



Carnival Stalker

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Category: Horror

Description: I never imagined I'd lose my heart to the man who stole my freedom, but now I'm caught in a web of desire I can't escape.

I was just a small-town girl with big dreams of creating video games. But when Phoenix, the carnival's enigmatic hacker, set his sights on me, my world turned upside down. His ice-blue eyes terrified and tempted me, drawing me into a twisted game of obsession and desire.

Kidnapped and thrust into his dark world, I quickly realized I was in over my head. Phoenix was dangerous, brilliant, and hauntingly alluring. His past trauma fueled a need for control that both frightened and fascinated me.

Every attempt to reclaim my freedom had me sinking deeper into his intricate maze of manipulation. I became his possession, with no chance of escape. My death was faked, my old life erased, and I belonged to him completely.

As the carnival lights flicker and the darkness closes in, I must decide: do I fight against the chains that bind us or surrender to the intoxicating pull of our shared madness?

Total Pages (Source): 35

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PHOENIX

I sit hunched over my laptop, the dim glow of the screen casting eerie shadows across the trailer. My fingers dance rapidly across the keys, encrypted messages flashing on the screen before me. The thrill of arranging these deals, the delicate web of deception, it's an intoxicating game I've mastered.

Fuck, I need a new shipment soon. These small-town buyers are like starving wolves, always hungry for more. I smirk, knowing their desperation lines our pockets. A soft ping alerts me to a new message, coordinates for the next drop-off flickering on the screen. Perfect.

The creak of the trailer door rips me from my trance. I whip my head around, eyes narrowed, ready to strike at any threat. But it's just Tyson barging in, as always.

"What do you want?" I snarl, my voice dripping with disdain. The man may be the ringmaster, but I'm pulling the strings behind the scenes.

Tyson doesn't flinch, used to my acrid demeanor. "Need your help with something," he states, his tone brooking no argument.

I lean back, feigning nonchalance as I study him. Tyson knows better than to disturb me during business hours. A smile plays across my lips while I ponder the possibilities. "Oh? And what makes you think I'm in a helpful mood?"

“You’re a fucking asshole, Phoenix. Get your ass to the engineer’s tent ASAP.” The venom in Tyson’s tone immediately sets me on edge.

I bristle at his words, a low growl rumbling in my chest. Who does he think he is, barging in here and barking orders? My fingers curl into fists, itching to lash out and put him in his place.

But I know better than to challenge Tyson directly. Grinding my teeth, I lock my desktop and push away from the desk, the trailer rocking with my abrupt movements. “This better be good,” I snarl, brushing past him toward the main tent.

The cloying scent of sawdust and grease assaults my senses as I stride inside, my boots kicking up dirt with each step. Lars, Gage, and Nash are already gathered, their expressions grim. Something has gone wrong.

“What’s the problem?” I demand, my eyes flicking between the three men. Lars is the first to speak up.

“We had a deal go south last night. The shipment never arrived at the drop point.” His jaw tightens. “We need to find out who fucked us over.”

My brow furrows as I process his words. A botched deal could spell disaster, unraveling the delicate web we’ve so carefully constructed. “Gimme the details,” I order, already mapping out a strategy.

Nash steps forward, fidgeting nervously. “The guys never arrived with the product. They stated they were ambushed on the way, and it’s all gone.”

“Not to worry,” I scoff, rolling my eyes at their panicked expressions. “I’ll get to the bottom of this clusterfuck.”

My fingers are already itching to dive back into the depths of the dark web, scouring every encrypted channel for whispers about our missing shipment. Tracing the digital footprints, unraveling this betrayal thread by thread, will be child's play.

I turn on my heel, ready to retreat to my lair and get to work, but Tyson's gruff voice stops me. "Hold up, Phoenix."

Slowly, I pivot to face him, arching a brow. The smug bastard has his arms folded across his chest, studying me with an infuriatingly calm expression.

"You still want to be part of this team?" His words are laced with quiet menace. "Because your attitude has been getting worse lately."

White-hot fury lances through me at the implication. How dare he question my commitment after everything I've done for this operation? My hands curl into fists, nails biting into my palms as I fight to keep my temper in check.

For a tense moment, I consider lashing out. But something in his steely gaze gives me pause. While Ty might be like an older brother to me, he won't hesitate to cut me loose if I step out of line.

Grinding my teeth, I force myself to nod, the movement stiff and jerky. "I'm on the team," I reply. "Now let me do my job and find these fuckers."

Tyson holds my glare for a beat longer before nodding. "Good. Get it sorted, then."

Without another word, I whirl around and stalk out of the tent, fists clenched at my sides. My rage simmers beneath the surface, a molten pit of fury.

I stomp back toward my trailer. The roiling fury within me threatens to boil over with each step.

As I round the corner, something catches my eye, freezing me in my tracks. There, amidst the chaotic swirl of the carnival, stands the most beautiful woman I've ever seen. The world shifts into hyper-focus, all the noise and chaos fading into a dull roar as I drink in every detail of her.

Chestnut hair cascades in soft waves over her shoulders, framing a heart-shaped face with delicate features. Her hazel eyes sparkle with warmth, instantly drawing me in like a moth to a flame. A radiant smile plays across her full lips as she laughs at something her friend says, the sound like a siren's call luring me closer.

I can't tear my gaze away, utterly transfixed. Every fiber of my being yearns to know her, to unravel the mysteries hidden behind that captivating smile. An ember of obsession ignites, a blazing hunger clawing at my insides.

She shifts slightly, and my breath catches in my throat as the carnival lights dance across her curves, highlighting the swell of her hips and the gentle flare of her waist. God, she's exquisite. Flawless. Mine.

The possessive thought startles me, snapping me back to reality with a jolt. What the fuck is wrong with me? I'm not some lovestruck idiot who gets won over by a pretty face.

Yet even as I berate myself, I can't look away. There's something about her, an irresistible pull that has already sunk its hooks into me. A need to know everything about her consumes my thoughts, drowning out all reason.

Gritting my teeth, I tear my gaze away and continue stalking toward my trailer, my previous rage forgotten. I'll find out who this girl is. I'll study her routines, habits, likes, and dislikes. I'll uncover every scrap of information until I've mapped out the intricate tapestry of her life.

Only then will this maddening obsession be sated. Only then will I decide if she's worthy of my attention?

A smile curves my lips as I disappear into the shadows again. The game is afoot, and I always win—no matter the stakes.

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TILLY

I 'm hanging out with Chloe at the carnival, and we're having so much fun! I needed this before we dive into another semester at college. The atmosphere is electric, with vibrant lights and the scent of sugary treats wafting through the air.

"Isn't this just the coolest?" Chloe gushes, her green eyes sparkling with excitement. She grabs my arm, practically dragging me toward the spinning teacup ride. "C'mon, Tilly, we have to go on this one!"

I laugh, allowing her infectious enthusiasm to sweep me up. "Alright, alright, you convinced me!"

A surge of childlike glee fills me as we sit in the oversized teacups. Chloe and I have been best friends since we were kids, and moments like these remind me why our bond is so strong—we share an ability to embrace the simple joys in life.

The ride starts, and we're soon whirling around, giggling uncontrollably as the world blurs into a kaleidoscope of colors. "Woohooo!" Chloe hollers, her fiery red hair whipping in the wind.

When the ride finally slows to a stop, we stumble off, dizzy but grinning from ear to ear. "That was a rush!" I exclaim, steadying myself against her shoulder.

Chloe nods, her cheeks flushed with excitement. "Worth the line! Now, what's next?"

Ooh, I hear the Ferris wheel calling our names.”

We make our way through the bustling crowd, and I take a moment to soak in the sights and sounds around me. The carnival is truly a magical place filled with wonder and possibility.

Chloe and I get in line for the towering Ferris wheel, chatting excitedly about which ride to hit next. That’s when I sense a presence beside me—a sleazy-looking guy with greasy hair and a leering grin.

“Hey there, pretty lady,” he says, stepping too close. “A knockout like you shouldn’t be ridin’ alone. How about you ditch your friend and come with me instead?”

My nose wrinkles as he stinks of alcohol. “Sorry, I’m not interested.” I try to turn away, but he reaches out and grabs my arm with a clammy hand.

“Aw, don’t be like that, baby. I can show you a real good time.”

Before I can react, Chloe steps between us, her green eyes blazing with fury. “Get your fucking hands off her, you creep!” She shoves him hard in the chest. “She said she’s not interested, so back the hell off!”

The guy stumbles back but quickly regains his footing, raising a fist. “You’re gonna regret that, you little?—”

Suddenly, a tall figure appears, seeming to materialize from the shadows. My mouth dries as he’s gorgeous, with chiseled features, ice-blue eyes, and intricate tattoos snaking up his muscular arms. Without a word, he grabs the creep’s raised fist and, in one fluid motion, clocks him squarely in the jaw.

The guy crumples to the ground, out cold.

I stare at the mysterious stranger in shock, my heart pounding. He turns to face me, a smirk playing on his lips, before turning on his heel and melting back into the crowd.

“Hey, wait!” I call after him, pushing past Chloe to try and follow. “Who are you? Why did you do that?”

But he’s already gone, swallowed up by the sea of people. I scan the crowd desperately, but there’s no sign of the enigmatic, tattooed stranger.

“Tilly?” Chloe catches up to me, grabbing my arm. “You okay? That was crazy!”

I shake my head slowly, still in a daze. “Yeah, I’m fine. Just...who was that guy?”

Chloe shakes her head, her brow furrowed in confusion. “I have no idea. But he saved our asses from that creep.”

I scan the crowd again, but the tattooed stranger is nowhere to be seen. It’s like he vanished into thin air. A tingling sensation goes down my spine as I recall those piercing blue eyes and the casual way he took down that asshole with a single punch.

“Earth to Tilly!” Chloe waves a hand before me, snapping me out of my daze. “You still with me, girl? ”

“Y-Yeah, sorry,” I stammer, tearing my gaze away. “I was just...never mind. Let’s get out of here.”

Chloe nods in agreement. “Good call. I could use a break from all the chaos anyway. Maybe we can grab some food for the walk home?”

My stomach rumbles at the mention of food, reminding me we’ve been going nonstop since we arrived. “You read my mind. I’m starving!”

Looping her arm through mine, Chloe guides us away from the Ferris wheel toward the tempting aroma of funnel cakes and hot dogs. “This is what we need after that crazy encounter.”

As we order our snacks from one of the vendors, I glance over my shoulder, half-expecting to see that striking face in the crowd again. But the carnival bustles around us, a kaleidoscope of sound and color, giving no hint of the mysterious stranger.

We find an empty picnic table to devour our food. Once we’ve finished, we head out of the carnival and call it a night.

I grip Chloe’s arm tightly as we make our way down the darkened street, my heart thudding in my chest. Every rustle of leaves or flickering shadow makes me jump. My nerves are still frayed from that creep at the carnival.

“You alright, Tills?” Chloe asks, giving my arm a reassuring squeeze. “You seem really on edge.”

I force a shaky laugh. “Yeah, I’m fine. Just...that guy freaked me out, you know?”

Chloe nods sympathetically. “I don’t blame you. He was a total dirtbag.” She shoots me a sly grin. “Lucky for us, that mysterious hottie showed up to save the day, huh?”

Heat rushes to my cheeks at the memory of those piercing blue eyes and chiseled jaw. “Y-Yeah, I guess so.” I swallow hard, trying to shake off the sense of being watched. “Still, it was really weird how he just...appeared out of nowhere like that.”

A twig snaps behind us, and I whirl around, my heart leaping into my throat. The street is empty, save for a stray cat scurrying across the road.

“Tilly?” Chloe’s brow furrows with concern. “What’s up?”

“N-Nothing,” I stammer, forcing myself to keep walking. “I just thought I heard—never mind. I’m just being paranoid.”

Chloe studies me for a moment before slinging an arm around my shoulders. “Well, how about this? My parents are out of town this weekend. Why don’t you crash at my place tonight?”

Relief washes over me at the invitation. “You sure? I don’t want to impose...”

“Are you kidding?” Chloe scoffs. “Girl, after our night, I could use the company. Plus, I’m too lazy to go to my place if you’re not coming with me.”

I manage a small smile, leaning into her side gratefully. “Okay, you twisted my arm. A sleepover sounds perfect right about now.”

I can’t shake the feeling that we’re being watched as we approach Chloe’s house. I keep glancing over my shoulder, my skin prickling with unease. But the street remains silent, giving no hint of any other presence.

I’m just being paranoid as Chloe unlocks the front door. That guy from earlier must have gotten under my skin.

Still, even after we’re inside with the door locked behind us, I can’t quite relax. My mind keeps drifting back to those intense blue eyes and the casual, almost ruthless way that stranger took down the creep like it was nothing.

Who was he? And why did he help us?

The questions continue to nag at me as Chloe and I settle in for the night, curling up on the couch to watch a silly rom-com and stuff our faces with snacks. But no matter how hard I try to lose myself in the cheesy plot, I can’t get rid of the nagging feeling

that I'm missing something—some crucial piece of the puzzle surrounding that enigmatic, tattooed stranger.

PHOENIX

“Tilly Jane Lawson,” I murmur.

The name rolls off my tongue. With a few keystrokes, her entire life unfolds before me—every detail meticulously cataloged, every fragment of her existence at my fingertips.

She was born in Oakridge to parents who divorced when she was just a child. I can almost picture the heartbreak etched on her young face, the innocence shattered by the harsh realities of a broken home. But she persevered, her spirit unbroken, fueled by a passion for coding and game development.

My eyes trace the lines of code on the screen, each line a breadcrumb leading me deeper into her world. She’s taking classes at the local college, honing her skills, dreaming of the day when her creations will captivate audiences worldwide. A small, satisfied smile tugs at the corners of my mouth. An aspiring game developer—how deliciously fitting for someone who has already trapped me in her own game of cat and mouse.

The obsession is taking root, tendrils of desire wrapping around my heart, squeezing ever tighter. She’s perfect—a brilliant mind in breathtaking form, a rare gem in a world of dull pebbles. My fingers move across the keyboard, uncovering every facet of her life, committing each detail to memory.

Her online presence is surprisingly sparse for someone so captivating. I guess she isn't one for vanity or the addictive nature of social media. But then, just as I'm about to close the laptop, I stumble upon a hidden gem—a private photo album, password-protected. My fingers fly across the keys, easily deciphering the lock, and the images come into view.

She is bathed in sunlight, her skin gleaming with a light sheen of sweat. She's on a beach, the ocean a vibrant turquoise behind her. But my eyes are drawn to her skimpy bikini, each triangle of fabric barely containing her curves. My breath catches in my throat as my gaze runs hungrily over her body.

I shift in my seat, suddenly aware of the growing bulge in my pants. With a swift movement, I unbutton my jeans and reach inside, pulling out my hard dick. The cool air of the trailer sends shivers down my spine, but the sight of Tilly keeps me burning with desire.

I scroll through the photos, taking in every inch of her—the gentle swell of her breasts, the curve of her hips, the way the bikini bottoms hug her ass. My hand moves faster, fueled by the vision of her writhing beneath me, her soft moans filling the air.

“You're mine,” I whisper, my eyes fixed on a particularly alluring photo. In it, she's reclining on a beach towel, one leg bent at the knee. I can imagine parting those legs and sliding deep inside her. My thumb brushes over the head of my cock, slick with arousal, as I imagine it's her touching me.

The memory of that sleazy bastard putting his hands on her sends a surge of rage through my veins. I recall the smug look on his face and the way he invaded her space, thinking he could take what he wanted. My Tilly.

I should have cut off his hands. Severed them at the wrists and watched the blood spill out, staining the ground red. That would have taught him a lesson. Instead, I

followed him later and slit his throat before burying him in the woods, where he'll never be found.

His dry blood is still on my hands as I stroke my dick. No one touches what's mine. I strengthen my hold on my cock; the image of his lifeless body only makes me harder. I should have made him suffer, slowly, painfully, for daring to touch her, but I didn't have the time.

Tilly's face haunts me, the fear in her eyes as she recoiled from his touch. I could see the vulnerability in her expression, the panic simmering beneath the surface. She needed me. I'd rip apart anyone who threatens her with my bare hands.

The idea of that guy's hands on her perfect body, his mouth tasting her sweet skin... It makes my blood boil. I wanted to tear him apart limb from limb and then fuck Tilly over his dead body just to mark my territory, to prove to the whole fucking world that she's mine and mine alone.

But I know that without control of these violent urges, I'd have been locked up long ago.

I quicken my pace, my eyes glued to the photo of her on the screen. My cock throbs with need, demanding release. I want to brand her as my own, leave my mark so that whenever she looks at herself, she's reminded of me.

I think of her sweet moans, the way she'd squirm and writhe beneath me, begging for more. I'd give her more, repeatedly, until she was screaming my name. Until there was no doubt in her mind or anyone else's that she was mine.

I'm lost in a haze of obsession and lust as I stroke myself. My eyes fix on her perfect tits, and I groan as I shoot my hot cum all over the screen. It lands on her chest and face, a sticky white mess, and I smile.

“Fucking hell,” I mutter, gasping for air. I stare at the image, my seed coating it. “That’s just the beginning, baby. Just wait till I cover your entire body with my cum. Mark you as mine.”

I picture her bound to my bed, her wrists and ankles restrained, waiting for me with anticipation in her eyes. I’d savor every inch of her soft skin, mapping her body with my mouth and hands, learning every dip and curve. I’d tease her, driving her wild with desire, until she’s begging me to fill her, to brand her as my own.

And then I’d give her what she craves. I’d thrust into her, hard and deep, claiming her as my territory. I’d make her feel it, too, the depth of my obsession, the intensity of my need. I’d fuck her until she couldn’t walk and until her body was mine alone to possess. Until every part of her screamed that she was mine.

I reach for a cloth, slowly cleaning the screen, while I commit the image to memory, burning it into my brain.

