. "Please don't do this, Mav, I'll be good!" Her whimpers continue as I trail the knife down to her ass and nick her left cheek, drawing blood to the surface. "I'll be a good pet. I'll be a good pet!" Her pitiful chanting repeats over and over like a broken record.

"I know you'll be a good pet for me after this, Mallory." I toss the knife aside and rip my belt from its loops; the crack of the wearing leather startles her. Tears start to

cascade down her pink cheeks; her cries grow louder and make shivers of pleasure roll through me. “We’re going to start with fifteen lashes, Pet. I want you to count every single one, if you miss one, then we will start all over again.” I run my hand down her cheek, wiping her tears away with my thumb, tilting her chin up so our eyes meet. “If you’re really good for me, then we will stop at ten. How's that sound?” Her head bobbles up and down in a frantic yes; little does she know I’ll be stopping at ten whether she’s good or not, because even through my ruthlessness, I don’t want to hurt her more than necessary. Just enough to fully drive home this lesson, to solidify it into her skin.

Pulling my arm back, I let the belt fly across her ass; the sharp crack zips through the trees. The pain doesn’t register with her at first, but when it does, she lets out a scream, and a red welt already forms on her skin in its wake. I grip the belt tighter in my hand, waiting for her to count, but she’s silent besides her sniffing. I bring the belt down again, this time across her upper thigh, and she screeches out, “Two!”

“That was one Mallory. You didn’t count the first one. Try to get it right this time, okay?” I swing the belt again, relishing the cries that the belt pulls out of her.

“T-two!” She says with a strangled wail, three red welts now lie across her skin.

“There we go. I was concerned that you forgot how to count for a moment there.” I let the belt fly again, this time harder than the last, and the three that she screams out in pain is almost enough to make me pause, but pets don’t learn their lessons if they’re always getting their way.

### Chapter Nineteen

#### MALLORY

Pain and overwhelming shame are all I can feel right now. Fire streaked over my flesh with every hit from the leather. My mind is on autopilot now as I scream out each number. The shame of what I did makes my heart hurt; I feel like it's being ripped out of my chest. Maverick's disappointment is obvious, and I hate it more than the pain that he's inflicting upon me. My skin feels like it's burning between the lashes and the fire going next to us. It feels like he's trying to flay me alive, and I won't be surprised if I've started bleeding at this point. The belt whistles through the air again before it makes contact on my battered skin.

"Nine!" I yell out as soon as it touches my skin, not wanting to drag this out longer than it has to be. My fists are clenched tight, nails digging into my palm.

"Just one more baby, you're doing so well." His praise gives me the strength that I need to endure the last blow from his hand, and I swear it's the hardest one yet. The ten that leaves my lips is deafening, and for a second I worry that I have attracted unwanted attention, but that minuscule thought is gone as quick as it came. "Such a good Pet for your Master." He hums and drops the belt to the ground next to me. My body goes slack in the restraints, waiting for him to untie me, but I feel the soft touch of his fingers against my pussy. "Guess your pussy has a mind of its own, huh?" His chuckle drifts to my ears, and pure horror rushes through me as I feel his finger glide in with zero resistance. I'm so shocked about being this wet that I don't hear his zipper lower until his cock is filling me to the hilt.

The immediate feeling of fullness and his pants scratching against my sore ass is enough to make me moan instead of scream. That is the sound that makes him go into a frenzy. One hand comes up and tangles in the hair at the crown of my head while the other is a death grip on my waist. His ruthless pace has my clit and nipples rubbing against the rough bark of the log; the bite of pine mixed with the pleasure is just what I need to send me over the edge. Stars burst behind my eyelids, my body convulsing underneath him as he continues to thrust into me at a brutal pace. He lets out a growl as he reaches his own climax and then stills behind me. The air surrounding us is only filled with our heavy breathing.

My eyelids start to get heavy from the emotional and physical turmoil; he gently pulls from my pussy and starts to untie my legs. He comes around to the front and unties my wrists next, helping me up into a sitting position on the log. I sit there dazed for just a moment before sliding off the side of the log to kneel before him. I bow my head in surrender, tears leaking out of my eyes and falling onto my bruised knees, before speaking through my dry and scratchy throat. "Thank you, Master, for my punishment." His hand comes up to my hair, his fingers gently petting it, and then he crouches down so that we are eye level. The look of pride in his eyes has more tears cascading down my cheeks.

"You did so good, Mallory. I'm so proud of you." His words of praise go straight to my heart, and a sob rips out of my chest. No one has ever told me that they were proud of me before. It didn't matter how many A+'s or awards I got in school or trophies for winning a cheerleading championship. My parents still always looked at me like I was a burden with fake interest coating their words. Maverick scoops me up into his arms, grabs a blanket that I didn't see off to the side, and wraps it around me. He holds me in his lap, rocking me like I'm a child while I cry out all the sorrow and grief that I feel. "Shhh, it's okay, baby." His arms wrap around me like iron bars, keeping me safe in his own personal cage. "Promise me that you won't try and run away again." His deep voice rumbles through his chest, and the tone of his words tells me he's not fucking around.

I sniffle and calm my breathing. Trying desperately to get my shit under control before I give him the answer that we both need to hear. “I won’t leave you again, Maverick. I swear on my favorite pair of hot pink Versace heels.” A chuckle leaves his lips like he thinks I’m kidding, but I’m completely serious. Those heels were the first pair of designer heels that I bought with my own money, and they were my pride and joy. “Man, I miss those heels; you would’ve loved them too.” I sniffle at the memory of those heels that I kept in a safe in the back of my closet. His chuckle turns into a full-on laugh, which has me laughing as well.

“I’ll get you a new pair, my sweet Pet.” His hands come up and clutch my face between them, nose nuzzling my own before his lips brush across mine. This is the sweetest kiss I think we’ve ever had, and it makes my heart completely melt for him. My previous doubts about him completely fly out the window, and I kiss him back until we’re both breathing heavily. I twist around in the blanket trying to straddle his lap, but he stops me, holding me back in place. “You’ve been through enough tonight, Mallory. Your mind and body need to rest. If you still want to jump my bones in the morning, then I won’t stop you.” His devious smirk has me laughing.

We sit under the night sky, clutching each other in front of the fire until the sun starts to peek over the trees. My bladder starts to scream at me, and I go to wiggle off Maverick’s lap, the searing pain in my ass making me topple over onto the ground. He reaches down to right me, and a whimper leaves my lips, but I let him pull me to my feet anyways. He strips the blanket from my body and turns me around for his viewing pleasure. Embarrassment pinkens my cheeks, and the building pain with each movement makes me tremble.

“Fuck.” His pissed-off curse has tears building in my eyes, threatening to spill over. “I’m so sorry, Mallory... it was so dark I couldn’t see just how hard I was hitting you. God Damnit!” He yells and kicks the log beside us, rolling it a foot away. I whirl around, and he’s clutching his hair, tugging it at the ends and pacing back and forth by the fire, muttering to himself about how stupid he is. I watch him for a few

moments, and the tears finally spill over my lashes and down my cheeks. This hard as nails, stubborn, dominating man is beating himself up over hurting me. That's when it dawns on me that I really am special to him, because I can guess that he's never cared once about hurting someone too much before. I walk up behind him and wrap my arms around his waist, hugging him with what little strength that I have right now. He stiffens in my arms, his mouth snapping shut; he stands there clueless on what to do.

"I forgive you, Maverick." That's not all I wanted to say, but I know that's what he needed to hear to stop his self-loathing. He spins around in my arms, hands gripping my chin, tilting my head up for our eyes to meet. His eyes are glassy as he looks down at me in sorrow, and my heart breaks even more seeing how broken he is over this. "It's okay. You didn't know, and I deserved it. If you hadn't stopped me, I'd probably be dead right now, so I will take a few bruises and welts over that." The noise that comes out of his mouth is a mix between anguish and relief at my words. His arms come around me, hugging me tight to his chest, one hand tangled up in my hair while the other one smooths against the unmarred part of my back. We stand there for several long minutes until my body starts to shake with exhaustion.