Leaning back, a sense of contentment washes over me, even as my obsession grows. My eyes drift closed, Tilly’s face haunting my mind’s eye. Her laugh echoes in the darkness, sending shivers down my spine. She’s like a drug, her very essence addicting me further with each breath.

I know I should get up and move on to the next task, but I can’t bring myself to leave the comfort of my trailer. The outside world can wait. For now, I want to indulge in this all-consuming desire that has taken root in my soul. The trailer’s lonely sanctuary protects me from the chaos of reality, and I crave the safety of its confines.

The faint hum of the computer fan fills the silence, a soothing accompaniment to my racing thoughts. My hand brushes over the screen as if reaching out to touch her.

I long to trace the contours of her face, feel the softness of her skin, and breathe in the

scent of her hair. The need to be close to her is overwhelming. I'm bound to her in a way I can't explain.

"Soon," I whisper. "Soon, I'll find a way to be near you."

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TILLY

The campus bustles with activity as I walk toward my coding class, clutching my laptop close. Despite the excitement of beginning a new semester, I can't shake this unsettling sensation that has lingered since the night at the carnival.

It's silly, I know. How could anyone be watching me? The hairs on my neck prickle every time I step outside as if invisible eyes track me.

As I enter the classroom, my gaze sweeps across the sea of unfamiliar faces until it lands on one that stops me dead in my tracks. Sitting in the back row is the stranger from the carnival, who seemed to materialize out of nowhere to protect Chloe and me.

My pulse skips a beat when our eyes meet, and a jolt of recognition passes between us. The man watches me intently, his piercing stare holding me captive. Everything else disappears, and it's only us, connected by an inexplicable tether .

Snapping out of my trance, I quickly avert my gaze and shuffle to an empty seat. What are the odds of him being here in this very class? Surely it's just a coincidence. And yet, a nagging voice in the back of my mind whispers that it's no coincidence.

As the professor launches into the syllabus, I find concentrating impossible.

Who is he? And why can't I shake the feeling that he's been following me?

The professor's voice drones on, but the words fail to register as my mind drifts back to those piercing blue eyes. My eyes keep flitting toward the shadowy figure in the back row, searching for any indication that my imagination isn't playing tricks on me.

He sits motionless with his penetrating gaze fixed on me. Our eyes meet again, his stare seeming to bore into my soul. At that moment, I'm transported back to the chaos of the carnival, the flashing lights, and watching him knock that jerk out with one hit.

Shaking my head, I bring my focus back to the lecture, scribbling notes halfheartedly. But no matter how hard I try, that sense of unease refuses to ease.

I exhale a breath I didn't realize I was holding. Shoving my laptop into my bag, I glance toward the back row, only to find the seat vacant. My heart sinks as I scan the thinning crowd, but there's no sign of the stranger.

Am I going insane? I wonder as I exit the classroom.

Perhaps the stress of starting a new semester has caught up with me. Or maybe, just maybe, I'm not imagining any of this, and some ridiculously attractive man is stalking me like a psycho.

As I step out into the crisp autumn air, a shudder runs through me. I quicken my pace, desperate to escape the suffocating weight of my paranoia.

"Hey Tilly, wait up!"

I turn to see Amy, her friendly smile welcoming.

"Amy, hey! What's up?" I try to muster an air of nonchalance, but my voice wavers ever so slightly.

“I was just about to grab a bite to eat,” she says. “You look like you could use a break. Wanna join me?”

I’m grateful for the invitation. “You know what? That sounds perfect,” I reply, offering her a genuine smile. “Lead the way.”

We walk together, the comfortable silence between us providing a much-needed reprieve from the whirlwind of questions in my mind.

“So, you wanna talk about what’s got you so spooked?” Amy asks, her tone gentle yet probing.

I hesitate, unsure how to articulate my thoughts which have been bugging me since the carnival three nights ago. Shrugging my shoulders, I wave my hand. “It’s nothing. I’m just a little drained from the first week back. You know how it is.”

The lie rolls off my tongue with surprising ease, but a pang of guilt tugs at me. Amy has been my closest friend at college since our first year, always there to lend an understanding ear or a supportive shoulder. And yet, here I am, keeping her at arm’s length, shutting her out from the unease that’s been swirling within me .

But what choice do I have? How can I possibly articulate the fear that’s been gnawing at me since that bizarre encounter at the carnival? The inexplicable sense that someone is watching my every move, waiting in the shadows for the perfect moment to strike?

It’s better to keep these unsettling thoughts to myself. To voice them out loud would only cement the notion that I’m losing my grip on reality, spiraling down a rabbit hole of paranoia fueled by an overactive imagination.

Amy’s brow furrows ever so slightly. “This semester is already shaping up to be a

doozy. Maybe we should soon plan a girl's night, blow off some steam."

I smile at the prospect of a much-needed respite from the relentless onslaught of classes and assignments. "That sounds amazing. Count me in."

We lapse into a comfortable silence as we make our way across campus, the paranoia eased by the promise of quality time with my best friend. Amy has an uncanny ability to ground me, to provide a steady anchor amidst the chaos that so often threatens to engulf me.

Still, as we approach the bustling coffee shop, I can't resist taking quick looks over my shoulder, scanning the sea of faces for the mysterious stranger from the carnival. A shiver runs down my spine as my gaze lands on a figure lurking in the shadows.

Is it him? Or am I merely projecting my anxiety on some random person?

I tear my gaze away.

Get it together. Tilly. No one is following you. And the guy from the carnival being in your classroom was just a coincidence.

I'm sure there's a perfectly logical explanation for everything. And yet, as Amy and I settle into our usual booth, the nagging sense of unease won't go away.

PHOENIX

Rage boils within me as I overhear Tilly and her friend making plans for the night. A night out? In a club? With other men? The thought ignites a blazing inferno within me, consuming every rational thought.

How dare she? Doesn't she understand she belongs to me now? I've watched, studied, and claimed her in the deepest recesses of my mind. She's mine.

Blending into the shadows on this crowded campus is torture. The sea of bodies presses in on me, their mindless chatter grating on my nerves. This is exactly why I prefer the solitude of my trailer, surrounded only by the gentle hum of technology.

But she's drawn me out here like a moth to an irresistible flame. I can't tear myself away when the thought of her in another man's arms makes my blood simmer.

The earpiece crackles with her laughter, that sweet, melodic sound I've committed to memory. Hearing it now, filtered through wires and circuits, is a poor imitation. I long to experience it in person, to have her look at me with those sparkling eyes.

"We should hit that new club downtown, Pulse, tonight," her friend says, the words like a dagger twisting in my gut. "Maybe you'll finally meet a guy worth your time."

My fingers clench into fists. A guy? She needs no one but me. I'll make her see that soon enough.

Using the tracking data from her phone, I follow at a distance, careful not to draw attention. She can't know I'm here...not yet. But I'll be watching. Always watching. Waiting for my moment to strike and claim what's rightfully mine.

I slip into the coffee shop unnoticed, keeping my head down as I find a secluded table in the corner. From here, I have the perfect vantage point to observe my obsession.

Tilly settles on one side of the plush booth, tucking those endless legs beneath her as she leans over the table toward her friend. My breath catches when she tosses her hair over one shoulder, the silky strands shimmering like liquid bronze in the dim lighting.

"You'll never believe what happened at the carnival the other night," she begins.

Amy's eyes sparkle with curiosity. "Spill, girl. Don't leave me hanging!"

A pretty blush stains Tilly's cheeks as she recounts the events from that fateful evening. "This total creep started hitting on me out of nowhere. Like, seriously gross and persistent." She shudders.

"But then, out of nowhere, this crazy hot guy stepped in and knocked him out." Her eyes sparkle as she describes me—yes, me!—with those two delicious words: crazy hot.

I fight back a satisfied smirk, committing every detail of her recollection to memory. The way her lips form those syllables, the slight hitch in her breath... it's intoxicating.

"He disappeared before I could even thank him," she adds with a disappointed sigh. "But I swear, I saw him in my coding class earlier. One second, he was there, and the next..." She trails off with a confused shake of her head.

Clever girl, always so observant. A shiver of excitement races down my spine,

knowing she's thinking about me, searching for me in every crowd. Soon, she'll never have to wonder where I am again.

I smirk as Amy's eyes widen, clearly alarmed by Tilly's admission of seeing me lurking around campus. "Are you sure, Tills? It could just have been a coincidence."

Coincidence? No, my brilliant girl is so perceptive—a quality I both relish and fear when it comes to my lingering presence in her life.

Her brow furrows in that adorable way, full lips pursing as she mulls over Amy's words. "I know how it sounds, but I swear I'm not making it up. He was there, clear as day, and then just...poof. Vanished."

Soon, her subconscious obsession will consume her entirely, mirroring the all-encompassing desire that blazes through my veins.

But I'm not ready to be known, not fully. Not yet. Allowing her to unmask me, to pull back the veil and gaze upon the truth of who I am... it's a risk I can't afford. At least, not until I've secured her fully in my grasp .

The thought of her in a club, surrounded by hordes of men desperate to fuck her, makes my blood run hot. A hunting ground for the sort of mouth-breathing degenerates who would dare lay their hands on my obsession. She's too naive, too temptingly pure to fend off their advances. No, I need to be there. Watching, protecting her from the clutches of any other man.

However, since Tilly is already suspicious, blending in will be tough.

Unless...

A smile stretches my lips as a plan emerges in my mind. One of the masks from the

carnival's stock, something innocuous enough to let me move freely among the masses.

Yes, that's it. I'll slip away from the carnival, don my disguise, and become her silent sentinel. Not that anyone will miss me since I spend the majority of my time in my trailer. I will protect her from any piece of shit who would dare put his hands on my beauty. She may not realize it yet, but Tilly belongs to me.

And soon, she'll have no choice but to accept that reality.

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6

TILLY

S moothing down my tight black mini-dress, I give myself one last look in the mirror.

“You look so hot, girl!” Chloe squeals.

Amy nods. “Yeah, that dress is fire. You’re going to have all the guys drooling tonight.”

A little thrill goes through me at their words, pushing aside the lingering unease I’ve felt all week. Tonight, I will let loose and have fun with my best friends.

We grab our purses and head downstairs, hailing a cab to take us to Pulse. The city’s bright lights blur past the windows as I sip on the little bottle of vodka Amy snuck in her purse. The liquor warms my throat and helps me forget about the weird encounters at the carnival and the eerie sensation of being watched I’ve felt ever since.

We reach Pulse and pay the cab fare before turning toward the entrance.

“Tonight’s going to be so much fun!” Chloe shouts over the pounding music as we hand our IDs to the bouncer. I flash him a flirty smile, and he nods us inside, the beat of the bass vibrating through my body.

Amy grabs my hand, tugging me toward the dance floor. “Let’s dance!”

I down the rest of my vodka and let the rhythm take over, swaying my hips back and forth. Guys start gravitating toward our little circle, trying to catch my eye and grind up on me. I laugh and shrug them off, just enjoying the music and the electric atmosphere.

A pair of ice-blue eyes catch my attention from across the crowd. I blink, wondering if I imagined it. And sure enough, the eyes are gone, lost among the mass of gyrating bodies. I ignore it and grab Chloe's hand, jumping up and down to the music.

Tonight is for being free and letting go.

A tall, athletic guy with mesmerizing green eyes moves next to me on the dance floor. He flashes me a panty-dropping smile and starts moving to the beat, his hips swaying dangerously close to mine.

What the hell, why not?

I grin back and let my body sway with his. His hand grazes my hip, sending a shiver down my spine. Okay, he's working some serious magic. I lean in, ready to let this hottie kiss me when a large figure wearing a creepy skull mask steps between us.

The masked man leans down to the man's ear and whispers something. His eyes go wide with what I can only describe as terror, and he turns and bolts away, disappearing into the crowd .

"What the hell?" I spit, glaring up at the masked intruder.

He doesn't respond. Instead, he starts dancing with me, mirroring my movements. Those piercing eyes...I know those eyes.

It's him. The mysterious stranger from the carnival. The man I was sure saw in the

back of my class earlier today.

So he has been following me? There's no way this is a coincidence. Panic and confusion war inside me as his body presses against mine, his hands skimming my waist.

I should run. This is so messed up. It's clear he's been stalking me, And now he's here in a mask, scaring off guys like a psychopath.

But I can't help but be intrigued despite the alarm bells ringing in my brain. I search his eyes for any recognition or explanation, but he gives nothing away.

So I keep dancing, letting the thunderous bass drown out my thoughts. If this stranger won't talk, I'll play along for now. See where this goes.

His hands roam my body, pulling me flush against him. Our bodies move in perfect sync like we were made for this dance. His breath is hot against my neck as he leans in close.

"Let's find somewhere a little more private, sweetheart," he murmurs.

A thrill of electricity shoots through me at his words. This is so dangerous. This stranger could be a complete psycho for all I know.

But God, something is intoxicating about him. Part of me craves the delicious sense of danger that rolls off him in waves.

So, despite every rational part of my brain screaming at me to run, I give him a nod. He takes my hand, and we slip from the crowded dance floor.

The man leads me down a dimly lit hallway toward the back rooms of the club. My

heart skips a beat when he pushes open a door and ushers me into a storage room.

As soon as the door closes behind us, caging us in this small space together, I spin to face him, needing answers.

“Who are you?” I demand, trying to pour as much bravado into my voice as possible. “Why were you following me and Chloe at the carnival? And why did you scare that guy off?”

The masked figure doesn’t respond. He stares at me through the haunting skull mask, his icy eyes roaming hungrily over my body.

“Now’s not the time for questions.” His deep, gravelly voice sends a shiver down my spine.

Then he’s on me, lifting me onto a nearby workbench. I gasp, my hands gripping the edge as he parts my legs, forcing them open when I try to close them.

“I’m going to prove why you’re mine,” he growls. “Prove why you need to stay the fuck away from all other men.”

He pulls the mask up enough to free his mouth, and his lips ghost against my lace-covered pussy, sending a shockwave through me.

Then he pushes the fabric aside and devours me. His tongue swirls and flicks against my clit in a way that makes my head spin. My back arches off the table as a moan escapes my lips, loud and wanting.

He growls in response, the vibrations shooting straight to my core. His fingers dig into my thighs, holding me open as he feasts on me until I’m a panting mess.

I can't think, can't breathe. I've never been eaten out like this, as if the guy is starving and I'm his last fucking meal. It's like he's staking his claim on my body, branding me as his own with every lick and nip.

My mind is blank, and my body is on fire. I'm putty in his hands, helpless to do anything but feel. His tongue plunges inside me, and his fingers tighten on my thighs as he devours me with an intensity that matches the obsession in his eyes. I'm lost, drowning in a sea of pleasure, my body betraying any resistance I might've felt.

I belong to him in this moment, body and soul.

A scream tears from me as I climax, my walls clenching around nothing as he circles my clit with the tip of his tongue. He groans his satisfaction, lapping up every drop of my release.

Slowly, I come back to earth. I'm buzzing with the aftershocks, slumped on the table, boneless and utterly spent.

But he's not done yet.

With a rough grip, he lifts me off the table and pushes my back against it, wrapping his fingers around my throat.

"Tell me, Tilly." His voice is a low, menacing growl. "Say it. Tell me who you belong to."

Fuck. How does this stranger know my name? That's a serious red flag in itself.

"What? No—I don't even know your name!" I choke out, his fingers tightening around my throat.

“You don’t need to know that yet,” he says. “But I need to hear you say it. Admit that you’re mine and belong to me and only me.”

There’s a threat beneath his words, and the thrill of it sends a pulse between my legs. I’m breathing heavily now, my body aching for more.

My voice comes out in a hoarse whisper. “I belong to you.”

At my surrender, his lips crash into mine. His tongue pushes into my mouth, allowing me to taste myself. All while his hands move to grip my hips, pulling me closer.

I melt into him, my hands roaming over his shoulders and back. This intense, masked stranger has me under his spell, my body singing with need.

But as quickly as the kiss begins, he moves away and pulls the mask into place, hiding his mouth again.

“Wait—” I reach for him.

“Not yet, baby,” he says. “But soon. I promise.”

Then, before I can protest, he turns and strides away, leaving me alone, shocked, and aching for more.

PHOENIX

Tyson gives the supplier the names over the phone. Those idiots have no idea the shitstorm they've unleashed by crossing us. A twisted part of me wants to make them suffer.

"Let me handle this one," I say once he ends the call.

He raises an eyebrow. Normally, I keep my darker impulses concealed behind a calm facade.

But this time, I want those fools to know their lives now belong to me—a realization that will shake them to the core.

"You want to pay them a personal visit?" Tyson asks, studying me. He knows better than to underestimate the depths of my depravity.

"Oh, I have something far more delicious in mind," I state, leaning back in my gaming chair. "Why settle for a quick demise when we can drag it out and make the cowards beg for mercy before the sweet release of death. "

His eyes widen, taken aback by how much I enjoy this. But a slow, wicked grin soon mirrors my own as he nods.

"Alright, you twisted fuck," he chuckles. "Show me what delightfully sick plans

you've got brewing in that deranged mind of yours."

I step closer to Ty. "I plan to make them wish they'd never messed with us. First, we find out everything there is to know about them. Their deepest fears, their weaknesses—then we use that information to our advantage."

"A tailored torment, huh? Getting creative, aren't we?"

"Oh yes," I murmur. "It'll be a masterpiece of psychological torture."

He grins. "Go on. You've piqued my interest."

"I suggest we isolate them first and make them question their sanity. We plant hidden cameras in every corner of their homes, capturing their most private moments. It's incredible what people do when they think no one's watching."

Tyson chuckles. "And then we use it against them to expose their secrets and strip away their privacy layer by layer."

"Exactly," I purr. "We leave them vulnerable and exposed. Then, when they're at their most fragile, we strike."

A mischievous grin splits his face in two. "So we fuck with their heads, and then we fuck with their lives. Count me in."

"Leave it to me," I say, excitement pumping through my veins. "I'll fuck with their heads so bad they won't know up from down. We can consider killing them once they've been through the wringer. Make them pay for messing with us."

Tyson chuckles. "Just be sure to fill me in on the details. I want to enjoy the show, too." He pauses, a devilish smirk playing on his lips. "And if you need an extra set of

hands or anything else for your little project, don't hesitate to ask."

"Will do," I respond, already deep in the throes of planning my revenge.

As Ty leaves, my mind wanders back to Tilly. Ever since I laid eyes on her, something inside me snapped. It's like a switch flipped, and my once-ordered world has turned chaotic. I can't focus or think straight, and my usual calm demeanor is gone.

My obsession with her has only intensified since I claimed her at Pulse, tasting her sweet fucking cunt. The memory of her soft moans and the feel of her body surrendering to mine has me aching to possess her entirely.

I pace the trailer, raking a hand through my hair. I need something to distract me from this maddening desire. This fixation threatens my usually controlled nature, and I can't afford to be off my game, not when there's work to be done—work that requires my full attention and sharp mind.

I need an outlet, something to channel this restless energy into. Normally, the prospect of hacking into someone's life excites me. It gives me power and control, peering into people's secrets and manipulating them like puppets, but even that holds no appeal right now.

All I can focus on is this goddamn yearning for Tilly. It's like a fucking drug that's consuming me. My hunger for her is becoming unquenchable, and I fear my control is slipping by the fucking minute.

I open Tilly's file and sigh when I see all the images of her I've compiled there. It's extensive, but I can't resist adding more daily as I scour social media. It helps ease the relentless craving temporarily.

As I scroll through the photos, my heart thrums with a dangerous mix of lust and possession. “You’re mine, Tilly Jane Lawson,” I whisper. “Whether you know it yet or not.”

Forcing my attention back to the task, I crack my knuckles and begin the hack. In mere seconds, I’ve infiltrated the devices of the pricks who crossed us.

Their lives are now an open book, laid bare before me.

With deft keystrokes, I hijack every camera and recording device in their homes—laptops, phones, tablets, even those ridiculous smart home gadgets. One by one, the feeds flicker to life on my screens, granting me a glimpse into their most intimate moments.

A twisted sense of power surges through me as I witness their mundane existences, oblivious to the violation of their privacy.

I activate the microphones on their cell phones, allowing me to eavesdrop on their conversations no matter where they go. Every whispered secret, every hushed confession—all of it is mine to exploit.

As the final camera feed comes online, I lean back in my chair, savoring the win. They are puppets now, their strings firmly in my grasp.

Despite the adrenaline rush, my thoughts are immediately pulled back to Tilly. Her radiant smile and infectious laughter haunt me. Switching back to her file, I scroll through her images on my computer, devouring every captured moment of her life hungrily like a starving man.

I’ve got a week left in this town before we move on.

The idea of losing her is unbearable. I need her, crave her, in a way that borders on pure fucking insanity. An obsession that threatens to unravel the very fabric of my being.

As I scroll through the images, a plan begins to take shape—a deliciously twisted scheme to ensure that Tilly becomes truly, irrevocably mine. A grin tugs at my lips, and my mind already spins with the intricate details.

One way or another, I will claim her. She will belong to me, mind, body, and soul, even if I have to shatter her world to make it so. Tilly Jane Lawson will be the ultimate prize in my twisted game of control.

And those who dare to stand in my way will soon learn a lesson etched in blood—a fate worse than death itself.

8

TILLY

A shudder runs through me as I step onto the college campus. My heart pounds in my chest, and my palms sweat. I feel so exposed out here in the open after what happened at the club Friday night.

Ever since that encounter with the masked man, I've been a prisoner in my apartment. Too afraid to leave, too shaken to face the world. But I can't skip classes without falling behind.

I tug my jacket tighter around myself and hurry across the quad, eyes darting at every shadow, every movement in my peripheral vision. Paranoia claws at my mind. Is that figure watching me from behind those trees? Did that bush rustle?

I clutch the strap of my backpack like a lifeline, quickening my pace.

Deep breaths, Tilly. There's no one following you.

With my head down, I walk into the computer science building and up to the coding lab. The familiar hum of machines and the tap of keys on keyboards instantly calm my anxiety. This is my element and where I'm in control, where the world makes sense in lines of code.

I fire up my workstation and lose myself in the logic and the neat patterns. But my mind keeps flashing back to the sight of that man in the skull mask at Pulse and the

sound of my cries as he ate my pussy like no man ever has.

God, he was a fucking master with his tongue, and I've never come so hard or fast before. Granted, I'm not exactly experienced. I've had one high school boyfriend I slept with and only one other guy during my first year of college.

Amy's text flashes across my cell phone screen, a welcome distraction.

Hey girl, are you free for an early lunch at the usual spot?

I quickly type back.

Yeah, that sounds perfect. See you there in 20?

Packing up my stuff, I push aside the lingering unease from earlier.

The crisp autumn air bites at my cheeks as I step outside, leaves crunching underfoot. I tug my jacket tighter and walk across campus to the cozy coffee shop off Greek Row. Our usual place.

Pushing through the door, the rich aroma of freshly brewed coffee and freshly baked muffins envelops me. Amy waves from our usual booth in the back corner, a bright smile lighting up her face .

"There's my girl!" She hops up to give me a quick hug. "You could use a pick-me-up after that brutal coding lab."

I roll my eyes but can't help grinning at her infectious energy. "You know me too well. Let's get some caffeine and sugar in me, stat."

After ordering my mocha, her frappe, and a couple of muffins, we settle into our

usual booth. “So, how was your weekend after our wild night out?”

My stomach twists into knots at the mention of our night out. The night when I let a stranger go down on me and was even expecting more until he just walked off, leaving me stunned.

I try to push it from my mind. “Oh, you know, just chilled at home and relaxed. Needed to recover from all that dancing and drinking.”

Amy snorts, rolling her eyes. “Uh huh, sure. You’re such a boring homebody sometimes, Tills.”

If only she knew the truth—I’ve been practically locked in my apartment since Friday night when I returned, too terrified to leave. How could I explain the dark, twisted events at the club without her thinking I was completely unhinged for allowing it to happen?

The best thing is to keep it to myself. It’s what I’m best at. From this moment on, I’ll bury the memory of that man kneeling between my thighs in a skull mask, those cold ice-blue eyes piercing into my soul as he...

I shudder involuntarily. The phantom feeling of his wicked tongue devouring me sends a tremor down my spine.

Get it together, Tilly. Don’t let your mind go there again .

“Earth to Tilly!” Amy’s amused voice breaks through my spiraling thoughts. “You zoned out there for a second. Everything okay?”

Forcing a bright smile, I nod. “Yeah, yeah, sorry! Just got distracted thinking about this coding project I’m working on.”The lie falls easily from my lips. I’ve always

been a skilled bullshitter when needed.

“Ugh, you’re such a nerd,” Amy teases. She launches into a dramatic retelling of her wild weekend antics, including a one-night stand with some jock from our college after they hooked up at Pulse.

I let her ramblings wash over me, trying to silence the dark thoughts in my mind.

For now, I’m safe here in the light of day, surrounded by the normal bustle of the coffee shop. But I’m sure that mysterious man will find a way to claim me as his again. After all, he all but promised as much.

Not yet, baby. But soon. I promise.

He made it clear he wants me to stay away from all other men.

I’m going to prove why you belong to me. Why you need to stay the fuck away from any other men.

God. Just thinking about the way he growled those words gets me wet. I’m so fucked up. The guy is an unhinged stalker.

“You know I’m a nerd at heart,” I laugh, trying to keep up the playful tone. “Coding is my first love. What can I say?”

Amy rolls her eyes and takes a sip of her latte. “Well, try not to get too lost in your little computer world, missy. You’re missing out on all the fun! Like, have I told you about my new neighbor yet? He’s this super hot med student with the most amazing abs?—”

As Amy starts on another animated story about her latest romantic prospect, my eyes

drift to the window, scanning the busy sidewalk outside. Students hurry to and fro, heads down, lost in their worlds.

Amidst the bustling crowd, a flash of something catches my eye. My heart skips a beat as I spot a familiar figure. Tall, muscular build, dark hair—it's him. The masked man from the club.

He pauses, icy blue eyes locked on me through the coffee shop window. The world seems to hold its breath as our gazes meet. I feel the weight of his intense stare, his unblinking focus.

I can't look away. Every nerve in my body is on fire. It's like he's peering straight into my soul with those piercing eyes, seeing all my darkest desires.

Suddenly, he turns and melts into the crowd, disappearing from view. My heart pounds wildly, and I feel a strange mix of relief and disappointment.

"Tilly? Are you even listening to me?" Amy's voice snaps me back to reality.

"Huh? Oh, sorry, my mind wandered for a second," I stammer. "What were you saying about your new neighbor?"

Amy looks frustrated. "I said, he's got this gorgeous tattoo on his bicep, like a Japanese dragon or something. Super hot. "

I nod, feigning interest as I steal another glance out the window, searching for any sign of him. Was it him?

"Tilly Jane Lawson, are you blushing?" Amy teases, her eyes sparkling with mischief. "Are you searching for this mystery man of yours?"

I feel my cheeks burning and stammer, “W-what? No, of course not! I just thought I saw someone I met at Pulse the other night.”

Amy’s eyebrows shoot up. “Ooh, la la! A guy from Pulse, huh? Now I’m intrigued. Do tell all!”

I sip my coffee, stalling for time as my mind races. How can I explain this pull toward a man I know nothing about? A man who is quite clearly dangerously obsessed with me?

Before I can answer, my phone buzzes with a text. My heart lurches as I don’t recognize the number.

I stare at my phone screen, that unknown number glaring back at me. A wave of unease washes over me as I open the text.

I saw the way you were looking at me, sweetheart.

I read the words over and over. It’s him. How did he get my number? A wave of nausea washes over me as another message pings through.

Don’t bother trying to run or hide. We both know you’re mine now. The way you came so beautifully on my tongue at Pulse proved it.

I squeeze my eyes shut, fighting back the memories that try to resurface. The feeling of being held by him while he devoured me. The sinful pleasure that rocked through my body.

“Tilly, what is it?” Amy asks, snapping my attention back to her.

“Oh, nothing, just my coding lab partner asking for notes,” I lie, sipping my coffee.

Amy's brow furrows. "So, this guy? What happened?"

I shake my head. "Nothing, we just danced for a bit, that's all. Nothing to tell, really," I lie.

My phone buzzes in my lap again, and I look down.

You came so hard for me, didn't you, baby? I could feel how wet you were, how much you loved my tongue on you.

Arousal stirs low in my belly, my cheeks burning with shame. How can this stranger's words affect me this way? I'm disgusting. Broken.

Bet you're dripping for me right now just thinking about it. Don't worry, I'll be giving you what you need soon enough.

I release a shaky breath, glancing across the table at Amy, who is watching me.

"Everything okay?" Amy asks. "You look like you've seen a ghost, Tills."

If only she knew the thoughts swirling in my mind right now. The dark fantasies this stranger has awoken. I quickly smile, shoving my phone back into my pocket. "Y-Yeah, I'm good! Just got a big project to plan, no biggie. "

She arches an eyebrow but doesn't push further. I tune back into her ramblings, trying to focus on anything other than the heat pulsing between my thighs.

Another buzz from my pocket makes me jump. I discreetly glance at the new message, my face flushing.

I can't wait to bury my cock deep inside you. To make you scream and beg for more

as I pound you into the mattress. You're going to take every thick inch of me like the desperate little slut you are.

Oh god. I squeeze my thighs together as a fresh gush of arousal dampens my panties. This is so wrong, so messed up. But the vivid images his words conjure make me ache with need.

I take another sip of my coffee, trying to keep my expression neutral as another text comes through.

You know you want this as badly as I do. Your cunt is practically throbbing at the thought of me claiming you.

A whimper escapes my lips before I can stop it. Amy breaks off mid-sentence, giving me a strange look.

"Tilly? You're acting weird. What's going on?"

"N-Nothing!" I stammer, my face flaming hot. "Just a, uh, cramp. You know how it is."

She gives me a sympathetic look. "Oh shit yeah, that explains why you're off. Do you want an aspirin?" She digs into her purse.

I shake my head. "Already took one, don't worry about it." My gaze drifts back to my phone screen when another text filters in, making my heart pound.

I'm going to ruin you for any other man. Make you my little fucktoy to use however I please. You're mine, baby.

The darkness, the raw possession in his words—it terrifies me. Even so, I can't deny

the twisted craving building inside me. Despite how fucked up it is that this guy is invading my privacy and stalking me, I want him.

Trembling, I stuff my phone back in my pocket, my thighs clenched.

Get a grip, Tilly. You can't let this psycho get to you.

But as another message buzzes against my leg, I know it's too late. This stranger has awakened something within me. A dark need I can't ignore, no matter how much I try to fight it.

PHOENIX

My eyes are fixed on the coffee shop security feeds on my cell phone as I stand in the side alley. Tilly's hair falls around her face in a way that frames her beauty while she laughs with her friend. I'm focused on how her lips move, her eyes light up, and her chest rises and falls with each breath.

My thumb hovers over the screen as I'm about to craft another filthy message, telling her exactly what I plan to do to her. My cock twitches in my hand as I imagine her blushing, her breath quickening as she reads my words.

I lean against the wall, my free hand bracing myself as I stroke my length. My breath quickens, and I let out a quiet groan, my eyes fluttering closed as I indulge in the fantasy of finally being inside her. But I won't finish out here like some desperate fool. With a growl of frustration, I force my achingly hard cock back into my pants and head toward the coffee shop entrance.

I can't fucking stand it anymore.

Pushing open the door, the bell jingles, announcing my arrival. The scent of coffee fills my nostrils, but I can only focus on her. Tilly looks up, locking gazes with me. For a moment, we're suspended in time. Then, with a slight smirk, I walk past her table toward the restroom at the back, hoping she'll follow me.

I feel her eyes on me as I head past her, and sure enough, seconds later, the door

creaks open. I don't turn around, but I know it's Tilly. I can sense her standing there, unsure what to do or say.

"Why are you following me?" Her voice trembles.

I turn, taking in the sight of her—those wide hazel eyes, the flush on her cheeks. She looks like a doe caught in headlights, unsure whether to run or stay.

"Get on your knees." I don't respond to her question but issue a command. "Now." I step closer, invading her personal space.

Tilly blinks, looking shocked. But there's something else in her expression, too—a spark of desire. I want to see if she'll submit to me willingly.

"I..." She bites her lip, and I know she's fighting herself. I can see the war waging in her pretty hazel eyes.

"Do it," I growl, grabbing her by the back of the neck and pulling her closer. "Unless you want me to bend you over and take what's mine right here."

Her breath hitches, and she lets out a soft whimper. Then, slowly, she sinks to her knees, holding my gaze.

The power I feel is intoxicating. Tilly's mine, all fucking mine, and she knows it. I could take her right now, bend her over this sink and fuck her until she screams my name for the whole fucking coffee shop to hear. But I want to savor this, draw out the tension. Leaning down, I whisper, "That's a good girl. Now, let's see how well you can follow instructions."

Slowly, I undo my belt, the metal clasp echoing in the small room. With a swift motion, I release my cock, the constriction of my pants finally giving way to sweet

freedom.

Her eyes widen, taking in the length of me, and her tongue darts out to wet her lips. Without warning, I step closer, gripping her hair and tilting her head back. I drag my cock over her lips, smearing my precum across them, marking her. She doesn't resist, opening her mouth.

I let out a low groan and angle her head further, using her hair to guide her. Her eyes dilate, and I can almost see the moment her arousal spikes and desire wins out over any remaining hesitation.

"Suck it," I command. I don't have to tell my girl twice. With a desperate whimper, she takes me into her mouth. I tighten my grip on her hair, guiding her movements.

Fuck. Goddamnit.

I've been imagining this since the moment I set eyes on her.

She sucks eagerly, her tongue swirling around the head. I thrust my hips, feeling her relax her throat to take me deep.

God, she's good at this.

I let her work, a flurry of curses escaping my lips as she bobs her head, taking me deeper each time. My eyes roll back, the sensation overwhelming as she hollows her cheeks and sucks hard.

But I want more. I want her throat constricting around my cock.

"Breathe through your nose, baby," I demand. Then, with a growl, I start to thrust into her throat. I can't help but growl as I look at her and see the mixture of shock and

pleasure in her eyes as she takes it.

Her eyes flick to mine, a silent plea in their depths, but I snarl, tightening my grip on her hair. I thrust harder, my hips slamming into her face. She makes a strange, muffled noise, and I realize she's trying to whimper, to vocalize. But I won't let her; I want to own every sound that escapes that beautiful mouth.

Her hands come up to my thighs, her nails digging into my skin as she struggles to keep up with my relentless pace. Then, her right hand slips between her thighs, and I see her fingers dip beneath her skirt to touch herself. That's my good fucking girl; she's touching herself as she sucks me off. My dick swells even more at the sight, and I feel my balls tighten.

I lean back, pulling my cock from her mouth with a wet pop. She whimpers, her lips red and swollen, and a string of saliva connects her mouth to my cock. I step back, my chest heaving as I take in the view of her on her knees, her fingers still working her clit.

Her eyes shine with shame and desire as she meets my gaze.

"That's right, baby," I encourage. "Come for me. Let me see you fall apart." I step forward again, my cock twitching with anticipation. "But remember, you're pussy is mine. Every fucking orgasm from this moment on belongs to me."

With those words, I offer my cock to her again. Her lips fall open, and she takes me in once more, hungry for my cum.

The tightness of her throat sends me spiraling toward the edge, and I thrust harder. Her gagging turns me on even more, and I grip her hair, holding her in place as I fuck her face.

With her free hand, she tugs at my belt, trying to pull me closer, wanting me fucking deeper. She's amazing. I can feel her throat relaxing around me. I growl. This gorgeous girl is on her knees for me, taking what I give her and more.

"That's it, take it," I grunt, and she whimpers in response, her throat vibrating around my length. I know she's close.