Without a word he scoops me back up in his arms, taking me to the edge of the trees so I can pee. Once I'm done, he picks me up and carries me back to the tent, then he places me on my knees on top of my sleeping bag, while promising to return shortly. He returns with the blanket, a bottle of water, a granola bar, and a bottle of pills. He opens the water, handing it to me before fishing out two orange pills from the bottle and handing them to me. I look at them skeptically because of the story he told me about Aspen, clutching the pills in my fist. I open my mouth to question him, but he beats me to it.

"They're safe. I found them in the hunting store. This isn't the same kind that Aspen took, and they aren't made by the same manufacturers either." He opens my palm, taking the pills and placing them on my tongue before tilting my hand up with the water to wash them down. "Lay on your stomach on your sleeping bag, and I'll cover



you up with the blanket.” I follow his orders, my head close to the door, and he does exactly as he says, while also laying the now opened granola bar in front of me along with the water. “I need to run back to that strip mall and see if I can find some healing salve, okay? Do you think you’ll be alright here for a few hours?” I think back to how far back the strip mall is and nod my head with a smile. With how worked up he is, I am sure he’ll be back in an hour or less. “Here, keep this by you just in case; it’s already loaded. Flip this switch to turn the safety off, point, and pull the trigger. Got it?” Honestly, I don’t, but I won’t tell him that because he will stay, and the throbbing in my ass screams for him to leave to get that salve.

“I’ll be fine, Maverick. Go and do what you need to. I’ll be here when you get back.” I give him a smile for reassurance, but he hesitates like he’s trying to figure out a way to take me with him. He shakes his head then leans down to give me a soft peck on the lips, his hand running down the side of my cheek. He tells me he’ll be back as fast as he can, and then he disappears out the flap of the tent. As soon as he’s out of view, my heart beat speeds up with the anxiety and fear that I tried to hold back from Maverick’s gaze. Now I’m stranded in a tent, naked, and injured with a weapon that I have no idea what to do with.

### Chapter Twenty

#### MAVERICK

Leaving Mallory in the tent was one of the most difficult things I have ever had to do. Pretty sure it's tied with blowing Aspen's dead brains out. Actually no, it's definitely the hardest thing I've ever done. Seeing how broken and vulnerable she was just about broke me. I didn't want her to see that side of me, and I'm embarrassed that I showed it to her. Letting down my guard is something I never do. I've only ever done it with one person once before, and that was Ghost. Her punishment wasn't meant to be a full-on beating, but that's how it looks right about now. Her back is striped with purplish black bruises and angry red welts. One in particular really concerns me, as the skin has cracked in a few spots on it, leaving it open and raw. The blood has long since dried on it. I'm so pissed off at myself for not noticing that sooner and not inspecting her back better with a flashlight after I was done like some fucking rookie.

I hoped that leaving her with the gun would make me feel better about leaving her alone, but it doesn't. While I gave her a quick rundown on how to use it, her eyes were wide and confused. Although she assured me that she understood what to do, I know that she really didn't. I hike my pack higher up onto my shoulders and continue my jog through the forest, coming out of the dense trees onto the asphalt road. Scanning my surroundings, I determine that it's safe to keep moving. I pass the Welcome To Georgia sign again, entering back into Alabama, and I know that I'm close to the strip mall. Several minutes later it finally comes back into view, and I sprint towards it like a madman, checking my watch to confirm it's only been twenty minutes since I left.

Jumping through the busted hunting store door, I head straight to the back where I know the first aid supplies lay. I grab the healing salve as well as some lidocaine numbing spray and a more potent antiseptic. Stuffing it in my bag, I also scrounge around for more food and other supplies that we are running low on. When my pack is full of mixed nuts, beef jerky, and protein bars, I'm satisfied and sling it back onto my shoulders. The weight is much heavier than when I left camp, and I know it's going to slow me down. I promised Mallory I'd be back within a few hours, and I'm going to make good on my promise by cutting it down to one. I turn to sprint out of the door and head back to my poor pet but stop dead in my tracks in the doorway of the shop. A whole horde of zombies lies across the lot, stumbling and bumping into each other as they walk around aimlessly. I let out a string of curses under my breath and back myself inside the doorway and out of sight. How the fuck do I have such bad luck? Peeking my head around the door jam, I do a quick head count, fifteen zombies, way more than I could possibly handle on my own.

Letting out a defeated sigh, I slide down the wall next to the door, landing on my ass. My mind whirls with possibilities on how the hell I'm going to get out of here in one piece. I wait until about an hour or so has passed, and the zombies still haven't left the parking lot, but they have crept closer, which has my nerves on edge. "Fuck it." I growl out, pushing myself to my feet. I check my watch, and it's already been two hours since I left. Breaking my promise to Mallory to be back in time, has me irritated and angry. Stalking to the back of the store again, I pick up an assault rifle and load it with bullets, grabbing another case of rounds and stuffing it into the side of my pack. Pulling the strap of the rifle over my head, I clutch the cold metal in my hands, making sure the chamber is loaded and ready. I slowly make my way back to the door, taking a deep breath to center myself, taking aim at the closest zombie, and pulling the trigger.

The sound of the gun going off, and the zombie dropping dead with its brains splattered all over, alerts the rest of the horde to my presence. I sprint out of the shop back towards the way I came, shooting zombies as I go. When the third one drops to

the ground, a fourth and fifth one follow too close behind and not by my hand. Sweeping my gaze around, I see another man across the lot picking up my slack. We nod at each other and continue to take the undead back where they belong. A much smaller man steps out of the shadow of the man with a gun, a mallet in his hands, and he tosses it at a zombie with all of his body weight. I'm honestly surprised that he didn't accidentally fling himself along with the mallet with how much force he put behind that throw. The mallet imbeds itself in the zombie's head, and as it slumps to the ground, the small man is hooting and jumping up and down at his success. I shake my head at his excitement right along with the other man. When all the zombies are lying in bloody heaps on the ground, I nod and salute my unknown comrade; he returns the gesture, before I sprint back towards my girl.

I don't stop running until I see the Welcome To Georgia sign again, and I vow right there to never see that fucking sign again. Bending over with my hands on my knees, I heave in deep breaths until my racing heart is back to normal and I stalk into the dense trees back towards camp. Before I know it, I hear a familiar voice and the crunch of a stick up ahead. The voice of someone I was worried I wouldn't see again. "Son of a bitch!" She squeals, and I jog towards the sound. I find Mallory sitting on the ground, clad in nothing but the sleeping bag wrapped around her body, as she clutches her foot with her hand. When she sees me, her anger is replaced with relief. "Maverick! I thought you weren't coming back to me." Her words crack at the end, breath hitching as she's almost in tears.

"So you just decided to go tramping through the woods naked to come find me?" The humor in my voice very evident while I kneel down to her level and inspect her foot. A sharp rock protrudes from the ball of her foot, blood streaming down her sole. "Could you maybe refrain from hurting yourself for the next few days?" I shake my head and scoop her body, wrapped in the sleeping bag, into my arms.

"Yeah, sure, I'll get right on that." Her response is laced with sarcasm and an eye roll, and it has me chuckling. I walk us back towards camp, shuffling us into the tent and

zipping the flap behind us. “Did you find everything you needed?” She peers up at me, laying back down on her stomach, her perfect ass free for my viewing pleasure. I’d relish in how good it looks if it weren’t for the wounds covering it.

“Yep, sure did.” Shrugging my pack off my shoulders, I pull out the first aid supplies I grabbed along with a packet of beef jerky. Ripping the bag open, I hand it to her as well as a can of soda I managed to snag. Her squeal of delight makes my heart do things I’ve never felt before. Mallory immediately pops the can open, taking a large swig. “Hope you like it.” Her only indication that she does is her downing half of it in one go. Then she starts on the jerky next while I disinfect her lower back and ass. She hisses from the pain, but tries her best to stay as still as possible for me. Spraying the lidocaine onto her back, she sighs in contentment, and then I slather her skin with the healing salve before I move towards her foot to patch it up as well. Once she’s finally covered in gauze, looking like she’s part mummy, I cover her up with the sleeping bag and lie down next to her. “I’m sorry I was late getting back; there was a whole horde of zombies waiting outside the hunting shop when I tried to leave.” I stroke her hair, and her eyes go wide, a gasp leaving her perfect lips.