Then, suddenly, she tenses, her body shaking as she orgasms with my cock deep in her throat. It's too much for me to bear, and with a roar, I explode, my release flooding her mouth. I keep thrusting, my hips stuttering as I empty myself into her throat.

"Swallow it," I demand, my voice harsh. "Every. Fucking. Drop." I hold her hair tightly, forcing her to keep her mouth wrapped around me. "Good girl," I praise when she obeys, my cum slipping down her throat.

As our breathing slows, we remain connected, her mouth still wrapped around my dick. I gently stroke my fingers through her brown hair, contrasting to my previous roughness. I want to savor this connection born of raw, intense fucking lust.

"Fuck," I breathe, pulling free from her lips with a slick sound. I lean down, pressing a soft kiss to her lips. "That was..." Words fail me as I try to process how fucking good that was. It surpassed every goddamn fantasy.

Her eyes are glazed with desire and something else. It's almost like wonder, but I can't quite decipher it. She searches my face, looking for answers or perhaps trying to make sense of all this.

Standing here with her, I feel a connection, something beyond the raw physical need that just exploded between us. It's disconcerting, especially given my usual detached nature. But before I can dissect it further, she surprises me with a soft smile and a hint

of shyness in her eyes.

The moment stretches between us, tense with silence. I want to step back, retreating into the familiar shadows of my trailer, where I can observe and analyze from a safe distance. But instead, I find myself reaching out, brushing a stray lock of hair away from her cheek.

She flinches at my touch, and the spell is broken. Reality comes crashing down as she rises to her feet, her eyes darting nervously around the restroom as if only just aware of where she is.

“I should go,” she mumbles, biting her lip. I wonder if she’ll say something more, but instead, she turns and hurries out of the restroom, leaving me alone with my confusing mix of emotions.

You can run, but there’s nowhere to hide, sweetheart.

PHOENIX

My fingers dance across the keyboard as I access the surveillance feeds. The two men who dared to cross us are putty in my hands. Their lives are now an open book, every sordid detail and dirty secret laid bare before my eyes.

I could see the fear etched onto their faces, their expressions contorting with each new threat they received from me. It was almost too easy, like plucking ripe fruit from a low-hanging branch.

“They’re so rattled that they’re hiding out in their lockup,” I murmur, glancing at Ty. “The digital breadcrumbs I’ve left have them questioning every move they make.”

He nods, his eyes fixed on the flickering screens. “Nicely done,” he says. “I think it’s time we pay them a little visit, don’t you?”

A smirk twists my lips. “I couldn’t agree more.” We head out of my trailer toward Tyson’s Mustang, and I enter the address into the GPS while he brings the engine rumbling to life. My fingers drum against the console as we tear through the night, leaving the carnival’s lights in our rearview mirror.

The lockup looms ahead, a dilapidated building on the outskirts of town. Ty kills the headlights as we pull in, shadows enveloping us like a cloak.

“You’re on,” he mutters, his eyes glinting with anticipation.

I smirk, cracking my knuckles as I exit the car. With a few deft keystrokes on my tablet, the security system blinks offline—child’s play. The lock disengages with a heavy clunk, granting us entry.

Inside, the stench of stale sweat and alcohol hangs thick in the air. The two lowlifes cower in the corner, their eyes widening when we enter the dim light.

I level my gaze at the two sniveling worms huddled in the corner, my lip curling in disdain. Ty looms behind me, a silent but deadly force.

“Well, well,” I drawl, savoring the fear on their faces. “Looks like you two made the rookie mistake of stealing from the wrong people.”

I slide my hand into my jacket, curling my fingers around the cool metal of my gun, and draw it out fluidly, aiming the barrel squarely at the one on the left.

“You see when you cross us, there are consequences.” I punctuate the last word by cocking the hammer back with my thumb.

Beside me, Ty mirrors my stance, his weapon trained on the one on the right. The steel glints under the dim lights .

The shorter man on the right whimpers, his hands raised in a pitiful attempt at surrender. “We didn’t know, man. It was just a job, that’s all!”

I snort derisively. “Just a job? You idiots had no clue who you messed with.” I take a step forward, the gun steady. “But don’t worry, you’re about to get a crash course in exactly why you don’t fuck with Tyson’s carnival.”

The fear dancing in their eyes excites me. My boot connects with the shorter man’s gut, sending him to the floor. I smirk as I pull him upright by his hair, the action

causing him to cry out in pain.

Reaching for the hooked chains dangling from the rafters, I relish the cold, hard metal between my fingers. I swing the chains in a wide arc, the steel glinting in the dim light, before burying them deep in his flesh. The man howls, a piercing sound that echoes off the damp walls. I ignore his desperate pleas, yanking the chains with a savage strength, tearing through muscle and sinew.

Blood rains down, warm and sticky, drenching the concrete as the man's screams pierce the air. With a final, brutal heave, I hoist him up, leaving him suspended by the hooks in his chest, writhing in agony.

I turn to the other man, his eyes wide with terror. Approaching with measured steps, I produce a knife, the blade glinting wickedly. I drive it through his palm and pull him toward a wooden table, nailing him to it ruthlessly. His cries join the chorus of his friend's, a gruesome symphony.

The blade slashes deep, cleaving flesh and bone, the sound of ripping fabric and shredded skin filling the room. With a violent twist, I tear through the other hand, pinning him to the table, a living martyr. Blood pumps from his ruined hands, pooling on the surface.

The look of horror on their faces fuels the fire in my veins. I want them to know true fear, to feel the weight of their transgressions. No mercy. No escape. Their suffering is my art.

My breath comes in ragged gasps, the metallic scent of blood heightening my senses. I stand amidst the carnage, my body thrumming with adrenaline. I let out a savage laugh, the echoes mingling with the dying echoes of their screams.

I glance at Ty, his face lit with savage approval. Together, we stand, the architects of

their pain.

The men's feeble struggles begin to fade, their eyes glassy, resigned to their fate.

This is but a taste of the havoc I can wreak. A promise of the chaos I'll unleash if anyone dares to cross us again. I turn to Ty, my eyes gleaming with manic delight. "Now that," I breathe, "was satisfying."

Ty grins, his eyes wild. "They got off easy if you ask me. But the real fun's just getting started." His deep voice rumbles through the lockup.

The two men are limp, their eyes rolling back as they slip into unconsciousness. I chuckle, my voice taking on a dark edge. "Guess we wore them out. At least they got a front-row seat to the show now."

"The show?" Ty's eyebrows shoot up. "Oh, but they're going to be the main event. But first..." He strides forward, the hook in his hand glinting as he steps closer.

Ty's eyes glint with a cruel light as he buries the hook deep into the shoulder of one of the men, eliciting a weak groan. He leans close, his lips curling into a sinister smile. "Just a little taste," he purrs. "A preview of the agony that's coming their way."

I can't help but admire his finesse.

"The game's afoot." I chuckle, reaching for my tablet. "Time to crank up the heat. Let's give them a little wake-up call."

With a few swift taps, I access their devices, unleashing a torrent of messages from their accounts. No one is spared the barrage of disturbing content: family, friends, colleagues.

Ty chuckles, his eyes shining with twisted amusement. “I do love a good old-fashioned digital lynching. Leave it to you to make their lives a living hell from the comfort of your trailer.”

“Hey, when it comes to torment, I deliver. It’s the Phoenix special.” I smirk. “But you? You’re the master of the grand finale.”

He straightens. “We make a damn good team. But, the grande finale will have to wait.”

I glance at the men, their battered, bloodied bodies, and smile. “Agreed. Now, let’s get back to the carnival.”

Ty claps me on the shoulder, his grip firm. “Absolutely. We’ll let them stew in their juices for a while.”

The dark, unspoken bond between us fuels my steps as we exit the lockup.

11

TILLY

Shame overwhelms me as I replay the coffee shop incident from earlier. How could I have given in so easily? The mystery man has a magnetic pull on me, and I can't stop thinking about him. It's not just his handsome looks or the air of danger that surrounds him; there's something more—an intense connection that I can't explain.

I try to distract myself by delving into my coding projects, but my mind always wanders back to him. The way he dominated me, the sharp edge to his voice, the way he made me feel so many conflicting emotions—excited, terrified, and undeniably aroused. I feel a flush of heat between my thighs at the memory of servicing him, and I shift uncomfortably in my seat.

My phone buzzes, breaking the silence of my room. It's him. How the hell did he even get my number in the first place? I stare at the screen, my heart racing as I read his text.

You know you wanted it, Tilly. Admit it. You've been yearning for my cock in that pretty little mouth.

I'm battling my conflicting desires. He's right. I want to surrender to him, to explore these dark fantasies that ignite a fire within me. But it's insane. He's a literal stalker, showing up everywhere I go, and I don't even know his name!

Then I remember the explicit texts he sent before the café encounter, teasing me,

priming me. I was so wet, so ready for him. I wanted him to take me there and then. And now, he's invading my thoughts again, making me question my sanity.

The phone buzzes again.

You can't deny what's between us. Embrace it. Surrender to me. I'll show you pleasures beyond your wildest dreams. I'll dominate every part of you.

I feel my resistance wavering as my fingers hover over the keyboard, ready to respond. Part of me wants to tell him off, to assert my independence and cut him out of my life. But another part, a hidden, darker part, yearns to explore this twisted path. I shut my laptop with a snap, unable to focus. The mystery man has infiltrated my mind, and I'm unsure I want him to leave.

Stop contacting me.

I text. But even as the words appear on the screen, I know they're half-hearted at best. I don't know if I want him to stop, and I fear he knows it.

Why? Are you scared to admit what you want?

I sigh, my resolve weakening. I should block his number, report him, and do anything to get this psycho out of my life, but something holds me back. I can't bring myself to do it.

You're obsessing over me.

I text back. I know I'm playing with fire, but I can't resist the thrill of this dangerous game.

You've got no idea how much I'm obsessing. I want to consume you, brand you as

mine. I want to be under your skin, in your head, and in your heart.

I shouldn't encourage him. I know that. But something about his confidence is so damn sexy.

Why me? Why are you so fixated on me?

I tap my foot, waiting for this psycho's response. He's insane and I shouldn't be indulging him.

Because you're special, you shine brighter than anyone I've known. I saw you at the carnival, and I couldn't look away. You're like a flame, captivating and untouchable, and I'm drawn to you.

My heart flutters at his words. No one has ever described me like that. I feel an odd satisfaction that I've captured his attention over all the other girls there.

Please, leave me alone. This is ridiculous. I don't even know you.

You will, Tilly. Soon, you'll know every part of me.

Biting my lip, I struggle to find a response. I want to give in, to let him consume me, but there's this nagging voice of reason that tells me it's a bad idea.

I focus on my coding, losing myself in the familiar world of computer language to escape the chaos in my mind. But as soon as my fingers touch the keyboard, a video starts playing. I recognize the mystery man's eyes immediately peering through the holes of his skull mask. He's stroking his cock slowly, his eyes intense behind the mask. He's hacked my computer. How is that even possible? I have robust security, yet here he is, invading my privacy again.

The video continues, and I can't tear my eyes away. Wetness pools between my thighs when he groans, the sound filling the room. His intense gaze pierces through the screen as if he can see me. The sane thing would be to shut it down and report his ass for this, but something holds me back. My body responds to his slow, deliberate strokes.

Carrying my laptop, I head for my bedroom. I need to do something about this overwhelming need. Once inside, I climb onto the bed and grab my dildo out of the nightstand. I shimmy my thong off and then spread my legs, hiking up my skirt. And I whimper when I slide the toy inside me, watching the video play.

"That's it, Tilly," he says.

I pause, my eyes widening. A live feed? Is he watching me through my camera?

"Imagine it's my cock, baby. Pretend it's me filling you."

Shock reverberates through me, and I snap my legs shut, unable to process what's happening. On the screen, he smiles intensely.

"No," I whisper, but my voice trembles.

I should be appalled, disgusted even. I should snap the lid on my laptop shut and call the cops. Instead, I'm intrigued, my body reacting in ways I don't fully comprehend.

"Open your legs for me," he commands. "Let me watch you fuck yourself. Show me how good it looks when you have a cock inside that tight little pussy."

I hesitate, battling my desires. My heart is hammering so hard, and my pussy is soaking wet. I want to give him what he wants, but it's so wrong that this guy is stalking me and hacking into my laptop like a deranged psycho.

“Imagine it’s my dick, baby,” he coaxes. “I want to slide inside you, feel your tightness around me. Open yourself for me.”

Taking a shaky breath, I feel my resistance crumble under the weight of my desire. Slowly, I part my legs, my eyes never leaving the screen. He leans closer, fixing his gaze on me.

“Just like that,” he murmurs. “Show me, Tilly. Let me see that pretty little cunt getting fucked. I want to imagine it’s me buried deep inside you.”

I slide the toy in and out tentatively. I can’t believe I’m doing this, but the thought of pleasing him excites me.

“Mmm, you’re so beautiful like this,” he says, his gaze intense. “Keep going, baby. Fuck yourself for me.”

I moan, closing my eyes as the sensations wash over me. I feel naked, defenseless, and incredibly aroused. My motions become more urgent, matching the rhythm of him stroking his cock.

“I can’t wait to taste you again, baby,” he growls. “To lick you clean, to make you come on my tongue.”

Hearing those words breaks something inside me, and my walls clench around the toy. “Oh God,” I whisper, my release washing over me so damn hard that it feels like my mind short circuits. On the screen, he roars, his eyes fixed on me as he comes too, his hand movements becoming erratic.

Panting fills the air while we both catch our breath. With a slight smile, he breaks the silence, “Soon, Tilly. Soon, I’ll be inside you for real.”

With those words, he ends the feed, and I'm left staring at a blank screen, my body still humming with pleasure but my mind spinning with questions.

12

PHOENIX

I follow Ty into the lockup, apprehension mixing with anticipation. The smell of blood and fear hangs heavy in the air. This is the part I look forward to.

The men we left are barely alive, their blood painting the concrete floor. One is still suspended from the ceiling, his body limp, face bruised and swollen. The other is bent over the table. His back bowed, hands pierced by knives that pin him in place. They look pathetic and defeated.

“Let’s wake them up,” Ty suggests.

I grab the electro-shock device, the metal prongs glinting in the dim light. With a click, the device sparks to life, and I touch the prongs to the hanging man’s neck, delivering a jolt of electricity. His body spasms, eyes flying open, a guttural moan escaping his lips. We do the same to the other man, returning him to consciousness.

The men whimper, their fear palpable.

Ty moves closer. “You boys caused a lot of trouble. Now it’s time for the grand finale.”

I step forward, my gaze fixed on the man hanging from the ceiling. With a sadistic smile, I loosen the chains, relishing the way he whimpers as I free him.

He falls to the floor, kneeling before me like a penitent sinner. I place a hand on his head, pushing him down further, and say, “You’re going to wish you were dead by the time we’re done.”

The panic in their eyes is almost tangible. They try to squirm away, but their efforts are futile. Ty and I, we’re their masters now.

“Any last words before we et this party started?” I ask, my voice calm.

“Please, man, have mercy,” he begs.

With a cruel laugh, Ty moves toward the table.

I watch with a detached sense of pleasure as Ty moves with surgical precision, carving into their flesh with a blade. Their screams pierce the air, turning into bloody gurgles as the life slowly drains from them. It’s a symphony of agony, and I want to savor every moment.

One of the men, the one still pinned to the table, is still conscious, his eyes wide with terror as he stares at us.

The other man is limp, his eyes closed, breath rattling in his chest. Ty approaches him, a devilish smile on his face, and slices his throat, ending his misery.

I step forward, my heart pounding with anticipation. I want this moment to last forever. I take my time, drawing out the fear, relishing his desperation. With a swift motion, I end his life, silencing his screams.

We stand there, catching our breath. The acrid smell of blood fills the room .

“Let’s get rid of the evidence,” Ty says, breaking the silence.

Together, we wrap the bodies in bags, our movements efficient and practiced. We wipe down surfaces, leaving no trace of what transpired here. And then, we douse it in gasoline, the liquid pooling on the bloodstained floor.

Ty hands me a lighter, his eyes cold. With a flick of my wrist, I ignite the fuel, and the room erupts in flames, the fire consuming the evidence of our dark deeds.

We step back, watching as the fire devours the lockup, taking with it our secrets. The night swallows us as we walk away, our footsteps echoing on the pavement, the blaze lighting the way to our next destination.

The silence between us is heavy as we drive back to the carnival, the weight of our actions hanging over us like a storm cloud. But we both know this was necessary. And there will be more nights like this to come, more screams, and more blood. It's the price we pay for our empire.

After washing the evidence of my afternoon activities away, I stand in the middle of the fairground. The carnival's neon lights glow against the twilight sky as I pace restlessly, awaiting Tilly's arrival. My heart thunders in my chest.

I catch a glimpse of her approaching figure, and my breath hitches. She's here, just as I demanded.

As she draws nearer, I study her every movement, committing each detail to memory. The way her hair brown hair cascades over her shoulders, the slight curve of her lips, the sparkle in her hazel eyes—it's all mesmerizing.

"Hey," she greets me.

I nod in acknowledgment, struggling to find the words. In her presence, I'm rendered speechless.

“I’m here, as you requested,” she says.

“Shall we?” I gesture toward the carnival.

“Are you going to tell me your name?” she demands.

I smirk and lean toward her. “Why? Do you plan on screaming it all night long, sweetheart?”

I let out a low chuckle at Tilly’s embarrassed silence. How her cheeks flush and her gaze darts away adds to her allure.

“The name’s Phoenix,” I reveal, leaning in close enough for her to feel the warmth of my breath on her skin.

Her lips open slightly as she processes the information. “Phoenix...” she whispers.

Hearing my name fall from those luscious lips drives me fucking wild. The way it rolls off her tongue sends shivers racing down my spine.

Fuck. I ache to possess her fully—mind, body, and soul—to claim her as mine in every sense of the word. To brand her with my name, my essence, until she belongs to me and me alone.