“Oh my god! How did you get out of there?” She screeches, trying to get up to fawn over me, but I gently push her back onto the ground.

“Honestly, I got fucking lucky. I thought I was a goner, but these two men showed up on the other side of the lot and helped take down the horde. No idea who they were, but I’m grateful for them nonetheless. However, one of them was damn excited about killing one with a wooden mallet.” I end the sentence with a chuckle, remembering the absurd scene from earlier.

“God, that definitely sounds like something Noah would have done.” She says with a giggle.

“Who’s Noah?” My brows furrow with the question.

“Oh, he’s one of my best friends. Rue and Noah are like my other halves. My people. I miss them a lot.” A tear tracks down her cheeks at the memory of her lost friends. I swipe it away with my thumb, pulling her into my side to soothe her as something in the back of my mind niggles at the mention of the name Rue.

“I’m sure you’ll get to see them again, Mallory.” She hums her response, already falling asleep against my chest. I run my fingers through her hair until night falls and my own eyelids close with exhaustion.

### Chapter Twenty-One

MALLORY

THREE DAYS LATER.....

Maverick has been fawning over me for days, not even letting me leave the tent unless I need to use the restroom. He follows me into the woods and then stands less than ten feet away while I take a piss. The night I had to take a shit was a big surprise because I've never done that in front of someone before, let alone a man.

"Absolutely not, Maverick!" My voice comes out in a cracked screech, my face beet red as I wave my hands at Mav to shoo him away.

"Nope. I'm not going anywhere, so you might as well get used to it." His shoulders shrug up and down, eyes rolling back into his head in annoyance.

"It's embarrassing! Please just go away." At this point I'm frantic because I feel like I'm about to shit myself and he isn't budging.

"You have two seconds to pop a squat, or we will be repeating your first piss in the woods." He crosses his arms over his chest, eyes glaring at me, and the stare he gives me says he means business. A shudder runs through me, my eyes filling with tears of humiliation. Shaking my head, I take in a shuddering breath and steel my spine before dropping my pants and squatting in front of him. "Good girl." He leans down and pets my head, hands me a roll of toilet paper he managed to find in the hunting store, and then walks a few steps away to lean against a nearby tree while I do my business.

I shiver with the flashback of that shameful moment, and it makes a blush creep up my already flushed cheeks. Maverick is behind me, straddling my thighs as he reapplies the healing balm to my dry skin. The marks have started to heal; most of the bruises are a greenish yellow at this point. Letting out a groan as he massages the balm into my sore skin, his calloused hands on me are driving me nuts today. I don't think I've ever been this damn horny before. His attentiveness the last few days has been wonderful, albeit annoying at times. The heat between my thighs rises, and I wiggle beneath him trying to alleviate the burn.

"Stop moving, Mallory. I'm almost done." His warm hand smooths against my skin again, his thumb swiping through my ass crack, and it makes me jump in surprise. "Sorry about that." He whispers, and it makes me groan all the same. I'm so needy I'd let him take my ass right now if I'm being honest; the thought of him plunging into me brutally has me squirming beneath him. "What's the matter, pet?" His chuckle at the end tells me he knows exactly what's wrong with me, but I know he's going to make me say it anyway.

"I want you, Maverick." I say as I look back at him, his eyes darkening with lust. "Please, sir, I need you." My words end with a whimper when his hands clutch on tighter to my ass. He promptly slides off the back of my thighs, kneels down behind me, and wrenches my hips up and back towards him. The sudden feel of his warm tongue against my throbbing clit has my eyes rolling in pleasure. "Yes! Please, more!" He sucks my clit into his mouth while plunging two fingers straight into my needy pussy. I'm so wet that they slide in with zero resistance, and the feeling of fullness is almost enough to send me spiraling out of control. His fingers tap against my g-spot, making spots fly across my vision. "Fuck, harder!" He groans, and the vibration of it goes straight to my clit. The brutal thrusts of his fingers continue, and the addition of a third finger has me coming so fast that my legs shake; his arm around my waist is the only thing holding me up. He leisurely laps up my dripping arousal, before I collapse onto the ground underneath him. "Thank you, I really needed that." As he lies next to me, he wraps his arms around me and holds me close



while kissing me up my spine. Sometimes I wonder just how I got so lucky for this ruthless man to treat me with such love and tenderness.

“Anytime you want me, all you have to do is tell me, baby. I love watching you fall apart underneath me.” His words have goosebumps prickling my skin, and he lays a soft kiss against my neck. “Having you naked the last few days has been absolute torture.” I laugh at the pained groan he lets out. “I’ve been hard for days, and I would give anything to fuck you right now.” His teeth dig into my neck, sucking my skin into his mouth, ripping a moan from my lips.

I turn around in his arms and push him back onto his back, which he goes willingly and helps me straddle his hips. His hard cock digs into the apex of my thighs, and I grind my still throbbing clit against it. Maverick throws his head back in a pained moan, his fingers clutching onto my hips trying to keep me from moving. “I want to fuck you...” My voice drifts off as I continue to grind against his pelvis; he thrusts his hips up against mine as his eyes that are full of desire bore into mine.

“Then what are you waiting for, Pet?” The arch of his brow convinces me to lean down and undo his pants, his hard cock springing out against his stomach. He leans up, ripping his shirt off over his head, and all I can do is sit back and marvel at the hard planes of his chest, chiseled to perfection. He opens his mouth to say something, but I’m already lifting up and sliding down his hard length. “Fuuccckkk...” His groan spurs me on, his hips lifting up to meet my thrusts. Placing my hands back behind me on his knees, I ride him like some down-and-dirty cowgirl. His hand snakes up, fingers flicking at my clit as he rises up, the other hand wrapping around my waist. I shift my body forward, his hard chest coming flush to my own heaving one. My nails dig into his shoulders as his hand tightens around my neck. “You are exquisite.” His praise sends me into a freefall, riding him with abandon, one hand tightening so much on my neck that dark spots start to appear while the other one rubs tight circles into my clit. “You gonna come for me, baby girl?” He says in a rough growl.

“Yes, yes, yes!” I chant through a squeaky breathlessness with what little air I have left in my lungs. Next thing I know, his hand stops moving against my clit, and we are rolling through the air, my back slamming against the hard ground, Maverick's hips slamming into my own. I wrap my legs around his waist, while the hand on my neck continues the pressure and his other one comes up to tangle with one of mine. “Please, I need more!”

“You sure, baby?” I nod my head frantically, and he readjusts his hand around my neck, the other one moving down to my ass cheek. He uses his knees to tilt my pelvis up, and then his thick finger is pushing into my ass. The unexpected sensation catapults me over the edge, my broken scream swirling around us. “Fuck, that's my good girl.” He growls and continues to pound into me, my head flopping over to the side. His hand lets go of my neck and grips the other side of my hip. His finger still thrusting into my ass. “Give me another one, Pet.” I shake my head, muttering no, because how the hell am I supposed to do that? I feel like I'm wrung out. “Yes, you can, baby. You'll do it just for me, won't you?” His words come out in a seductive purr that has my pussy clenching around him. The hand on my hip slips over to rub against my clit, and he slowly adds another finger into my ass, which has my back arching up off the ground. The sting of his fingers and the pleasure coursing through my clit ignite a weird feeling inside of me that has me leaning up on my elbows, pleading to the man defiling me.

“Maverick, stop! I think I'm going to piss myself! Stop, stop!” My hands frantically push against his chest, while the feeling continues to increase. Neither my words nor my flailing hands deter him, though.

“Relax, baby, and just feel. I got you.” His words wrap me in a comforting blanket as he continues his pace and practically yeets me off the cliff of ecstasy. My back bows, wetness pools beneath my ass, and the inhuman sounds coming from my mouth are probably comical. Maverick pulls his cock out and rubs his palm back and forth against my clit while still fingering my ass, and the sensation is back, water splashing

against him and onto the tent floor. “Fuck yes! You’re such a good fucking girl, Mallory.” He growls before thrusting his cock back into me, and gently removing his fingers from my ass. His hand which is covered in my juices, wraps around my neck in a manner to just keep me in place because I am utterly limp beneath him right now. His thrusts start to stutter, and he finally releases a deep growl as he releases inside of me.

Maverick collapses on top of me, but still manages to hold most of his weight. Sweat and come surround us as well as our heavy breathing. My eyes have since fluttered closed, and I feel like I’m about to drift off to dreamland. “Open those pretty eyes, baby.” His voice is like smooth scotch as it drifts across my senses. Eyes fluttering open, his icy eyes bore into mine as he says, “You took that like such a good girl, Pet. I’m so proud of you, Mallory.” His words of praise have my chest tightening and a tear rolling down my cheek, and then I’m dead to the world.

The feeling of warm water pouring over me mixed with the soft sound of a babbling brook jolts me awake. My eyes flutter open, being met with the shadowed treetops and the rough feeling of hands on my body. I’m lying between Maverick’s spread thighs as he gently cleans us both up in the small stream. “Look who’s finally awake. I was starting to get worried there.” His chuckle meets my ears with a smile spreading across my face. His blue eyes meet mine, mirth swimming in their depths as he leans down and gently kisses my lips. He hasn’t said if he loves me or not, but his actions and touch speak every word he hasn’t said. I snuggle back into his body as he continues to wash away our earlier debauchery. Once he’s satisfied, he pulls me up to sit against his chest, his wet arms wrapping around me like a cocoon, before he heaves out a sigh. “We should really get going soon.”

“Go where exactly?” I mutter, my brow furrows.

“I don’t really know. Where do you want to go? The options are pretty endless at this point.” He chuckles because he’s right. The world is fucked right now, so we can

basically go and do whatever we want.

“Well, there is one place, but I’m not really sure what it is. I just know where it is.” My fingers twist together as I flash back to a previous time where Noah had mentioned the name. It was nothing more than a brief slip of the tongue, and he didn’t elaborate or ever say it again. Which is rather odd for Noah if I do say so myself. “Oasis, it’s in Florida.”

“What the hell is that?” His skeptical expression has me twisting around in his lap so our fronts are squished together.

“Honestly, I have no idea what it is. I just know it’s called Oasis and it’s in Florida. I remember Noah making a comment about it forever ago, but can’t remember anything else. He was really shifty when he talked about it, but I’m confident that if he knows what it is, that could be where he’s going...” I drift off with my words because Maverick’s expression tells me there’s no way we are going there, so I heave out a disgruntled sigh.

“Fuck it. Let’s go.” The unexpectedness of his words has me shooting back to look at him.

“Really? Are you sure?” I question with my arms crossed over my chest and my head tilted in disbelief.

“Yeah, I’m sure. What else are we going to do?” He shrugs before making his way to his feet, sticking out his hand and helping me up. I don’t know who replaced my ruthless, take-no-shit, killer of a man with this go-with-the-flow guy, but I’m not sure if I like it yet. He pulls me up the bank of the brook and walks through the woods. Branches and dead leaves crackle beneath our feet. After a good ten-minute walk, we make it back to the tent. Shit, I didn’t even realize we were that close to water in the first place. Maverick stops before he enters the tent. “Let’s get one thing clear though.

We are only going to this place because that's the only thing we've heard about. I'm trusting you with this decision. That being said, you do what I say when I say it while we are traveling, do you understand?" His voice deepens with his command, and now my man is back to how he should be.

"Yes, sir, I understand." I say with a smile as I lean up and press a kiss to his cheek before crawling into the tent to find some clothes.

### Chapter Twenty-Two

#### MAVERICK

This girl is turning me into a fucking sap. I've never treated anyone this nice before, not even my own mother. Seriously, what the hell is wrong with me? When I look at her, my heart rate speeds up, and it makes my chest flutter when she smiles. That damn giggle she lets out all the time makes me smile myself, which is such a foreign thing. Is this what they call love? Because I feel like a nutcase right now. She doesn't seem to mind my affection most of the time, but when that sass comes out? Shit, it takes everything in me not to bend her over and fuck her. Not sure how the fuck I got so lucky finding her in the woods that day, but whatever I did to deserve it, thank fuck for that. I watch my girl as she makes her way through the forest, hopping carelessly over fallen branches like she's a track star. We left the campsite a few hours ago and have been walking since. Mallory has only stopped once to piss, which I am honestly shocked about.

The trees have started to become more sparse, and the air has gotten thicker the farther we walk. Mallory has already stripped off her sweater and tied it around her waist over an hour ago, sweat beading on both of our foreheads as we continue through. The ground has started to get squishy in some spots, making me wonder where the hell we have ended up. "Goddammit!" Mallory's annoyed screech reaches my ears; her boot is stuck in thick sludge. She tries to tug her boot out, but the suction is so strong that it doesn't even budge. She narrows her eyes and lunges forward, hoping her body weight will tug the boot free, but she just falls flat on her belly on the ground instead. A sound whooshes out of her when she makes impact, and I can't restrain the laugh that bursts out of me. "It's not funny! Come help me." Her pitiful

voice just makes me laugh even harder. She's up on her knees now trying to pull the boot free, and she lets out a scream of frustration. "Stop laughing at me and get over and help!"

I walk over to her, still chuckling under my breath, and grab her hands, bracing my feet on the ground before tugging. It takes a few minutes and some wiggling to finally get her boot out of the mud, and we both fall back onto the ground with a laugh. She slaps me on the arm with a glare before hopping to her feet and offering me her hand. I smirk at her and grab onto her hand before pulling her back into me, her thighs straddling my lap. Leaning up, I place a kiss on her pillowy lips, and we stay there in our little bubble until the sky starts to darken. "We better get going; it looks like it's going to rain." Her face tips up to the sky with a pout as she gazes at the dark clouds floating in. We finally get to our feet and head on our way.

"Mav, look!" Her excited squeal catches me off guard, and I look to where she's pointing. There's what looks to be an old dock in the distance surrounded by water. We've been hearing the sounds of frogs and crickets for a while now. She runs off towards the dock, and I have no other choice but to follow after her. "Oh my god, look, look!" She's hopping up and down now and pointing to a small boat that is attached to the dock haphazardly. Her boots echo off of the old wood and sway under her feet as she approaches the boat. "I think we should use this to get us farther down this nasty swamp, because I'm tired of trekking through the mud." She doesn't even wait for me to acknowledge her before she swings a leg over and promptly tumbles down into the boat. It swishes back and forth in the water while she struggles to get her bearings.

"Have you ever even been in a boat before?" I ask with a raised eyebrow as she clutches the sides of the boat for dear life.

"Uh, does a yacht count?" She lets out a nervous chuckle, and I lean down to steady the boat for her. "What are these?" She picks up two oars on the bottom of the boat

and holds them up to me with a quizzical look.

“Are you serious right now?” I’m trying so hard not to laugh at her, but her lack of knowledge sometimes is just too much for me. “Those are oars. That’s what we use to move the boat with.” I say as I step into the boat myself, barely even jostling it.

“Ohhhhhhh, okay, gotcha. How do you use them?” She holds them up and almost bashes me in the head with one as she goes.

“How about you let me worry about that and you just worry about keeping your pretty ass in the boat, okay?” She shrugs and passes me the oars before settling into her seat across from me. I position the oars in their holders on the edges of the boat and drop them into the water, pushing off from the dock.

Mallory oohs and ahhs over everything she sees as we float through the water. I’ve never seen someone so enamored by nature before, and it tugs at my heartstrings. “What’s that?” She points to a large bird standing on the bank.

“That’s a great blue heron, and that over there is a cottonmouth.” I point to the snake slithering down into the water.

“Fuck no, that’s a nope rope!” She screeches and jumps towards me, plopping down into the bottom of the boat by my feet. I let out a chuckle at her antics and keep moving us through the swamp.

It’s long since gotten dark, and the mosquitos out here are horrible. I wouldn’t be surprised if we looked like we had the chicken pox when we finally made it out of here. Rain starts to drop down from the sky, and I let out a string of curses while scanning the horizon for a place to take shelter. Mallory is complaining about getting wet, but I’m more worried about getting stuck out here in a damn storm. I haven’t told her that there are alligators out here yet just because of the way she acted about



that damn snake. The rain starts pouring down in buckets, and it's hard to hear Mallory over the sound of it, let alone see where we are going. The wind has picked up, making us travel faster through the water, and I feel Mallory's arms snake around one of my calves as she clutches me to her. Looking down at her, she's shaking from the cold rain, her blue eyes round with fear as the boat rocks back and forth from the rain and the wind. Before I can open my mouth to tell her that everything is going to be okay, all hell breaks loose.