Forcing myself to maintain composure, I trace the curve of her jaw with my fingertips. “That’s right. Phoenix. The name you’ll be crying out all night long.”

Her eyes widen, equal parts intrigued and apprehensive by my bold proclamation. But I can see the flicker of longing in those mesmerizing depths. They hold a silent plea for me to push her boundaries and awaken the primal desires that are simmering beneath the surface.

With a smirk, I lean in until our lips are a mere breath apart. “Say it again,” I demand.

“Phoenix...” she breathes, her voice laced with newfound boldness.

Before I can respond, she closes the distance between us, pressing her body against mine. The unexpected boldness of her action sends a jolt of lust right to my fucking dick.

“Phoenix,” she repeats.

A low growl rumbles in my throat as I yank her flush against me, claiming her mouth. She gasps, her body melting into mine as our lips move in a duel for dominance. My tongue plunders the depths of her mouth, tasting the intoxicating essence that is uniquely her.

One hand tangles in her hair, angling her head to deepen the kiss, while the other roams the luscious curves of her body. She whimpers against my lips, sending white-hot need through my veins.

Reluctantly, I break the kiss, both of us panting heavily. Tilly’s eyes are glazed with a haze of desire.

“Fuck, you’re driving me crazy, sweetheart,” I rasp, trailing scorching kisses along the slender column of her throat.

She shivers beneath my touch, her fingers digging into my shoulders as I nip at her racing pulse point. “Phoenix...”

“I can think of a better way to spend our time than standing around here,” I murmur against the sensitive hollow beneath her ear.

Pulling back, I brush a strand of hair from her flushed face, my thumb tracing the curve of her kiss-swollen lips. “How about we go for a ride on the Ferris wheel?”

I guide Tilly onto the Ferris wheel, my hand at the small of her back, reveling in how her eyes sparkle under the glowing lights of the carnival. As we settle into our seats, I pull her close, my hand sliding possessively onto her thigh.

The wheel begins to turn, lifting us into the night sky. I hold Tilly tighter, my hand gently stroking her soft skin. Her eyes flutter closed, a soft sigh escaping her lips.

I lean in, my lips brushing her ear. “Like that, do you, sweetheart?” I murmur, my thumb grazing the sensitive skin of her inner thigh.

She nods slightly, her breath quickening. “Mmm-hmm,” she replies.

My hand continues its lazy path up her thigh, my fingers inching dangerously higher.

Tilly moans, her body arching subtly toward me. “Phoenix,” she breathes, her hands clutching at my shoulders.

I chuckle low in my throat, the sound vibrating through her. “What’s wrong, Tilly? Don’t you like it?”

“I—yes,” she stammers, her cheeks flushing. “It’s just?—”

“Just what?” I nudge her chin with my fingers, forcing her to meet my gaze. “Tell me what you want.”

Her eyes search mine for a moment before she drops her gaze, a delicate pink tingeing her cheeks. “I want—” She hesitates.

I stroke her thigh again, a silent encouragement for her to voice her desires. “Tell me, Tilly,” I coax, my lips brushing her ear. “I’ll give you whatever you want.”

She takes a shaky breath, her eyes fluttering shut. “I want you to touch me,” she confesses. “Please.”

My heart pounds in my chest as my thumb grazes the satin fabric of her panties.

I lean in, my lips hovering over hers. “As you wish, baby,” I whisper, capturing her mouth in a kiss.

I shift closer, savoring the warmth of her body against mine. With one hand, I caress her cheek, my thumb gently tracing the outline of her lips. The other hand slips beneath the hem of her skirt, slowly, deliberately, my fingertips teasing the sensitive skin of her inner thigh.

Her breath hitches as my fingers dance closer to her core. I hear her soft whimper and know she’s aching for more.

“You like that, don’t you?” I murmur.

I slide my hand higher, my fingertips grazing the silken fabric covering her wet pussy. I feel the dampness that has gathered there, a testament to her arousal.

“Yes,” she breathes, her body tensing beneath my touch.

With gentle pressure, I stroke her through the fabric, my touch teasing. Her hips buck slightly.

“Fuck, you’re so wet, gorgeous,” I whisper.

I continue my torment, drawing lazy circles, enjoying how her breathing quickens. Her soft moans fill the air, music to my ears.

As her arousal builds, I quicken the pace of my touch, my fingers firm and relentless. She cries out my name, her nails clawing into my shoulders as she yields to the sensations.

“That’s it, baby, let me hear you,” I urge, my touch relentless as I edge her closer to the pinnacle.

Her breathing is ragged, and she arches toward me, pleading for release. But I’m not ready to let her crest yet.

With a final teasing stroke, I pull my hand away, leaving her hovering on the brink, breathless and wanting. She whimpers softly, her body trembling with unspent passion.

“Not yet, sweetheart,” I murmur, my lips curving into a mischievous smile. “I plan on making this last.”

Her eyes fly open, frustration and desire swirling in their hazel depths. “But I?—”

I silence her with a scorching kiss, my tongue tangling with hers, conveying all the things I long to do to her. Her taste, scent, and soft moans fuel the fire within me. But I’m not ready to surrender to it just yet.

I pull away slowly, my gaze holding hers captive. “Patience, Tilly,” I breathe, my thumb brushing her swollen lower lip. “The best is yet to come.”

Tilly whimpers softly, her body pressing against mine as if seeking solace from the very torment I inflict. I savor the way she melts into me, the aroma of her desire

heightening my own.

“We’re about to stop,” I murmur, brushing a stray lock of hair from her face. “Wouldn’t want anyone to catch my hand on your sweet pussy, now would we?”

Her eyes widen at my bold words, a mortified yet intrigued expression flashing across her face. “Oh,” she breathes, her cheeks flaming red.

Leaning in, I capture her mouth in a searing kiss, tasting her shame and desire all at once. Our tongues tangle desperately, conveying the urgent need simmering between us.

As the Ferris wheel comes to a halt, I reluctantly pull away, smirking. “Come on,” I whisper, taking her hand and leading her from the ride. “Let’s find somewhere more private to continue this.”

I guide her through the carnival, my arm wrapped around her waist. The vibrant colors and lively atmosphere pale compared to the electricity crackling between us.

Her eyes flicker across the various attractions, a mix of anticipation and nervousness reflected in her gaze. “Where are we going?” she asks, her voice laced with curiosity.

“You’ll see,” I reply mysteriously, a devious smile dancing on my lips.

We approach a secluded area of the carnival, where the crowd thins out, leaving us with a semblance of privacy. I stop in front of the bumper cars, an enigmatic glint in my eye.

“Here?” Tilly questions, a hint of confusion in her voice.

I nod, stepping closer so that our bodies are mere inches apart. “Here,” I confirm, my

voice a low, seductive rumble. “But first, I need to collect something.”

With a wink, I stride toward the operator, requesting two cars be kept aside for us. The attendant complies with a knowing smile, recognizing a potential romance when he sees one.

When I return, Tilly’s eyes sparkle with anticipation. “What’s the plan?” she asks, her breath coming in short, eager gasps.

“Get in the car, gorgeous,” I instruct, my tone brooking no argument.

She obeys without hesitation, sliding into the bumper car. I climb into the adjacent vehicle, a mischievous glint in my eye.

I beckon to the attendant, and the ride comes to life. Our cars jolt forward, bumping into each other.

“So, where did you learn to hack?” she asks.

I chuckle. “You’re curious, aren’t you, Tilly? Always wanting to learn more.”

She shrugs, a playful smile on her lips. “Maybe I just want to know more about you.”

“Is that so?” I edge my car closer, our bumpers knocking together. “Well, then, I’ll give you a hint.”

Her eyes shine with excitement as she eagerly awaits my words.

“Let’s just say I learned the hard way,” I confess, my voice laced with pride and bitterness. “When you grow up in foster care, you do what you have to do to survive.”

Her expression softens, and she briefly touches my hand before pulling back as if unsure of the boundaries. “Foster care?” she echoes, her voice laced with surprise and a hint of sadness .

I nod, steering my car alongside hers. “It wasn’t all bad. I learned valuable skills—skills that have come in handy.”

A mischievous grin crosses her face. “Oh yeah? Like hacking into my computer and stalking me?”

“Guilty as charged.” I chuckle, bumping her car again. “But you have to admit, it paid off. After all, here we are.”

I pull Tilly close as we exit the bumper cars, the electricity crackling between us. Her eyes sparkle as I back her against the metal railing, my body pressing flush against hers.

“You drive me crazy,” I growl, tangling my fingers in her silken tresses. “Every look, every smile—fuck, even the way you breathe sends me over the edge.”

Her lips open with a soft gasp as I lean in. “Phoenix...” she breathes, her fingers curling into the fabric of my shirt.

I trail kisses along her jaw. “I want to hear you moan my name like a prayer on those pretty lips.”

“Phoenix,” she whimpers, her body arching against mine as my lips blaze a path down the slender column of her throat. “Please...”

The desperation in her voice ignites a primal hunger within me. Capturing her mouth in a searing kiss, I pour every ounce of my desire into it. She moans softly, her

fingers threading through my hair.

I press her harder against the railing, one hand splaying across the small of her back while the other cups her jaw, angling her head to deepen the kiss.

Reluctantly, I break the kiss, both of us panting heavily. Her lips are swollen and glistening, her eyes glazed with a haze of want. Tracing the curve of her jaw with my thumb, I gaze at her with a heady mix of possession and reverence.

“You’re mine,” I rasp. “Every inch of this gorgeous body belongs to me.”

Before she can respond, I capture her mouth in another soul-searing kiss.

At that moment, the world around us fades away, leaving only the two of us locked in a passionate embrace, our bodies and souls intertwined in a primal dance as old as time.

13

TILLY

I clutch the paper cone filled with sweet popcorn, the butter slick on my fingers. Phoenix leads me through the carnival, his fingers brushing against mine. I feel a pull in my chest, a longing to be closer to him, and I wonder if he feels it, too. I want to know what drives him. How he ended up with the carnival, and why he's so obsessed with me.

I feel like I'm dreaming as we pass the dazzling lights and lively crowds. This place, these people, they don't feel real. But Phoenix does. He's a storm of intensity, and I'm drawn to the eye of that storm. I know it's wild, but I can't deny my feelings.

He stops in front of a nondescript trailer, its metal surface reflecting the vibrant colors of the carnival. "This is me," he says, his voice low and inviting. "Want to come in?"

I'm nervous, but there's a voice in my head urging me forward. "Okay," I whisper .

Stepping inside, I'm hit by the smell of something uniquely him. The trailer is a mess of clothes, takeout boxes, and screens. So many screens. My gaze flits across them, wondering how many secrets they hold.

"It's a bit of a mess," he says, pulling me closer. His lips find mine, and I forget about the chaos around us. His kiss is passionate, desperate even. My nerves melt away, and all I want is more. "Needs a woman's touch."

He backs me toward the bed, his hands roaming over my body. The hunger in his eyes lights me on fire. This man is unhinged. I know it, yet I crave him. There's no denying our attraction that's pulled me to him like a moth to the flame.

"You're so beautiful," he breathes, tangling his fingers in my hair. I shiver as he continues to kiss me.

This is happening. I'm about to have sex with a stranger, someone I know nothing about. But he's under my skin, in my blood. I've never wanted anyone like this before. His mouth travels down my neck, making me arch toward him as a moan tears from my lips.

I pull at his shirt, needing to feel his skin against mine. He obliges, pulling it over his head and tossing it aside. His tattoos are beautiful as I run my hands over his chiseled torso, marveling at the feel of his powerful muscles beneath my fingers.

He pushes me back, and I fall back onto the bed. His hands wander, and the heat of his palms sears me through the fabric of my dress. His lips find my neck, sucking and biting, leaving marks that I know will be there tomorrow .

"You like me marking you, don't you?" he whispers.

I nod, not trusting my voice.

He grins, grabbing the hem of my dress to pull it over my head. My heart races as I lie there, exposed beneath his intense gaze.

"You're gorgeous," he murmurs, his eyes trailing over my body. I feel a shiver of anticipation as he reaches into a drawer and pulls out a length of soft rope. "But I want you helpless."

I swallow, my mouth dry as he gently ties my wrists together, then secures them to the bed frame above my head. I'm at his mercy now.

He unbuckles his belt and pulls off his pants and boxers, tossing them over his shoulder and exposing his thick, straining cock. And then he climbs onto the bed with me, parting my thighs and climbing between them.

"Are you ready for me, Tilly?" His voice is rough, and I nod, unable to speak. I arch my back, offering myself to him, and he chuckles darkly.

He pulls my panties off and tosses them over his shoulder.

"You're so wet for me already." His words are a husky whisper as he runs his fingers through my wetness. I bite my lip, my body responding to his touch. He leans down, his breath hot against my ear. "Do you have any idea how much I've wanted this?"

My hips buck as he grinds his length against me, teasing me and driving me mad with need. "Please," I beg, unsure what I'm asking for. I want more. I want all of him .

Phoenix chuckles, and his fingers trail down my body, swirling around my navel before dipping lower. I whimper as he brushes against my sensitive clit, his touch light and teasing. "Not yet, baby."

I whine in frustration as he pulls away, but the sound turns into a gasp as he lines himself up and pushes the tip of his cock against my entrance, not penetrating but teasing, driving me crazy with need.

He leans forward, supporting himself on one arm as he continues to tease my entrance with shallow thrusts. His other hand finds my breast, tweaking my nipple until it pebbles. "Tell me how much you want it."

“Please,” I beg again, my voice cracking. “I need you. I want you so bad.”

“That’s it,” he groans, his hips snapping forward, thrusting just a little deeper. “Tell me more.”

I moan, my body aching for release. “I’ve wanted this since the first moment I saw you. I want to feel you inside me. Please, Phoenix, take me.”

His eyes burn into mine, and he finally, mercifully, plunges deep, filling me in one swift stroke. We both groan at the sensation, and he stays still for a moment, letting me adjust to his size.

“You feel so damn good,” he breathes, his eyes closed as he savors the sensation.

I lift my hips, wanting more, needing more. “Move,” I demand, my voice hoarse.

He chuckles, his eyes opening to meet mine. “Bossy. I like it.”

He starts to move, slowly at first, then with increasing urgency. My wrists strain against the rope as I try to buck my hips to meet his thrusts. “Fuck, Tilly, you’re so tight. Your pussy was made for my cock.”

His words thrill me, and I can feel myself nearing the edge already. I’m so close. “Don’t stop,” I plead.

Phoenix’s jaw clenches as he sets a frantic pace. His eyes are burning with feverish intensity. It’s as if he can’t hold himself back. Suddenly, he pulls out and rolls me onto my front, entering and filling me again. “You like it rough, don’t you, baby?”

“Yes,” I breathe, my face pressed into the pillow.

His hand wraps around my throat, applying just enough pressure to send sparks of pleasure through me. With his other hand, he pulls my hair, exposing my neck, and bites down on my shoulder, sending waves of pleasure and pain crashing over me.

I scream, my voice muffled, and he tightens his grip, choking me. The pleasure crashes into me hard, and I come apart. Phoenix only then releases my throat, a soft laugh escaping his lips.

“Good girl,” he praises, his fingers stroking through my hair as he fucks me through my bliss. “I want you to ride me, now.”

I whimper as his cock slips from my pussy, leaving me empty and aching. And then he lies down beside me as I push myself up. His gaze never leaves mine as I straddle him and lower myself slowly, savoring the sensation as I take his length inside.

“That’s it,” he growls, gripping my hips.

I ride and fall, setting a steady pace. He lets out a low groan, his head falling back.

But I want more. I lean down, capturing his lips with mine, tasting him, feeling the stubble on his jaw scrape against my skin. His hands move to my hips, guiding my movements, lifting me up and down, setting a furious rhythm.

As I ride him, I feel wild and free. I quicken my pace, chasing a second orgasm, which is so close yet just out of reach.

His hands slide up my body, and he brushes my hair off my neck, baring my skin. “You like it when I mark you, don’t you?”

I nod, biting my lip as he squeezes my throat, using it like a handle to guide my movements. I’m completely under his control, and I surrender to it, wanting to please

him, needing to feel him lose control.

My pace becomes urgent, my breath coming in short gasps. He tightens his grip on my throat just enough to heighten the pleasure, and I feel the coil between my thighs tighten further. I'm so close, teetering on the edge. "Please," I beg.

Suddenly, he sits up, taking me with him, still buried deep inside me. With his hand wrapped around my throat, he guides me up and down on his lap, setting a relentless pace. I can feel his strength, his power. I cling to him, my fingers digging into his shoulders as I move with his demanding rhythm.

The pleasure builds, an inferno inside me, and I feel the familiar tightening in my core. "Don't stop," I plead, wanting to soar over the edge.

With a savage grin, he releases my throat and leans back, using his hold on my hips to lift and lower me, controlling my every move. "Come for me, baby. Let me feel it."

I cry out as the dam breaks, waves of pleasure crashing over me. I'm overwhelmed, consumed by the pleasure he wrings from my body. I feel him tense beneath me, his grip on my hips tightening.

"That's it, baby," he growls, his voice rough with desire. "Keep going, ride it out."

I whimper, my body still shaking, and obediently continue to move, drawing out the exquisite sensation. Phoenix watches me, his eyes burning with intensity. I can see the pleasure on his face, the way my body responds to him, only fueling his arousal.

Phoenix groans, his control breaking. "Fuck," he breathes. "You're so tight."

He sits up, pulling me with him, and before I can protest, he spins me around. I land

on my hands and knees, my breath hitching as he positions himself behind me. His hands grip my hips, pulling me back toward him, and then he's filling me again, his thrusts powerful and relentless.

"You feel so good wrapped around me," he grunts, his hips snapping against mine. "I'm going to breed this tight pussy, fill it with my cum."

His words send a shock through me, and I push back against him, meeting his savage rhythm. It turns me on, even though I know he can't get me pregnant since I've had an IUD since I first had sex when I was eighteen. The bed creaks beneath us, the sound of our bodies coming together filling the trailer. The heat builds again, spurred on by Phoenix's words.

"That's it, take it," he grunts, his hands sliding up my body to grip my throat. He chokes me harder now as he thrusts into me.

"Again," I beg, wanting to soar over the edge again and feel him lose control, too.

"Greedy girl," he growls, his voice hoarse. "You want to come again? Do you want my seed dripping from your pussy?"

"Yes," I cry, my face pressed against the pillow. "Please, Phoenix. Fill me."

His pace quickens, his hips snapping against my ass. I can feel him, hard and thick inside me, and I know he's close. "Fuck, I'm not gonna last," he grunts. "I'm going to mark you as mine."

His possessive claim sends me over the edge, and I cry out as my body tightens around him. Phoenix follows, his hand tightening on my throat as he roars, his release pulsing hot inside me.

“That’s my good fucking girl, take it all,” he pants, his voice hoarse. “I’m going to fill you up again and again. And I’m not going to rest until my cum is dripping from you.”

He continues to thrust into me, his hips moving frantically, milking his orgasm. I cry out with each thrust, overwhelmed by the pleasure, my body shaking with the force of it .

Finally, he slows, his breath ragged, releasing my throat and kissing my shoulder gently. “That was?—”

I cut him off with a giggle, turning my head to smile at him. “Incredible,” I finish.

He pulls out of me, and I whimper at the loss, feeling his cum start to leak from my body. Phoenix grins and pulls me toward him, my back against his chest. “That was just the beginning, sweetheart. I’m not done with you yet.”

14

TILLY

I wake up groggy, my head throbbing, and there's a strange sensation between my legs. I try to lift my arms to rub my eyes, but they won't budge. Confused, I blink a few times, my vision clearing to reveal that I'm still tied to Phoenix's bed.

I feel disoriented, and it takes me a moment to remember the intense night we shared. My body aches pleasantly, and I shift to get more comfortable. Then I notice Phoenix kneeling between my legs, his eyes shut, his mouth hovering over my core.

I should be scandalized, but a spark of pleasure shoots through me as I realize what he's doing. He's licking me, feasting on my most intimate place while I lay helpless, sleeping and bound to his bed. It's wrong and still sends a thrill coursing through my body.

I watch, captivated, as he laps at me, his tongue teasing my clit. Despite my fuzzy state of mind, I'm so aroused.

A soft moan escapes my lips as he nuzzles further into my core, his breath hot against my sensitive flesh. I'm completely at his mercy, tied up and vulnerable, and the realization only fuels my desire.

His tongue darts out, swirling around my clit in slow, deliberate circles. I sink my teeth into my lip to suppress a whimper. The pleasure is electric.

His eyes flutter open as I watch, transfixed. He smirks, clearly pleased with the effect he's having on me. "Good morning, sweetheart," he whispers.

"Phoenix," I breathe, my back arching as I seek more of his devastating touch.

He chuckles, the sound warm and intimate, and dives back in, his tongue teasing me, driving me closer to the edge. I know I should be embarrassed, tied up, and helpless while he eats me out, but I can't bring myself to care. All I can focus on is the pleasure he's eliciting, the way he's driving me wild with just his mouth.

His fingers join the dance, slipping inside me, stretching and filling me while his thumb works in circles, adding to the delicious friction. I'm on the precipice now, teetering on the edge, and I know with just a little more stimulation, I'll shatter.

"Please," I beg, my voice hoarse and wanting.

He chuckles again, the sound vibrating against me, and sucks my clit into his mouth. That does it. I cry out, my body bowing as I lose myself in the sensation. My hips buck against his mouth, seeking more, needing to ride out the waves of my release.

Phoenix groans his approval, his hands tightening on my thighs, holding me in place as I come undone. "That's it, baby," he whispers, his breath hot against my sensitized flesh. "Let go for me."

I'm floating, drifting back down from the stratosphere Phoenix sent me to, when a faint humming fills my ears. At first, I think it's just the lingering echoes of my climax, but then I feel it. The trailer is moving. We're rolling forward, slow and steady.

My eyes snap open, confusion and panic setting in. "What's happening?" I ask, my voice laced with alarm.

Phoenix lifts his head, a playful smile on his lips. “We’re moving on. The carnival never stays in one place for too long.”

I struggle against my binds, suddenly aware of how vulnerable I am. “Wait, you can’t just?—”

He presses a finger to my lips. “Shh, it’s okay, sweetheart. I’m not letting you go.”

I spot my belongings neatly stacked in a corner of his trailer. My heart sinks as I recognize my favorite lamp, my stack of video games, and even the mug my sister gave me. “What...what are my things doing here?”

He brushes his thumb across my lower lip, his eyes holding mine. “I had to drug you, sweet girl. It was the only way to get you out of your home without a fight.”

I stare at him, unable to process his words. “You kidnapped me?”

The amusement fades from his eyes, replaced by a fierce intensity. “I prefer to think of it as a strategic relocation. You see, Tilly, I couldn’t bear the thought of being without you, and I knew you’d never leave your life behind voluntarily. So, I had to take matters into my own hands. ”

I swallow, my throat dry. “You’ve taken me with you on the road?”

He nods, his gaze unwavering. “You’re mine now. And I intend to keep you safe and by my side, no matter what.”

The trailer rocks as we continue rolling forward, each bump and sway sending a jolt through my body. Phoenix’s actions are unhinged, possessive, and utterly irrational.

“But...my life, friends, family,” I sputter.

Phoenix captures my hand, bringing it to his lips. “I’ve taken care of everything, baby. They’ll believe you’ve moved on, chasing some newfound dream. You’re free to start anew with me by your side.”

“You’re insane, Phoenix. Let me go! I demand you let me go this instant!” I try to sound commanding, but it comes out slurred, the effects of the drugs muddling my brain.

Anger flashes in his eyes. “You’re not thinking straight. Just rest for now. We’ll talk once you’re feeling more like yourself.”

“No, you don’t understand,” I say, struggling to think. “I can’t be here. My life, my friends, they’ll be worried sick. And my family—what must they be going through?”

“Shh,” he soothes, stroking my hair. “I told you, I’ve handled everything. No one is coming for you, Tilly. No one but me.”

“But they will!” I insist, my voice rising in desperation. “They’ll come looking for me. They won’t just accept that I’ve vanished!”

His jaw clenches, and his gaze hardens. “I’ve been monitoring them, Tilly. Your friends, your family. I had to, for your safety and mine. And I can assure you, they won’t come after you. Not anymore.”

The weight of his words settles in my stomach as I wonder if he’s hurt them. “What do you mean? What have you done?”

His fingers ghost my cheek, his eyes holding mine. “I had to sever those ties. It was the only way to ensure your safety and our future together. I made sure they’ll never bother us again.”

My breath catches, my mind running wild with horrible possibilities. “What—what did you do to them?”

He shakes his head, a pained expression crossing his face. “Just rest, Tilly. You need to recover your strength. We’ve got a lot to discuss about our life.”

“No, Phoenix, tell me!” I try to tug myself free, but the rope is firm. “Did you—did you hurt them? Oh God, please tell me you didn’t hurt my family!”

He flinches. “I’d never physically harm them, Tilly. I just faked your death. It was necessary to protect us.”

Faked my death?

My mind spins, trying to grasp what he’s saying. “You—you faked my death? Like, they think they’ve buried me?”

“It was the only way. They’ll grieve, but they certainly won’t come looking. To them, you’re dead and gone. Now, rest. We’ll create new memories, just you and I together.”

This psycho faked my death and severed all ties to my loved ones. In their eyes, I’m gone forever, just a tragic memory to mourn.

“No, no, you can’t do this!” I cry out, thrashing against my restraints. “My family, my friends—they’ll be devastated! You’ve got to let me go back. You have to tell them the truth!”

Phoenix shakes his head. “I’m sorry, but it’s already done. For our future together to work, your past had to be left behind.”

“You’re insane!” I scream, tears of rage streaming down my cheeks. “You’ve ruined everything, taken me from everyone I love! How could you do this?”

His face hardens. “It was necessary.”

I open my mouth to protest further, but a strange drowsiness overtakes me. My limbs feel heavy, my thoughts growing fuzzy.

“Wh-what did you do?” I slur, realizing he must have drugged me again.

Phoenix strokes my cheek gently. “Shh, it’s alright. You’re just going to rest for a little while. When you wake up, you’ll see things more clearly.”

I try to fight the darkness encroaching on my vision, but it’s useless. The drugs are too strong, pulling me down into a deep, dreamless oblivion. The last thing I see is Phoenix’s face, his expression a mixture of concern and possessiveness, before the world fades to black.

I drift into a void, my senses dulled, my thoughts scattered. Time holds no meaning in this endless abyss. Am I awake? Asleep? Alive or dead? The line between reality and nightmare blurs until I can no longer tell the difference.

15

PHOENIX

Tilly is now irreversibly mine. No one will come looking for her. I ensured that.

My plan was intricate, but it worked. I got the records switched at the morgue, a simple hack into their system. Now, they believe Tilly Jane Lawson's body was charred beyond recognition in a car accident. Her DNA "matched" that of the victim. What people will believe when presented with "scientific evidence."

I admit, a part of me feels guilty for causing her loved ones pain. But it was necessary. They'll move on; people always do. And Tilly will be forever mine.

I watch Tilly as she sleeps, her chest rising and falling gently. We've been moving for days, and the trailer has finally stopped. We've reached our next destination, a new state, a fresh start.

I knew this trip would be ideal. It's far enough that no one will recognize her, and the distance provides the perfect opportunity for Tilly to adapt to our new reality. She needs time to accept what I've done and why. Time to understand that there's no going back to her old life.

Tyson thinks I've been working in the trailer during the trip, taking advantage of the rare opportunity to have my tech haven to myself as we traveled. Usually, we'd take the carnival bus when moving on, but this time, I had a different plan.

I glance at Tilly, admiring her beauty and innocence. Soon, she'll wake, and I'll ween her off the drugs that have been keeping her sedated and calm for the trip.

For now, I'll let her sleep, enjoying the peace of this moment before the storm. I know the coming days will be a whirlwind of emotions as she grapples with her new reality. But in the end, she'll see that everything I did was for us.

Stepping out of the trailer, I admire the new scenery. We're surrounded by lush greenery, with towering trees blocking the harsh sunlight and providing a sense of seclusion.

I double-check the window and door locks, ensuring everything is secure. Tilly is safe inside, and I'll keep her that way.

My phone buzzes, signaling a message from Tyson. It's time to meet and discuss our distribution plan for this state. He also wants an update on the two men we took care of.

I set out toward the designated meeting spot, a secluded area on the outskirts of the carnival. Along the way, I reflect on the steps I took to squash any rumors about those men's deaths. It took some clever manipulation on the dark web. Still, I managed to make their deaths seem like an accident, with no traces leading back to us.

As I approach, I see Tyson leaning against a tree, his muscular frame relaxed but alert. He greets me with a nod.

"Good work with those guys," he says. "Any rumblings on the web?"

"None. The accidental fire story is sticking. No leads, no suspicions."

Tyson grins. "Always a step ahead, Phoenix. Now, let's talk distribution. We've got a

sweet deal set up with a local contact. We'll need to lay low until the shipment arrives. In the meantime, keep an eye out for anything suspicious. We don't want any unexpected complications again."

"Don't worry, I'm on it," I assure him. He trusts me to handle the tech side of our operations, and I won't let him down, even though my mind is elsewhere. Tilly is my secret project. My obsession. But Ty doesn't need to know about her.

Thinking about Tilly brings a smile to my face. My captive princess, sleeping peacefully in my trailer. She's safe, away from the world, and all mine. I can't wait to wake her up and see her eyes sparkle as she realizes the truth of her new reality. It's just a matter of time before she accepts that she's mine forever.

"Oi, Phoenix." Tyson's voice snaps me back to the present. "You good?"

I nod, my focus returning. "Yeah, just eager to get this distribution plan rolling. The quieter we keep things, the better. I'll make sure our digital tracks are non-existent."

"That's my man." Ty slaps me on the back, his eyes gleaming with excitement. "Now, about those guys we dealt with. I want to make sure there are no loose ends. We can't have any surprises popping up later."

"I've got my eyes and ears open. Nothing's slipping past me. Our little empire will remain unnoticed."

He grins, his enthusiasm matching mine. "Exactly. We're building something here, Phoenix. Something big. And our tech wiz is a key player."

Tilly may be my primary focus, but I can't disappoint Ty. He's counting on me. We're building something that will leave our mark on this world.

As we step further into the shadows of the carnival, I feel a surge of adrenaline. This is my element—the hidden underworld I command with my tech skills. Tilly is my obsession, but my partnership with Ty fuels my desire for control. We'll rule this hidden empire together, leaving a trail of secrets in our wake.

16

TILLY

D isoriented, I wake up, my mind blank. Slowly, like creeping tendrils of fog, memories begin to emerge.

The carnival. Phoenix. His trailer.

The intense passion and roughness of his touch. The pleasure he gave me was unlike anything I'd experienced before. But then the rest hits me.

He drugged me. He tied me up. My hands shoot up, tugging frantically at the bindings.

And then, as if that's not terrifying enough, the worst part comes flooding back. Phoenix told me he'd severed all ties with my loved ones and faked my fucking death!

How is that even possible?

Glancing around the trailer, it quickly becomes clear I'm alone. Phoenix is gone. I'm tied up, restrained, a prisoner. My heart starts to race as my mind spins with everything he's done—the drugs, the lies, the faked death. I can't let him control me. I have to get out of here .

Tugging at the restraints, I'm determined, and my joints crack as I contort my body. I

manage to slip one arm free—a small victory. I focus on the other tie, which is tighter and more stubborn. I twist and turn my wrist, maneuvering with all my might.

The minutes feel like hours.

What if Phoenix comes back and catches me trying to escape?

Slowly, inch by inch, I work my way out of the restraint. Finally, with a sharp tug, my hand slips free. I rub my wrists where the rope grazed my skin. But I'm free now.

I stand and almost collapse back onto the bed as my head swims. God knows how long he's had me sedated in here, but it feels like I've forgotten how to use my legs. With a pounding heart, I push off the bed more gently and stand for a moment, trying to steady myself. Once I'm sure I'm okay, I head for the door and try to open it.

Locked, of course.

I knew it would be, but I had to try. My eyes scan the room for another way out. Windows—maybe they're my escape route. I move quickly to the main area, then the kitchenette.

Locked. Damn it!

There's a small window in the bathroom, and I rush over, my heart sinking as I see it's locked, too. There has to be a way out.

And then I spot it—a skylight in the ceiling. It's my only hope. I search the kitchen for something to stand on and find a set of steps. Carefully, I climb up, every muscle tense with anticipation. I reach the skylight and push, feeling a rush of relief as it gives way. It's not big, but it's enough.

I force the skylight open and feel a rush of cool, fresh air—freedom. Climbing up through the opening without hesitation, I stick my head out, already imagining myself back home, exposing the psycho who took me and his faking my death. I'll be back where I belong, not trapped in this nightmare.

I hear the trailer door open below as if the universe is conspiring against me. Every muscle in my body freezes. And I hope and pray that it's not Phoenix.

“What the hell do you think you're doing?” Phoenix's voice is a low growl.

Panic takes over, and I scramble to escape trying to haul my ass out of the hole, but he's too fast.

He climbs up after me, grabbing my leg with an iron grip. I kick and squirm, desperate to break free, but it's useless. He's too strong, and with a swift movement, he drags me back into the trailer, slamming me down on the bed.

“Stop it! Let me go!” I scream, trying to wriggle out of his grasp, but it's like trying to escape a vise.

“Enough!” he snaps. “You're not going anywhere. This is for your own good. You have to understand.”

His words are like a slap in the face. “For my own good? Are you insane? You drugged me, tied me up, faked my death, and now you won't let me leave! How is any of this for my good?”

Fear and anger begin to mix, clouding my judgment. Tears well up in my eyes as I realize how unhinged this man truly is.

“You don't understand,” he says, his voice softening. “I did what I had to. Your old

life had to end. But I promise I'll keep you safe now."

"Safe? Are you kidding me? I've never felt more afraid in my life! You're a stranger, and you've taken everything from me!"

My words hang in the air, thick with emotion. Phoenix's eyes search mine, and momentarily, I see a flicker of uncertainty.

"You don't get it. The world out there is dangerous. I'm the only one who can protect you now."

I open my mouth to argue, to plead, but he cuts me off with a fierce intensity in his eyes. "This is how it has to be. In time, you'll understand."

"You're out of your mind!" I scream, my chest rising and falling with rapid breaths. "You can't keep me here, tie me up, and expect me to understand!"

"Tilly, please. Just rest. Everything will make sense soon, I promise."

Before I can protest further, he secures the restraints once more. I'm trapped, unable to move, and my thoughts race as my eyes frantically search the room for any sign of hope.

"Just relax, okay? I'll be right here," Phoenix says, stroking my hair.

I want to scream. I want to fight. But exhaustion washes over me like a wave. The terror and adrenaline take their toll, in addition to the drugs still lingering in my system. Despite my fear and confusion, I feel my body surrender to his demands. My eyes flutter closed, and I struggle to keep them open, to stay alert, but it's no use.

As my consciousness slips away, my mind struggles to make sense of the situation.

The last thing I remember is Phoenix watching me intently. Is it concern I see in his expression? Or something more sinister? As sleep overtakes me, my mind fights to stay alert, but the darkness consumes me. For now, I am his captive, and my fate is in his hands.

PHOENIX

I 'm losing my grip on reality. I know it. My obsession with Tilly has driven me to extremes, but I can't let her go. She's mine, and I'll never give her up.

Now we're together, and I've ensured her safety by faking her death and cutting ties with her past. It had to be done. Tilly is dependent on me for survival.