The boat crashes into a tree trunk and bounces back, knocking into several thick branches. Mallory is frantic, and I can hear her screams over the rain as she clutches onto me with all of her strength. We bash into another tree trunk that sends us careening outward, the boat flipping over in the process. We both splash into the water, and the feeling of her arms on me disappears just as the frigid water seeps into me. Thunder clashes and lightning lights up the area for a split second, and I can see Mallory's head bobbing in the water on the other side of the boat. "Maverick!" She screams, trying to swim towards me, but the current is too strong for her and takes her downstream. I yell her name, but it gets lost in another clap of thunder, rain still beating down all around me in sheets, making it hard to see. I frantically scan the area for her, but she's gone. My heart almost seizes in my chest with the feeling of losing her. I promised I would protect her, and I couldn't even save her in this storm?

I spy the boat nestled between branches on the edge of the swamp and manage to get it flipped over and haul myself inside of it. The oars are long gone, so I rip a branch off the tree and make do with that as I propel myself through the water in the same direction Mallory went. I yell her name while I go, but I don't hear a sound back, and I fear that she's drowned. My chest aches with that thought, and my breathing starts to become shallow. When did I become such a pussy over a girl? I set the branch down beside me on the floor of the boat and lay down next to it, staring up at the sky as the rain continues to pelt down onto me. I close my eyes hoping that this is all a dream, but when I open them again nothing has changed.

I eventually fall asleep because the next thing I know I'm waking up to sunny skies and chirping birds. Leaning up on my elbows, I see that there is about an inch of water in the bottom of the boat and thank whoever's out there that I didn't drown too last night. I'm still floating down the stream, so I hop back onto the bench and grab my makeshift oar again. Tiredness pulls at my eyelids, but I force them to stay open. A few minutes later I spy something sparkly down the bank, and I propel the boat towards it. Sticking out of the mud is one of Mallory's pink combat boots. I tug it free from the mud and scan the area, calling for her, but only silence greets me. She had to have gotten out this way with how stuck her boot was in the mud. I steer the boat around a bend, and a wooden dock lies within reach. Using my tree branch, I get as close as I can to the dock before lunging out of the boat onto it. I lay there on my back, holding Mallory's boot to my chest.

"Mallory!" I yell out one last time, and when silence greets me again, I heave out an exhausted sigh. What the hell am I going to do now? Our packs were washed away during the storm, and the only thing I have on me is her boot. My worry for Mallory intensifies because she has nothing, not even both boots to help keep her safe. The feeling of dread courses through my body, and I pray to anyone out there that she will stay alive long enough for me to find her.

### Chapter Twenty-Three

#### MALLORY

I am soaked, missing a boot, and I smell like a stinky gym shoe. I'm not sure who I pissed off to get me in this situation, but seriously, fuck them. A twig snaps in the distance, which has me scampering behind a large tree trunk. This night has been awful and terrifying. I thought I was scared before, but this is a whole other level. A bunny hops into my view, munching on some grass, and I heave out a relieved sigh. Sitting down by the trunk of the tree, I rest my head back against the scratchy bark. My hair has become a nasty tangled mess, and I wouldn't be surprised if it's started to form matting back there. Closing my eyes and heaving out a sigh, the events from last night play on a loop behind my eyelids.

One second I'm clutching onto Maverick's leg in the bottom of the boat, and the next second I'm being flung through the air like a rag doll. My body crashes into the water below, the murky substance invading my mouth and nose making it hard to breathe. My heart is pounding in my chest as I frantically flail, trying to grasp onto anything. "Maverick!" I scream when my head finally pops through the surface. I'm able to see his blue eyes shining fiercely through the storm on the other side of the boat. He's yelling, but I can't make out the words between the raindrops and the water rushing in my ears. The tears streaming down my panic-stricken face blend in seamlessly with the rain pelting down on me while I do my best to stay afloat. The current is strong, and it flings my body back and forth, the muscles in my arms and legs tiring from the exertion.

A bolt of lightning blazes through the sky, lighting up Maverick's hulking form as he

throws himself through the water to get to me. His powerful arms beating at the current, eyes filled with desperation, his voice filled with dread, “Mallory!” A whimper escapes my lips before my head falls back under the water; the coldness seeps into every part of me, making my muscles seize up. My legs and arms still in the water, Maverick’s handsome face flashes through my mind with all the memories we’ve created thus far. A soft smile sweeps across my lips as my body is flung down the stream; the feeling of weightlessness takes over until my back is slammed against a hard surface, forcing what little air I had left in my lungs out. The force of the impact has my head bobbing back above the surface; water sputters out of my mouth as I cough up the thick swamp water. The current has died down to the point that my noodle limbs are able to keep my head above water.

Kicking my feet out, I use my hands to hastily brush my hair and the water out of my eyes so I can actually see my surroundings. I spy a large branch protruding out of the bank, and I slowly manage to propel myself over to it, my shaking hands grabbing onto it for dear life. My body trembles in the water while I swing myself slowly up the muddy bank. Once I’m able to get my bearings, my left boot sinks deep into the mud, immobilizing me. “You have got to be fucking kidding!” I screech out for no one to hear as I tug on my leg with what little strength I have left. A sob leaves my lips as my boot just suctions deeper into the earth. Leaning down, I carefully unlace my boot enough to slip my foot out of it and army crawl the rest of the way up the bank. My body shakes with exhaustion, and the sobs spill out of me while I drag my body farther up the earth. I don’t stop until I’m lying safely next to a large tree, far enough away from the water for my own comfort. Flipping onto my back, I stare up at the dark sky, my sobs turn into hysterical laughter and then back to sobs that wrack my whole body. My eyes eventually slide shut, and they don’t open again until the sunlight is warming my body.

Tears track down my cheeks, leaving tracks in the mud that is still caked there. I angrily swipe them away and take a deep breath, trying to calm my racing heart. “Come on, Mallory. You’re a bad bitch, and you need to act like it.” I say as I scold

myself and push to my feet. My clothes have finally dry enough that I'm not freezing anymore, but they are stiff on my body, making it hard to move. The once white sock on my left foot has now turned to a coffee brown, making me cringe. Wrapping my arms around myself, I scan my surroundings, and everything looks the same. "I'm going to die out here." I mutter to myself and start walking through the brush; sticks, and small rocks prick my sock-covered foot, making me wince. Stopping, I stare down at my body, and a thought comes to me, making me laugh, because who would have thought little ol' me would think of this? I use all my strength to tear off two strips of my already tattered shirt. The biggest one I fold up so it's a thick rectangle; placing my foot on top of that, I then shimmy the small piece of fabric under it and tie it around my foot and ankle to keep it in place. Taking a few practice steps, I whoop with victory and clap my hands when the fabric dulls the sharp objects just enough to be somewhat comfortable.

I straighten up, ball my hands at my sides, and march forward through the trees. Weaving in and out of the trees for hours is exhausting after you've almost died. My stomach has been growling the entire time I've been moving, and I would kill for a greasy cheeseburger right now. Eventually I see a small stream up ahead and make my way towards it with the intention of getting this mud off of me. At the edge of the water I slip off my boot and makeshift shoe, then peel my clothes away from my body before wading into the lukewarm water. Heaving out a sigh as the water warms my frigid skin, I plop my ass down on the rocky bottom and start cleaning the mud chunks from my body before leaning back and attempting to fix my hair. Spoiler alert: there is no fixing this rat's nest. Once I'm as clean as I'm going to get, I walk back out of the water and lay back on a flat rock near the edge to air dry my body. The sun is beating down and warming up my skin, reminding me of the summers I spent out on the deck of our yacht.