But there's a part of me that's unhinged. I admit it. My mind is clouded with possessiveness and a desperate need to keep her close. I know my actions are extreme, but I can't stop. I've crossed too many lines, and now there's no going back. Tilly is the light in my dark world, and I'll do whatever it takes to keep her.

She's so beautiful, even when she sleeps. I can't take my eyes off her. My mind wanders, imagining everything I want to do to her. My cock stirs in my pants, demanding attention. I give in, freeing it from the confines of my jeans.

"You're so fucking gorgeous, Tilly," I whisper. "You don't even know how much I want you. How much I need to feel you around me again and again."

I stroke myself, my eyes fixed on her sleeping form. Her lips are slightly apart, and her torso moves up and down with each breath. I want to kiss those lips, taste them, devour her all over again.

"I'm going to make you feel so good, baby," I murmur, my breath quickening.

“You’re going to be mine forever. I’ll brand you with my touch, mark you as mine.”

I move closer to the bed, my cock throbbing in my hand. My heart pounds as I imagine being inside her. Once I reach the bedside and look down at her naked, gorgeous form. With a few more strokes, my body tenses, and I shoot my cum onto her breasts.

She stirs, the sticky substance on her skin jolting her awake. Her eyes snap open, and she sees me looming above her, my semi-hard dick in my hand.

“Ahh!” Her scream pierces the air, her pretty hazel eyes wide. She tries to scramble away from me, but the restraints keep her in place. “What the fuck! What are you doing?”

She’s screaming now, her eyes wild with fear. I should’ve known better than to scare her like this. But fuck, seeing her naked and bound—it just does something to me.

“Shh, baby, it’s okay. I just needed to—I couldn’t help myself.” I try to explain, my voice thick with desire. “You were sleeping so peacefully, and I couldn’t control myself. You just looked so damn pretty. I wanted to decorate you with my cum.”

Her cheeks flush, and she continues to struggle against the restraints. “Untie me, you freak! What the hell is wrong with you?”

I sigh, running a hand through my hair. “I know, I know. It’s a lot to process. I did what I could to ensure no one could take you away from me.”

“Are you crazy? You kidnapped me, drugged me, and now you’re talking about keeping me?” She’s breathing heavily, her eyes filled with anger and fear. “Let me go right now!”

My gaze hardens. “I can’t do that. I won’t. Don’t you get it? You’re mine. I’ve claimed you, and I’m not letting you go. Ever.”

“Never say never,” she snaps, her eyes flashing. “You may have the upper hand now, but someone will find me. My friends will come looking for me.”

I chuckle, although it holds no humor. “No one is coming, sweetheart. They think you’re dead, remember? And they wouldn’t stand a chance against me even if they did. I always get what I want, and right now, I want you.”

“You’re insane,” she murmurs.

I smile. “Maybe I am. But you know what? I’m okay with that. Because in my madness, I found you.”

I watch as the defiance drains from Tilly’s eyes, replaced by a hollowness that twists my gut. Her body goes limp against the restraints, the fight leaving her like a deflating balloon. Seeing her so broken and defeated fills me with a strange unease.

“That’s it, baby,” I murmur, stroking her cheek. She flinches at my touch, her skin cool beneath my fingertips. “Just let it all go. It’ll be easier if you stop fighting me.”

A single tear trails down her face, and my chest tightens. Part of me wants to gather her in my arms, to whisper soothing words and chase the sadness away. But a darker part of me revels in her brokenness and how she’s finally surrendering the fight.

“I promise everything will improve once you accept that you’re mine. No more fear, no more trying to escape. Just you and me, together, how it’s meant to be.”

She doesn’t respond, her eyes fixed on the ceiling, vacant and hollow. It’s like she’s given up, her spirit crushed beneath the weight of her new reality. And as much as I

hate seeing her like this, I'm thrilled she's crumbling so easily.

"Look at me, Tilly," I demand, my fingers gripping her chin and forcing her gaze to meet mine. "I need you to understand that this is forever. You're mine, and I'm never letting you go. No matter how hard you fight or how much you beg and plead, you'll always belong to me."

Her lower lip trembles, and briefly, I fear she might break down completely. But then, something shifts in her eyes, a flicker of resignation that sends a shiver down my spine.

"Okay," she breathes. "I understand."

Relief washes over me, and I can't help but grin. "That's my girl," I murmur, kissing her forehead. "We're going to be so good together, you'll see."

Pulling back, I can see the fight has truly left her. She's accepted her fate, accepted that she belongs to me now. And while some of me aches at the brokenness in her eyes, the darker, more twisted part of me is glad.

She's mine, completely and utterly mine. And now that she's finally stopped fighting, we can begin our new life together, twisted and beautiful in its own way.

18

TILLY

Three days later. I'm still tied to this bed in Phoenix's trailer, parked at an unknown location. I need to get out. I know he's insane, a fucking psychopath, but I have to pretend I'm into him if I want to stay alive and find a way out of this mess.

My eyes dart to his computer screens, trying to ignore the heat that rises to my cheeks at the sight of him. I can feel his eyes on me, studying my every move. I shift my weight, testing the restraints, hoping they might loosen, but they hold firm. Each passing moment is a battle between my desire for freedom and my confusing connection with him.

"You're staring, beautiful girl." His deep voice breaks the silence, and I'm unsure how to respond.

His fingers tap away at the keyboard again, and I know he's back in his world.

I let out a breath, watching as his fingers dance across the keys. His concentration is intense, eyes fixed on the screen. He mumbles under his breath, muttering about algorithms and backdoors. I glance down at the restraints, knowing I'm his prisoner, but my heart beats faster when his eyes find mine.

"You want something, Tilly?"

I swallow hard, cursing myself for the heat that creeps up my neck. He knows how he

affects me. I can't give him the satisfaction of a response, so I keep quiet, looking away.

"Talk to me, baby. I know you want to." His voice is almost a whisper now, and he leans back in his chair, stretching out his legs. "Tell me what you're thinking."

My mind races, the darkness of my thoughts startling even me. I want to scream at this man, to tell him how much of a monster he is, but I can't deny the twisted pleasure that flares whenever he touches me. It's sick. He's sick. But I can't stop thinking about it—about him.

The silence stretches thick with unspoken words. I know I should hate Phoenix, but instead, I find myself wanting more, even as I lie here, tied up and helpless.

What has he done to me?

I take a deep breath, trying to steady my nerves. "Phoenix, I was close to finishing my computer science degree this year. All that work, all those late nights coding and studying, had to be for something."

He leans forward. "You don't need some paper to prove your skills, Tilly. I can teach you everything you need to know and more."

I shift against the restraints. "But it's not just about the knowledge. It's about the accomplishment, the sense of achievement." I shake my head. "You wouldn't understand."

Phoenix stands, making his way over to the bed. He sits beside me, his fingers tracing patterns on my bare skin. "I understand more than you think. This degree, this path you were on was all leading you toward a mundane existence, working for some soulless corporation."

His touch sends shivers down my spine, and I hate how my body responds to him. “That’s not true. I wanted to create video games, to bring joy and escape to people.”

He leans in closer, his lips brushing against my ear. “And you still can, but without the constraints of the system. With me, you’ll have the freedom to explore your creativity.”

I try to pull away, but his grip tightens. “You’ve taken away my freedom, Phoenix. How can you claim to offer it to me in the same breath?”

His eyes bore into mine, a mixture of desire and determination. “You’ll see once you accept your new reality and let go of the past. I’m not your captor, Tilly. I’m your guide to a world beyond your wildest dreams.”

“You’re right, Phoenix. I must let go of my old life and accept the new.” I need to play along and give him what he wants to hear. “It’s just hard, you know?”

As I speak, I clench my thighs together, a subtle movement that draws his attention. His eyes darken as he takes in my flushed skin and erratic breathing.

God, why does my body betray me like this?

“Are you turned on, Tilly?” His voice is hoarse.

I lick my lips, unable to meet his gaze. “No. I... ”

He reaches out, his fingers gently tracing the outline of my panties, the damp fabric clinging to my skin. “You’re soaked, baby.”

My breath catches in my throat as he teases the lace edges of my underwear. “It’s just... I can’t help but be turned on by your proximity.” I squirm a little, fighting

against the restraints, knowing full well what effect it has on him.

He groans and climbs onto the bed, parting my thighs wide. His eyes never leave mine as he lowers his head between my thighs. “You smell so fucking sweet, Tilly.”

His nose brushes against my sensitive skin, sending sparks of pleasure through my body. I can feel the warmth of his breath, the tickle of his stubble, and I can’t stop the soft moan that escapes my lips.

“Please, Phoenix...” I’m not sure what I’m asking for. Do I want him to stop? Or am I begging for more?

He chuckles darkly, the vibrations sending shivers down my body. “Don’t worry, baby, I plan to take care of this pretty little pussy.”

I close my eyes as he tears my panties off, and his breath is hot against my core. His mouth hovers so close, but he teases me, drawing out the anticipation. I rock my hips, needing more, craving his touch.

And then he swipes his tongue right through me, circling my clit. I jolt at the sensation, moaning shamefully.

“So fucking sweet,” he murmurs, his voice rough with desire.

Then he pulls away, leaving me gasping and wanting. I open my eyes to find him watching me, a fierce look in his eyes. “I love how responsive you are. It’s like your body knows you belong to me even if your mind isn’t there yet.”

My heart flutters in my chest at his declaration. Play along, and he’ll think he’s won you over. “Yes, Phoenix,” I whisper. “I belong to you.”

His ice-blue eyes darken, and he leans in, his lips hovering above mine. “That’s right, baby. You’re mine.”

I nod, my body thrumming. “Please, Phoenix. I need you.”

With a growl, he captures my mouth in a hungry kiss, his tongue plundering. As I respond to his kiss, I know I’m falling deeper into his web, but I can’t bring myself to care. All I know is that I need him now more than ever, all while hating him simultaneously.

Phoenix leans back, his eyes devouring me as he slowly moves his mouth back between my thighs. His tongue tracing patterns over my clit.

“Phoenix,” I breathe, my body arching toward him. My restraints prevent me from touching him, from running my fingers through his hair, so I can only lie here and let him have his way with me.

He chuckles, the vibration against my sensitive flesh causing me to buck my hips. “You taste even better than you look, baby.”

His tongue flicks against my clit, sending sparks of pleasure through me. I can’t help but moan, my body moving of its own accord as he teases me with skilled strokes. His hands hold my hips down, preventing my escape as he feasts on me .

I’m lost in a whirlwind of sensation, my breath coming in short gasps. “Oh, Phoenix!” I call out, my body tensing as I spiral toward release.

He moans in response, the vibrations sending me over the edge. With such power, my climax engulfs me, my body trembling with the intensity of it.

Phoenix slowly pulls away, a satisfied smile on his lips. He kisses his way up my

body, pausing to nip at my neck before claiming my mouth in a passionate kiss. I can taste myself on his lips. When he finally pulls away, I'm breathless and needy. My body is throbbing with unfulfilled desire.

"That was incredible." My voice comes out in a husky whisper. I'm still processing just how fucking amazing this man is with his tongue.

He stands, his eyes burning into mine, and adjusts his pants. "Just remember who gave you that pleasure, beautiful girl. You know you want to be mine."

A flush of heat rushes through me at his words. I am his. Owned. My mind rebels at the thought, even as my body responds to his dominant tone.

"You have a lot to process, Tilly. But understand this: I will take care of you. I'll give you everything you need." He runs his fingers through his hair, a hint of vulnerability flashing across his face. "I'll keep you safe."

I want to ask him to keep touching me, to erase the darkness that still lingers in my mind. But the words die in my throat as I recall the reality of my situation. I am his prisoner, dependent on his mercy .

"I know you do, Phoenix." I keep my tone soft, not wanting to provoke him. "And I'm grateful."

He nods, a crease forming between his brows. Then, with one last intense look, he turns away and returns to his computer, leaving me tied to the bed.

Alone with my thoughts, the full weight of my situation crashes down on me. I'm tied up in some unknown location, held captive by a man I barely know, a man who claims to want to protect me. But what about the things he's already done? The lies, the manipulation, the stalking? My mind reels as I try to reconcile the man who just

brought me to an explosive climax with the one who kidnapped me, faked my death, and severed ties with my loved ones.

I shift on the bed, testing the restraints once more, despite knowing they won't yield. I'm a prisoner to my desires as much as I am to Phoenix's whims. His kiss set my soul on fire even as my mind screamed for me to run.

How can I feel such conflicting emotions? How can I crave his touch and fear him at the same time?

Phoenix draws my attention. He's fully engrossed in his work, already in his element, as his fingers fly across the keyboard. Despite everything, there's no denying his talent and his mastery of technology.

I hate that I want him. I hate that my body betrays my mind. But in these moments, tied to this bed, with only Phoenix to keep me company, the lines between captor and captive blur.

"You're still staring." His voice startles me, and I heat, realizing he's caught me watching him again. "You know, most girls would be freaking out if they were in your situation. But not you. You're taking it all in stride."

I open my mouth to respond, but no words come out. The truth is, I am freaking out. I'm terrified. But I refuse to give him the satisfaction of seeing me break.

He chuckles, shaking his head. "Don't worry, baby. It won't be much longer until you're truly mine."

A shiver traverses down my spine. Does he truly believe that I'll ever willingly accept this life? The idea fuels my determination to escape, but I must bide my time, for now, playing the role he's scripted for me.

PHOENIX

Tyson needs me to accompany them on a deal. Which means I have to leave Tilly alone. I hate the idea. What if she escapes?

“You’re too paranoid,” I mumble, hurrying to mix a sedative into a drink. She doesn’t need much—just enough to keep her from causing trouble while I’m gone.

Stepping into the room, I find Tilly sitting on the bed, her eyes darting warily between me and the door. She senses my reluctance to leave.

“I made you a drink.” I offer the drink, hoping she won’t notice the powdery residue on the rim. “You’ve been tense lately. Thought it might help you relax.”

She stares at the glass, then slowly takes it from me. “What’s in it?”

“Just a little something to take the edge off,” I reply. “It’ll help you sleep. You’ve had a rough couple of days.”

She briefly studies the drink, then shrugs and takes a sip. The liquid slides down her throat, carrying the drug into her system. Another sip and she relaxes a bit, her body sagging slightly into the mattress.

“There you go,” I encourage. “Just drink it all. You’ll feel better soon.”

Obediently, she finishes the drink, her eyelids growing heavy. I watch her carefully, gauging the drug's effect, my own heart pounding in my chest.

"I have to go," I say. "But I'll be back soon. You rest up, okay?"

She manages a slight nod, her eyes drifting shut.

"Sleep now, beautiful," I whisper, leaning down to kiss her forehead.

As I head out, my stomach is in knots. I can't shake the fear that something will go wrong while away. Ty is persistent, demanding my presence at this deal, but I don't want to leave her.

I trudge toward his Mustang, knowing the money needs to be counted and my skills are essential. Even though I know she's out like a light now, doubt creeps in. An obsessive need to turn back and ensure she's still there, safe, and waiting for me.

"About damn time, Phoenix. Thought you'd bail on me." Ty's voice cuts through my thoughts.

My jaw clenches at his words. "I had some things to take care of," I snap. "Would've been here sooner if?—"

"If what? That little project of yours is more important than our operations?" Ty raises an eyebrow.

I glare at him, anger bubbling up. "It's under control."

"Everything except your attitude," he retorts, a smirk playing at the corners of his mouth. "You're a real ray of sunshine today. Someone piss in your Cheerios?"

I clench my fists at my sides, fighting the urge to punch something—or someone. “Don’t start with me, Ty. I’m not in the mood.”

He chuckles, undeterred by my warning. “Gotta say, your mood is shit. You planning on riding with me like that?”

“My mood isn’t your concern,” I growl. “Let’s just get this over with.”

Sliding into the passenger seat, I yank the seatbelt across my chest with more force than necessary. Ty eyes me as he starts the engine, then shakes his head.

“You’re wound tighter than a two-dollar watch. This personal project, what exactly is it?”

“It’s none of your business,” I bite out.

He snorts. “Everything’s my business when you’re this far up your ass. You need to chill the hell out.”

His words echo in my head as we speed off. I know he’s right—the Carnie life is about rolling with the punches and embracing the chaos. But this time, it’s different. Tilly’s different.

Ty’s voice drifts over me as the miles blur, a mix of instructions for the deal and friendly jabs to lighten my mood. I focus on the task, pushing my worries about Tilly aside. But her face haunts me, and her words—the fear and confusion in her eyes—refuse to fade. I’m caught in a storm of uncertainty and battling my obsessions.

Tyson slows the Mustang as we near the predetermined location, a secluded spot a few miles out of town. The engine rumbles as he kills the lights, coasting to a stop in

the darkness.

I scan the area, spotting the familiar figures of Lars, Nash, and Colt. Cool and collected as always, Lars leans against his motorcycle, his body silhouetted by the moonlight. Nash and Colt arrive in the van, their faces illuminated as they pass under a lone streetlight.

Our crew is an odd bunch, each with unique skills and quirks. But together, we make it work, a well-oiled machine. As I observe them, all united in our not-so-legal venture, I feel a twinge of something akin to family.

Lars approaches the Mustang, his boots crunching over the gravel. He pulls off his helmet, and his intense gaze settles on me. "Everything set, Phoenix?"

I nod, reaching for the bag at my feet. "Ready to roll. Just need to grab the goods."

"Let's get this show on the road," Ty grunts, opening his door.

I step out, joining Lars as we walk toward the van. Nash meets us halfway, a carefree grin on his face.

"Coast is clear. We're good to go." Nash reports.

Colt emerges from the van, his broad shoulders filling the doorway. "Everything's packed and ready. Just say the word."

We fall into our usual routine, each performing our assigned roles with practiced efficiency. Lars and Nash keep watch, scanning the surrounding area for any signs of trouble. Colt and I unload the van.

We work in silence, each of us focused on our task. The only sounds are the

occasional rustle of packaging and the soft thud of boxes placed on the ground.