The sun starts to dip behind the trees before I make it up off the rock to dress. Picking up my shirt, I rip off another thin strip of fabric, because why not at this point, and use it to tie my hair up into a messy bun. A movement to my right startles me and has

me jumping back, and then there's a movement to my left with a twig snapping. My heart rate increases at my impending doom as four zombies amble their way out of the trees. They are surrounding my only exit, because the other side of the stream is covered in jagged rocks, and I know damn well I can't make it over those. I take a few steps forward, intending on just edging myself around them, and they don't even sense my movements. My brows furrow while I lean down and grab a hefty branch by my feet, lifting it up as I've seen Maverick hold his axe. Walking closer to the zombies, I can smell their rancid stench emanating off of them, and they don't even flinch when the tree branch brushes up against them. "What the hell?" I mutter under my breath, and that gets the attention of the zombie closest to me. She limps her way towards me, and I don't move a muscle as she sniffs directly at my shoulder before she stumbles away with the rest of them. As soon as they are a few feet away, I toss the branch and run like hell.

Lungs burning with the exertion, sore muscles continuing to strain as I run through the trees. The sun is officially setting when I burst through the edge of the forest, leaning down to brace myself on my knees as I catch my breath. Staring at the ground, my toes are touching the edge of an asphalt road. I just stay there and stare at it like I've never seen one before. I think I'm in shock at this point. Finally I lean back up and sweep my gaze up and down the road that is lined by dense forest on both sides, with no road markers. My feet step up onto the road, and I almost sigh with the smooth feeling that lies under my feet while my gaze sweeps left and right. "Eenie, meenie, miney, moe." I say before choosing to walk right down the deserted road. It's almost eerie how quiet it is out here, and it has goosebumps erupting on my skin. I trudge down the road until it's well past dark, barely being able to see the few feet in front of me, and then I hear it. A sound that I haven't heard in weeks, a rumble and roll of tires as a vehicle comes closer. I turn towards the noise, stopping in the middle of the road as headlights flash over my body, blinding me. I throw up my arm to shield my eyes, and I hope to god that they decide to stop, but I brace myself for the impact anyways. The screech of tires reaches my ears, and I heave out a relieved breath. A door squeaks open, and then I hear the voice that I thought I'd never hear

again. “Little one, is that you?” His deep voice reaches my ears, and I drop down to my knees in sobs. I jerk back when rough hands touch my arms, but then his warm arms start to envelop me, and it starts to feel like I'm finally home.

### Chapter Twenty-Four

#### MAVERICK

I lost her. She slipped right through my fingers just like the water she vanished into. The only thing left of her is her muddy pink boot that I have tied around my neck like some morbid necklace. I've been walking for hours, and I'm completely exhausted. My body feels like it has been yeeted off of the highest cliff, and I'm really feeling my age right now. I stumble over a branch and fall to my knees on the hard ground. I hurl curses at the inanimate object, screaming out into the darkness, "Fuck!" with all my might until my voice starts to crack. I shake my head, leaning back to look up at the stars, "God, I'm fucking pathetic." Pushing myself to my feet, I set off walking again, breaking through the dense trees out onto an asphalt sea. I heave out a relieved breath just to be out of the uneven terrain. I start to trudge down the road, up the road, whichever way you want to call it, until I see a looming object in the distance. Quickening my pace, an RV comes into view, making me come to a stop and look at my surroundings.

The crickets chirping is the only noise that reaches my ears. Stealthily I move towards the RV, peering into the lowest window I can reach and seeing nothing but black space. I curse under my breath, "Fuck it," and move towards the door. My hand wraps around the handle, pulling it open on soundless hinges, revealing the space within. The RV dips down a bit as I enter it, taking tentative steps up the stairs. The space is bigger than it looks, housing a whole kitchenette with a fold-out table. Turning to the left, I peer down the hall, spying another door and a large bed at the end, and my shoulders drop at the lovely sight. Before I can take another step forward, I'm grabbed from behind, a hand wrapping around my mouth and the other



one pointing a gun at my temple. My body freezes, and I almost chuckle at my rookie mistake.

“You have five seconds to quietly convince me not to kill you. If you wake my girl up, I won’t even hesitate.” A laugh rumbles through my chest, his hand muffling the sound. “The fuck are you laughing for?” He taps the gun against my temple then lowers his hand from my mouth so I can speak.

“Long time no see, Ghost.” I chuckle, a smirk marring my face as I slowly turn towards him. Our eyes connect and understanding flashes through his. “Never thought I’d be relieved to see your ugly mug again.” We stare at each other, the awkward silence grows thick until he reaches out and hugs me, patting me on the back roughly before letting me go again. Usually I’d scoff at the gesture, but I’m so worn down that I don’t even flinch at his touch.

“Fuck, Mav, you look like hell. How did you get here? Where’s Aspen? Shit, let’s go outside and talk so we don’t wake up Rue.” His questions fire out at a rapid pace, and my brain is too exhausted to answer them that fast as he ushers me back down the stairs and out the door. I drop to my ass on the ground, back propped up by one of the RV wheels. “Where’s Aspen?” He asks again before plopping down a few feet away from me.

“She’s dead.” I say after clearing my throat, memories of that night flash rapidly through my mind, making me cringe.

“Did you kill her? After everything we did to get her out?” His scolding voice cuts through me like a knife.

“I killed her because I had to, Ghost. She was sick... I didn’t know until it was too late.” I say as I drop my head back against the RV. I never cared for Aspen as much as I do Mallory, but she was still a good chunk of my life.

“Fuck. You okay, man?” His concern would be laughable, but I tell he really means it.

“Not really. I mean, I’m over her death if that’s what you mean. It was about a month ago, I would say. Fuck, Ghost, I don’t even know where to start right now.” I say, scrubbing my hands over my face in exasperation as he waits patiently for me to keep talking. “The day after you and Rue left, I found Aspen in our room; she had already turned, so I uh... yeah, anyways, I burned the house down, and then I set off to wherever the fuck. While I was walking I found someone, but now she’s lost, and I’m a fucking mess.” My voice cracks at the end, and I punch the ground with my fist, berating myself for being a fucking pussy right now.

“You found someone? Who? Where is she now?” Ghost’s arms are now leaning over his knees as he looks at me with genuine interest. “Don’t give me that fucking look. Just take my kindness for what it is right now, yeah?” I heave out a sigh and nod my head.

“Her name is Mallory.” He gives me a funny look when I say her name, but doesn’t comment on it. “I found her tied between some trees about to be raped by some assholes. Fuck, man, she was beautiful hanging up there, her eyes shining with tears, and those goddamned pink heels still strapped to her feet. I killed those fuckers and took her with me. She’s... everything that I wanted Aspen to be. She’s my perfect little Pet.” He smirks at me, nodding as he fully understands what I’m saying and motions for me to continue. “We ended up in a boat going down the swamp the other night during the storm.”

“Shit, I remember that night! That storm about blew this fucking RV over.” He growls with an annoyed shake of his head.

“Yeah, wasn’t really a fun time. The boat tipped over, and we got separated.” I hold up her pink boot, waving it at him. “This is hers; I found it stuck in the mud down the

bank. I have no idea where she is, but fuck man, I need to find her..." Ghost stares at me, examining my expression, and he must find what he's looking for when he nods at me in acceptance.

"Okay, we'll help you find her, but Rue won't be happy. She has her mind set on us getting to Florida."

"Oasis?" I say, and confusion zooms through both of us.

"How do you know about Oasis?" He questions, leaning forward more on his haunches.

"Mallory told me about it." Ghost nods his head, his expression contemplative.

"Rue said she has a friend named Mallory... Do you think?" His thoughts are going in the same direction as mine are, our expressions identical as we contemplate this new revelation.

"Mallory has mentioned Rue and Noah, but I guess I never pieced that together. I... I don't want to get Rue's hopes up if it really is Mallory. Only one of us needs to be heartbroken if she's truly gone." Ghost nods in agreement.

"I'll talk to Rue when she wakes up in the morning, just telling her that you're looking for your Pet." He says with a smirk. "But I'm going to warn you, I don't think Rue will be very receptive to your appearance. She's pissed at how you treated Aspen." He ends his words with a chuckle.

"If it's any consolation, I treat Mallory much better. She's mine. " The seriousness in my gaze conveys all the words that I don't have the energy to say right now.

"Come on, you look like you're about to drop dead. You can sleep on the floor."

Ghost rises to his feet, walks back to the door, and motions for me to follow after him. Once we enter the space, he leaves me standing in the kitchen area and walks towards the back of the RV. I watch him leave before sliding down to the floor and stretching out on my back with a groan. A few seconds later a pillow and a blanket are dropped on my face. “Here, get some sleep. We’ll talk in the morning.” I salute him, tuck the pillow under my head, and wrap the blanket around me. It doesn’t take me long before I drift off into a dreamless sleep.

\* \* \*

“What the fuck is he doing here?” The screech penetrates my ears as I’m thumped on the head with something soft. “Get out!” The thump comes again, but harder, jostling my eyes open. Rue’s small form is looming over me with a pillow in her hands, ready to strike again. Her eyes narrow as she brings the pillow down hard against my face.

“Ghost, restrain your girl before I do it for you.” I growl out as my fists clench. Ghost’s hand snakes up and around to hold the collar on Rue’s neck with a smirk marring his face.

“What the hell? Let me go!” Rue grunts at Ghost, trying to push him away. Her small form to his large one is comical to watch as she struggles to get to me.

“Don’t worry, Death, Maverick will be on his best behavior. Won’t you?” His glare at me makes me chuckle as I sit up, leaning against the sink cabinet.

“I swear I’ll be on my best behavior.” I nod with a soft smile on my face, pulling my knees to my chest to rest my elbows on them.

The silence is thick and awkward in the space until Rue clears her throat before speaking, “Uh Ghost told me... About Aspen.” Gazing up at her, her eyes are full of sadness, shoulders hunched over as she wraps her arms around her middle. “I’m

sorry.” She whispers, and her apology is sincere.

I nod at her, accepting her apology, “It’s okay. Couldn’t really be helped...” I drift off, not wanting to rehash that nightmare again.

“Ghost said you lost your Pet? I’m guessing it’s not a dog, right, like it’s a real human?” Her eyebrow hitches as she speaks with a hint of humor in her voice.

“Yes, she is a human.” I chuckle at the thought of being this heartbroken over a damn dog. “She’s... uh... I-I think I love her.” The words stumble from my mouth, and we are all silent at the shock of my statement. No one dares to say a word at my new revelation, that is until Rue pipes in.

“Damn, I didn’t think your mean ass could actually love anyone.” Her laugh echoes through the RV, and I can’t help but to laugh along with her, and Ghost joins in, kissing her cheek in a loving gesture.

“Yeah, me neither, but she’s different.” I try to convey my emotions with my eyes; Rue gazes at me and finally nods in understanding.

“Okay, well then, what are we waiting for? We better find this infamous Pet before he turns grumpy again.” Her eyes roll with sass as she strides over to the passenger seat of the RV, waving for Ghost to follow, which he does with no hesitation.

“If I didn’t know any better, I’d wonder who was actually on the leash here.” Ghost turns around and glares at me from the driver's seat, making me chuckle.

“Shut the fuck up, Mav, or I’ll turn this fucking thing back around.” I hold up my hands in surrender, getting comfy on the floor as the RV starts to roll forward.

I must have fallen asleep again, because the next thing I know it’s pitch black outside.

Ghost is still driving away, and Rue is snoring softly in the passenger seat. I stand up and stretch, making my way to the front to see if Ghost needs to switch.

“Hey, I can drive for a while, why don’t you go and rest?” I nod my head at the obvious bags under his eyes and wave my hand towards the back of the RV. His eyes sweep over Rue’s sleeping form as he nods his head slowly, applying the brake. I look out at the windshield and see something moving in the middle of the road. “STOP!” I yell, and Ghost slams on the brakes without hesitation. “What the fuck?” I say in confusion as a small figure limps into the center of the road, waving their arm frantically. Their clothes are dingy and covered in dirt. One foot is wearing some kind of makeshift shoe while the other one... Is wearing a pink combat boot. I don’t even hesitate before I bolt for the door with Ghost yelling after me. “Little one, is that you?” I ask in a shocked, cracking voice as I walk closer towards her. Her hair is dirty and stringy around her face; the arm in front of her face shielding her from the headlights slips enough that I get a peek of her beautiful eyes. Her knees buckle, and she falls to the pavement, and I rush to her to encase her in my arms, holding her tightly to my chest. “Mallory, baby...” I whisper as I clutch her to me in fear that she’s just a mirage. Her small hands tighten in the front of my shirt as sobs wrack her body. Her exquisite face peers up at me, and she’s just as beautiful as I remember even with the dirt and tears staining her cheeks.

“Ma-a-averick?” She says through her hiccuping sobs, her lower lip trembles as she stares up into my face. My hands grip her cheeks automatically and bring her face closer to mine so I can kiss her softly; her familiar taste invading my senses heaves a groan from my chest.

“I found you. I told you that I’d always find you, my sweet, Pet.” I say with adoration as I nuzzle my face into her neck, soaking up her familiar scent through all of the dirt and grime. Her body trembles in my hold as I scoop her up bridal style, carrying her back to the RV. She makes a contented sound as her fingers still clutch onto my shirt for dear life.

“M-mal? Is that you-u?” Rue’s voice pipes up from beside the RV as she stares at the exhausted woman wrapped in my arms. She takes a tentative step towards me as Mallory swings her face to stare at her friend. Both of their bottom lips wobble, and a painful sob is wrenched from Mallory’s chest, but the reaction from Rue is the complete opposite. Her eyes look up at me with fire in them, her stance shifting, tiny hands balled up into fists. Ghost is behind her and notices the change, grabbing her from behind and hauling her to his chest before she lunges at me. She struggles in Ghost’s grip, trying to get to me, spewing profanities at me, which makes me stop dead in my tracks and clutch Mallory closer to my chest. A giggle seeps out of my Pet’s lips through her crying as she takes in the debacle. “You fucker! She’s my friend! I swear to God if you hurt her, I’m going to KILL YOU !” Rue screams at me, making Mallory laugh harder. I stare down at the girl clutched in my arms and then back at the girl screaming at me, and I’m confused as fuck. Ghost is looking at me with the same confusion and shrugs his shoulders. Well, this is not exactly how I pictured this reunion going.

### Chapter Twenty-Five

#### MALLORY

The warmth surrounding me feels so nice that I snuggle back into it, imagining that I'm back at home in my comfy bed. I wiggle my ass back, and it brushes up against something hard, which makes me frown, and then steel bands wrap tighter around me. I let out a gasp, my eyes flying open, and light blue wallpaper greets me. My eyes sweep down my body, and the sight of tan arms gripping me has my stomach swooping and the memories from last night swarming my mind. I snuggle deeper into Maverick's embrace, grinding my ass back against what I now know is his hard cock. He lets out a grunt, squeezing me in warning, which has me giggling softly.

"If you don't stop, I will fuck you right here, and I don't have any problems with your friend being nearby." He growls in my ear, and it makes me laugh out loud until a pillow is launched at us from behind, smacking me in the side of the head.

"Ew, please don't fuck her in front of me!" Rue's voice whines behind us. A chuckle escapes me as I roll over to straddle Maverick's waist and grind against his pelvis, my hands clutching at his T-shirt. "Mal, seriously!" Rue's foot stomps against the ground, and her arms are crossed over her chest. My eyes lift to hers with a mischievous glint. We stare each other down until both of our eyes start to well with tears. I bolt off of Maverick's body and launch myself at Rue, wrapping my body around hers like a baby monkey. Her laugh is thick and full of emotion as she hugs me back. "I fucking missed you, Mal." Rue's voice cracks, sending me into a crying mess. We eventually end up on the floor in a puddle of tears and limbs. "How did you meet that asshole?" She asks with a smirk, her thumb hitching behind her to point at



Maverick, who is lounging sleepily on the makeshift bed.

“It’s a long ass story, Rue.” The memories of our first meeting flit through my mind, and it makes me cringe.

“Well, good thing we have nothing but time now then.” She says with an arch of her eyebrow, her arms crossing over her chest.

“Do you remember Chad? From our chemistry class. He would hang out with a Jake and Derek?” She eyes me with confusion until the pieces slip together.

“God, yes, I remember them! They were such creeps, always staring at you from afar, and Chad asked me out once.” She shudders with a puke face as she recounts that awful moment.

“I went to that party and shit hit the fan... I got lost in the woods, fell down a fucking hill, and knocked myself out, Rue! When I woke up, those three were surrounding me. They took me to a cabin in the middle of nowhere, and they... they uh...” I struggle to say the words because they still put a bad taste in my mouth.

“She was trussed up in nothing but those pink sparkly heels, tied between two trees. Damn, she was a vision with tears streaming down her pretty face. They were going to do unthinkable things to her, so I killed them.” Maverick’s voice floats through us, startling Rue; his eyes are locked on mine with intense possession. “I’d say that I saved her from impending doom, but my intentions were purely selfish. I wanted her all to myself.” He says with a smirk marring his handsome face.

“Awe, that’s so sweet it makes me want to barf.” Rue says with a laugh, so I punch her in the arm, and she sends me a look of mock hurt.

“He’s been good to me Rue... better than anyone else.” My cheeks turn bright red, and I glance up at Maverick with shyness.

“Okay, but, he’s a killer, Mal. He isn’t a good man.” She says, not even caring that Mav is lying a few feet away from us.

“I know. He’s told me everything. He may not be a good man to everyone else, but he’s a good man to me, and that’s all that matters.” The look in my eyes must convey my seriousness because Rue reaches over and pulls me into a tight hug.

“Okay, fine, I guess I can be nice to him. For your sake.” She says with a roll of her eyes. “I’m going to go check on Ghost.” She squeezes me one last time before hopping to her feet. I give her the “we are talking about this later” look as she saunters towards the door. “Yes, Mal, I’ll tell you all about it later. I promise.” She blows me a kiss before disappearing outside.

“Come here, Pet.” Maverick motions for me to come to him, so I hop to my feet. “Nu-uh, baby, crawl to me.” He says with a smirk on his lips. Immediately dropping down to my knees, I crawl to him in a way that I am praying looks sexy. “Good girl.” He says, when I reach him, his hand reaching out to cup my cheek, bringing me in for a searing kiss. His forehead leans against mine as he says in a whisper that breaks my soul to pieces, “I thought I fucking lost you Mallory...” His voice cracks, and the look I see in his eyes is one that I have never seen before, it's both thrilling and terrifying.

“I will always find my way back to you, Maverick.” I whisper, my lips brushing against his own.

He pulls back away from me, both hands clutching the sides of my face, his eyes shining with emotion as he says, “I love you, Mallory. You will forever be my good little, Pet.” A smile curves his lips, and I launch myself at him, smashing my lips against his in a violent kiss. His hands grip my waist, pulling me on top of him, and I go willingly, molding my body to his. My hands clutch at his chest, thighs straddling his waist. His own hands drift up the back of my shirt to splay against my bare skin.

“I love you too, Master.” I say once we have broken apart for much-needed air. The mischievous smirk that he gives me, sends my head into a tailspin. He pulls me closer. How that’s even possible, I have no clue, but before he can get what he wants, I leap off of him like he’s on fire. “I don’t think so, mister, we need to get up, or they will think we are up to no good.” I flash him a smirk as I slip my boots on and head to the door. I can hear him groaning the entire time as he rustles around behind me.

I walk out into the crisp morning air and see Rue smashed up against the side of the RV, her legs wrapped around Ghost’s waist as his hands clutch onto her ass. I clear my throat, and her head whips towards me, growing redder by the second. She curses under her breath, wriggling out of Ghost’s arms. “It’s not what it looks like!” She says, feigning innocence.

“Don’t let her lie to you; it’s exactly what it looks like.” Ghost says as he slaps Rue on the ass, making her squeal in surprise. “Where’s Maverick?” His question is punctuated by the RV door slamming open and the grumpy bear himself clambering down the steps.

“I’m right here, asshole.” He grumbles as he sneaks up behind me, wrapping his arms around my waist. I lean back into him, soaking up the love and warmth his body is exuding. “So, what now?” He directs his gaze towards Rue and Ghost as he lays his chin against the top of my head.

“I guess we head towards Florida to find Oasis. Maybe we can find Noah along the way...” Rue’s hopeful voice drifts off as a frown crosses her lips. “But first we should probably get you guys some new clothes because you fucking smell.” Her nose wrinkles in disgust, pulling a full-on belly laugh out of me.

“Hey, we almost died in the swamp! Sorry that we don’t smell like fucking roses.” I say with a roll of my eyes.

“Okay, then it’s settled. Let’s just drive and hope we find somewhere to stock up on

necessities. Or better yet, somewhere to fucking shower.” Ghost says with a laugh and a shake of his head. He grabs Rue’s hand pulling her back towards the RV, and we all pile back in. “There’s some snacks up in the cabinet above the sink. It’s not much, but it will do until we can find something else.” He gestures to the cabinet, and Maverick immediately walks to it and pulls out several packs of nuts, granola bars, and bottles of water before handing them out to everyone.

Rue and Ghost head towards the front, where Ghost plops down into the driver's seat, starting the engine, and Rue makes herself comfy in the passenger seat. Maverick and I pile back into our makeshift bed, both still exhausted from the previous days. After eating our snacks, we both conk out for hours, not waking until Ghost and Rue are rousing us awake. We stumble out of the RV after them, a strip mall laying out in front of us.

“Why don’t we split up? Me and Rue will go towards the camping store to stock up on necessities. Looks like there's also a gym down at the end on the right that we will hit the showers in if they still work. Maverick, you and Mallory go find some new fucking clothes and also hit those damn showers. Fuck, I hope they work.” Ghost grumbles as he drags Rue away towards the camping store.

Maverick and I waste no time darting towards the nearest clothing store. We are thumbing through the racks, grabbing various items, when Maverick sneaks up behind me. “Look what I found.” He says slyly, holding out a pink shirt covered in orange butterflies. I squeal, grabbing the shirt and holding it to my chest. “That’s the one that got ruined at the last mall, right?”

“Yes! Maverick, how did you find this?” I squeal as I throw myself at him for a tight hug.

“Just luck, I guess.” He says, chuckling. “Do you have everything you want?” He waves at my pile of clothes, and I give him an enthusiastic nod. “Great, let’s go fucking shower now.” He grabs my hand and leads me out of the store and straight to

the gym down the road. As we approach the doors, Rue and Ghost are walking back out, both donning clean skin and wet hair.

“They work! And it’s hot water too!” Rue squeals in delight towards me and waves us on. “Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do.” She says with a wink as we disappear through the doors.

Maverick drags me towards the back wall where a shower sign hangs. He picks the largest stall, pushing me back into it and locking us in. Our clothes end up on the floor in record time, and we in fact do everything that Rue would have done. By the time we leave the shower, our muscles are relaxed and we are sparkling clean. Maverick helps me wash my boots off, and we both grab our things and head back to the RV hand in hand. By the time we get there, the sun is starting to set, and Ghost and Rue are huddled over a map on the floor.

“So, we’re going to Florida now, right?” I question as I plop down next to Rue. She leans over and points at a spot on the map, turning to me before speaking.

“Yeah, so we are here right now, and we need to go... here.” She says as her finger sweeps over the map, pointing to a spot circled and labeled Oasis. “Seems like a long trip, but I think we can do it in less than a week if we take turns driving. Ghost already filled up our gas tank and extra jugs while you guys took your sweet time in the shower.” She says with a chuckle.

“Then what are we waiting for? Let’s go, and I call being the DJ!” I screech as I run towards the front of the RV. Rue runs after me, and we both fight for the passenger seat, but I win in the end. “Ha, you snooze, you lose!” I say as I reach towards the black CD case that’s tossed haphazardly onto the floor, flipping through the old early 2000’s disks displayed, I stop on one, my face breaking out into a huge grin. I pull the CD out of the sleeve and shove it into the CD player, and the song Womanizer by Britney Spears blares through the speakers. Everyone behind me groans in annoyance, and it just makes me laugh harder. I settle down into the seat, and

Maverick moves towards the driver seat, kissing the top of my head as he goes. Sweeping my gaze over everyone in the RV, my heart is filled with warmth and the feeling of safety as I think of the journey we have ahead of us.