As we finish unloading, the client arrives right on schedule. I recognize the vehicle, a sleek black SUV, and the figure who steps out matches the description we received.

Ty takes point, approaching the client with a confident stride. I remain close, my hands tucked casually into my pockets.

The money is passed over and I set to work counting it quickly. Ty and the client confirm the deal's details. Lars and Nash move to transfer the boxes to the SUV, their movements deliberate and precise.

Colt lingers nearby, his gaze sweeping the area for any signs of trouble. Once I've finished counting and confirmed it's all there, I hang back, observing the interaction, my mind ticking over the intricacies of the operation.

Ty's all business, his eyes narrowed in concentration. This exchange of goods and money is a risky procedure we've performed countless times.

Within minutes, the transaction is complete. The boxes are loaded into the SUV, and with a brief nod, the client departs.

We linger for a moment, ensuring the coast is clear. Then we pack up.

"Another successful deal," Ty declares, a note of pride in his voice. "Tonight, we celebrate."

"Celebration can wait," I say, returning to the Mustang. "I've got somewhere I need to be."

And as I climb into the car, my thoughts immediately drift back to Tilly. I can't wait

to get back to her, to see the look on her face when I walk through that door.

20

TILLY

The moment he leaves, I spring into action. Frantically, I pull at the loosened ties binding me and rush to the bathroom. My heart is pounding as I stick my fingers down my throat, willing myself to vomit and rid my body of the drugs he's forced on me. I don't want that poison in my system any longer.

Nausea washes over me, and I heave into the toilet bowl, my body convulsing as I force myself to purge the toxins. A sense of relief hits me as the drug's hold on me begins to lessen. My mind clears, and I know I have to act fast. I need to escape this trailer and this madman.

My gaze lands on my dress, and I rush over and pull it on. It's the first time I've dressed since this man took me. And then I spot a thick black hoody belonging to Phoenix. The desire to cover up and keep warm wins out over putting something belonging to him on. Grabbing it, I pull it over my head, shivering as his scent wraps around me.

I glance at his computer, knowing it might hold some answers, but the security will be insane. I don't have the skills or the time to try and hack it. The desire to smash it to slow him from tracking me is strong, but I decide against it. There could be crucial information related to him faking my death, and I don't want to destroy any potential evidence.

I take a deep breath, steeling myself for what's to come. Time to get out of here. And

I have to be smart about it.

I scan the trailer, checking every window and door, but they're all locked tight, as expected. Phoenix isn't taking any chances when it comes to keeping me trapped here. But then my eyes land on the skylight, and a glimmer of hope sparks within me.

Quietly, I drag a chair over and climb up, testing the skylight. Surprisingly after my first attempt, he didn't fix the lock on it, as it's busted. Too confident he'd never allow me to slip free again. I waste no time hoisting myself up and through the narrow opening. The cool night air caresses my face as I pull myself onto the trailer's roof, and I have to stifle a joyful cry.

I'm out! I'm finally out of that hellish prison.

Carefully, I inch my way toward the edge of the roof, peering down at the ground below. It's a drop, but I've had worse falls rock climbing before. Taking a deep breath, I lower myself over the edge and drop down, my knees bending to absorb the impact.

I stumble, but I'm free! I did it!

A grin spreads as I straighten up and take in my surroundings. The carnival is quiet and still, the neon lights dimmed for the night. But I don't have time to waste. I need to figure out where I am and how to get home.

Determined, I start walking, keeping to the shadows if Phoenix is nearby. I will make it out of this nightmare and then find a way to expose Phoenix for the monster he truly is.

My heart is pounding as I make my way through the carnival. I'm on the lookout for anyone who can help me. Once out of the carnival grounds, I approach a group of

young men, their faces illuminated by the glow of their cell phones as they huddle together, laughing and enjoying the night.

“Excuse me,” I say, my voice sounding strange to my ears. “Do you know where we are? What town is this?”

They stare at me as if I’ve sprouted a second head, and I realize how much of a mess I must look.

“You’re in Greenvale,” one of them finally answers, his eyes narrowed in suspicion. “Why? You lost or something?”

I’m hit with a wave of relief. Greenvale. It’s a few hours from Oakridge, but I know the area. I can find my way home from here.

“Thanks,” I mutter. “Could I borrow one of your phones?”

The taller of the four men steps toward me. “Why are you lost?” He repeats.

A predatory glint ignites in his eyes, and instantly, I know these guys aren’t going to help me. Instead of replying, I turn around and walk in the opposite direction.

“Where are you going!” He calls out.

I break into a sprint, too spooked by everything that has happened to me to linger. My feet carry me in the direction I know will lead me toward the main road out of here. I need to distance myself from the carnival and Phoenix.

As I walk, my mind is racing. I need to find a phone so I can call the police, my parents, someone. Let them know I’m alive and that Phoenix is dangerous and faked my death. I can’t even begin to imagine the pain and suffering he’s put my loved ones

through with his twisted plan.

The weight of what I must do settles on my shoulders, and I walk with a new sense of purpose. I have to get to a phone but keep a low profile or get out of here first then find a phone, whichever comes first. Phoenix will look for me when he realizes I'm gone.

I quicken my pace, a sense of urgency fueling my steps. I need to get help, and I must do it now.

PHOENIX

I storm into the trailer and pause, confused. Where is she? My eyes dart around frantically, scanning every corner for any sign of Tilly. Then, my gaze lands on the half-open bathroom door, and the sour smell of vomit assaults my nostrils.

My heart lurches. She threw up the sedatives. The realization hits me hard, and I swallow the panic that rises in my throat. I should've known she'd fight back. Tilly is stronger than she looks, and now she's gone. My mind races with worry—is she lost, hurt, or worse?

I didn't think she'd be able to escape, but I prepared for this possibility. I injected a tracker under her skin as insurance. I pull out my phone, open the tracking app, and sure enough, she is only a mile from the carnival. I curse under my breath, imagining all the terrible things that could happen to her out there alone at night.

Without a second thought, I dash out of the trailer and head straight for Nash's motorcycle. I know he keeps a spare key under the seat, and I'm grateful for him being such a fucking idiot as I fire up the engine. A million thoughts race through my mind as I speed into the night.

I have to find Tilly, and fast. It's dangerous out here, and she's alone. My pulse quickens as I imagine all the potential threats lurking in the shadows. But I have to stay calm. She's close, and I will get to her before anything happens.

I race down the road, my eyes scanning the surroundings for movement. After an eternity, I spot a car pulled over up ahead.

Checking the tracker, it looks like she's either trying to hitch around or someone is messing with her.

Anger hits me like a lightning bolt as I pull over. There she is, my Tilly, begging some dirtbag in a van for a ride.

"Please," she pleads. "I'll do anything. Just get me out of here."

I clench my jaw, my blood boiling at the thought of what this guy might do to her. Clearing my throat, I leave the shadows and say, "Take a hike, buddy. She's with me."

The guy in the van looks me up and down, taking in my stature. He thinks better of arguing and drives off with a scowl, tires spitting gravel.

I turn to Tilly, expecting relief on her face, but instead, she stares at me with wide, frightened eyes. Before I can say a word, she turns and runs toward the woods. My heart sinks as I realize she's still afraid of me.

I start after her, calling out, "Tilly, wait!"

But she doesn't stop. The moon illuminates her panicked form as she darts between the trees, and I easily keep pace.

"Tilly, please! I want to talk. I promise I won't hurt you. You have to understand—I did this for you."

I yearn for her to turn around, to give me a chance to explain. But she only runs

faster, branches snapping under her feet. My throat tightens at the thought of her out here alone, exhausted and frightened. I never wanted her to feel this way.

I have to stop her. This is ridiculous; she's running from her soul mate. My feet pound against the forest floor, quickly gaining on her. She's terrified, and that's my fault, but I must keep her safe.

I'm faster and soon catch up, wrapping my arms around her waist and lifting her off the ground. She kicks and squirms in my arms, and I spin her around, pressing her back against a tree trunk. Her eyes are wild, and her chest heaves as she struggles for breath.

"Shh, Tilly, it's me. Stop fighting me," I plead, but she screams, a high-pitched sound that pierces the night.

In a desperate attempt to silence her, I clamp my hand over her mouth. My voice is harsh as I growl, "Don't make me gag you. Your screams are turning me on. Keep it up, and I'll fuck you right here, make you scream for a different reason."

Her eyes widen at my words, and she freezes in my arms. I remove my hand from her mouth, and she takes a shuddering breath. For a moment, we stand there, locked in a silent standoff .

Then, softly, so softly I can barely hear it, she whispers, "Why are you doing this?"

A low sound escapes my throat at her words.

I push away from the tree, stepping back to look at her. My gaze roams over her face, swollen lips, and wild hair. At that moment, I want nothing more than for her to understand.

“You’re mine, Tilly. You’ve been from the moment I saw you,” I say, my voice hoarse. “I need you. You’re my entire world.”

I see the fear, confusion, and desire waging a war within her. I step forward, my hands reaching out to cup her face, my thumbs brushing away the tears from her cheeks.

“Don’t be scared,” I whisper, my voice cracking as I gently kiss her. “I would never hurt you.”

Her body relaxes against mine as I kiss her, and she kisses me back, tentative at first, then with growing hunger. Her hands fist in my shirt, pulling me closer, and I groan, all rational thought disappearing in the heat of the moment.

“God, I need you,” I breathe against her lips, my hands moving desperately over her body.

She whimpers, and I feel her hands tugging at my belt, needing me too. I shove down the voice in my head that tells me I’m taking advantage of her vulnerability.

Instead, I let my obsession take over and lift her against the tree, pressing her back against the rough bark. She wraps her legs around my waist, and I thrust into her, claiming her as mine .

Her head falls back, exposing the long line of her throat, and I suck a mark onto her skin, growling in satisfaction. “You’re mine, and everyone will know it.”

Tilly moans, her hands tight on my shoulders, her body moving with mine. The moment is electric, our connection fiery and all-consuming. My obsession blazes as I punctuate each thrust with a nip of her skin.

I move my hips faster and faster, my hands gripped tightly around her waist. My breath comes in short gasps, and my heart pounds wildly. The tree bark digs into Tilly's back with each thrust, but she doesn't notice. Her eyes are shut tight, a mixture of pleasure and pain playing across her face.

"You like that, baby? You like it rough?" I growl, my voice harsh in the quiet of the night.

Tilly nods frantically, her breath coming in short gasps. "Yes, please don't stop."

A grin spreads across my face. "Never, baby. I'll never stop. You're mine, and I'll never let you go."

I lean down, my lips brushing against her ear as I continue to move my hips. "I'd kill for you, Tilly. Any man who even looks at you, I'll fucking murder him. I'll rip his heart out with my bare hands."

Tilly moans at my words, her body trembling against mine. I know she shouldn't love this dark side of me, but she does. She craves it, needs it as much as I need her.

"That guy in the van, I wanted to tear him limb from limb for even speaking to you," I confess, my voice hoarse and raw. "But I held back for you."

Her hands move to my face, her touch gentle, even as I dominate her body. "It's crazy, but I want you."

Her words fuel my obsession, and I groan, my hips moving uncontrollably. "I'm yours, baby. Always and forever. But you're mine too, and no one will ever take you from me."

I kiss her then, fiercely, desperately, claiming her lips with the same fervor as I claim

her body.

Tilly matches my passion, her kisses fueling the fire burning inside me.

Our bodies move together in perfect sync, our hearts pounding as one. The night air is electric, and the trees seem to dance with the intensity of our desire.

I feel the coil in my abdomen tighten, and my grip on Tilly's waist becomes bruising as I hold her in place, not wanting this moment to end.

"I'm going to breed you, baby. Mark you as mine forever." The force of our movements causes the branches above to sway. The moonlight filters through the leaves, dappling Tilly's skin with silvery light.

My favorite part of fucking her is when she's wild and helpless, consumed by the same fire that burns within me. I want to consume her, brand her with my touch so deeply that no one will ever be able to take her from me.

"You like the sound of that, don't you, baby? My cock filling you up, marking you as mine," I growl, my lips hovering over her ear.

"Yes," she breathes, her nails digging into my shoulders. "I do."

She meets my thrusts with her desperate movements, a feverish need in her eyes. Knowing someone could find us like this here in the woods only adds to the thrill.

The coil in my abdomen tightens further, an electric pulse shooting through me with each thrust. I'm close, and I want Tilly to explode with me.

"Come for me, baby," I command, moving one hand down to rub circles over her clit. "I want to feel you tighten around my cock."

Tilly whimpers, her body shaking as she teeters on the edge. I thrust harder, needing to feel her fall apart around me.

“That’s it, baby, let go,” I whisper, my lips brushing against hers.

As if on cue, her body shudders, a cry escaping her as she climaxes. The vibrations ripple through me, pushing me over the edge.

“Fuck,” I groan, my hips stuttering as I release inside her. “Oh, God—So fucking perfect?—”

I bury my face in her neck, my teeth scraping her skin as I fight for control. Finally, I surrender to the pleasure, my body shuddering with the force of my release.

For a moment, we stand there, breathless, our hearts pounding in unison. I tighten my grip on Tilly, unwilling to let her go, even as my body begins to slip from its high.

“That’s it, baby,” I murmur, kissing her neck. “All mine.”

Tilly’s chest rises and falls rapidly, her eyes closed as she revels in the aftershocks. I feel a rush of possessiveness as I realize she just gave me everything—her pleasure, her release, her trust .

I stroke my hands up and down her back, soothing her as she comes down from her high. The reality of what just happened begins to sink in, and I feel a surge of protectiveness.

“I know I shouldn’t have taken you like this out here in the open,” I admit. “But I needed you, and I couldn’t wait.”

She turns her face toward me, her eyes shining in the moonlight.

Tilly starts to shake in the aftermath of our passion as if she's just now realizing what happened. She tries to squirm out of my arms, her eyes darting around like a trapped animal. Her sudden fear scrapes my nerves like a knife, and my mouth flattens into a thin line.

"What the hell are you doing? Get off me!" She slaps my arms, her nails digging into my skin.

I tighten my grip, irritation coursing through me. "Calm down, Tilly. There's no need for that."

"No need? You tied me up, drugged me, faked my death, and now you're manhandling me in the middle of the damn woods! Of course, there's a need!" She struggles against me, her feet kicking out.

My patience, already thin, snaps. I spin her around and pin her back against my chest, capturing her wrists in one of my hands. "Listen, you little brat," I growl, my lips close to her ear. "You tried to run away. Do you know how dangerous that is? Anything could have happened to you out here."

She tries to wriggle free, but I hold her firmly in place. "You need to be punished for this," I mutter, planting soft kisses along her jaw, hoping to soothe her even as I threaten her. "You must learn that running from me isn't an option."

Tilly freezes, and I can feel her tense against me. "Punished? How?" she murmurs.

"I'm going to have to increase security if you're going to keep trying to escape." I pull her wrists higher, stretching her body against mine, emphasizing my strength and her vulnerability. "And we'll have to move you somewhere more secure."

She makes a frightened sound, and I know she's picturing a dark, windowless room. I

smile at the image. Maybe I will put her in a room like that to teach her a lesson.

“No, please!” She tries to jerk her wrists out of my grasp, turning her head to look at me over her shoulder, her eyes wide and frightened. “You can’t keep me locked up. I’ll go crazy.”

I chuckle, my chest vibrating against her back. “Well, we can’t have that, can we? So, maybe you’ll start behaving and save us both the trouble.”

She sags against me, defeated. “What do you mean by ‘more secure’?” she whispers.

I trail my lips along her neck, loving the way she shivers in response. “I have a place. Underground. No windows, no easy way out.”

“No!” She twists in my arms, renewed panic in her eyes. “You can’t do that. Please, Phoenix, you can’t?—”

I cut her off with a sharp tug on her wrists. “You’re not leaving me a choice, Tilly,” I snarl. “Do you understand? It’s for your own good. ”

She’s quiet for a moment, her breath ragged. Finally, she whispers, “Why do you even want me? I don’t understand. I’m nothing special.”

I bury my face in her hair, inhaling her sweet scent. “Nothing special? Of course, you are. You’re everything to me. But you need to learn that running isn’t an option. You’re mine, and you’re staying put.”

“Okay,” she says, her voice shaking. “Just please don’t take me to that place. I’ll be good. I won’t try to run away again.”

I smile against her hair, victory singing through my veins. “Maybe,” I murmur.

“We’ll see.”

She whimpers, her body going lax against mine, and I know she’s accepted her fate, at least for now. I run my hands up and down her arms, soothing her even as I plot out the details of her captivity.

I tighten my hold on her, breathing in the scent of her hair, relishing the feel of her soft body pressed against mine. This little escape attempt of hers was a minor setback, but it’s nothing I can’t handle. Tilly is mine; one day, she’ll willingly accept that fact. Until then, I’ll have to keep her close and safe from the dangers of the world and herself.

TILLY

I drag my feet beside Phoenix, feeling like I'm walking through quicksand. The weight of my defeat pulls me down, each step a struggle.

Phoenix is insane, and the realization hits me like a ton of bricks. I've never felt so trapped, so utterly helpless. His threat to put me underground looms over me like a dark cloud.

I imagine being buried, enclosed in a small space with no way out, and my heart pounds. I start to question if I even want to escape him anymore.

He tightens his grip on my arm, pulling me closer.

I recall the way he just made me come on his cock in the woods, the intensity of my orgasm. My cheeks burn at the memory, and a part of me craves that feeling again.

It's sick and twisted, but I can't deny he's dredging up feelings I didn't know I had, which scares me.

I glance at him, taking in his sharp jawline and the tattoos that adorn his muscular arms. There's something about him that draws me in, even as I fear him and hate him.

I try to understand the complex mix of emotions swirling inside me—fear, desire, and confusion. It's like being on a rollercoaster, my stomach dropping as we reach the

peak before plummeting downward.

My mind races as I contemplate my next move. Do I keep trying to escape, knowing the futility of it all? Or do I resign myself to my fate, to being his captive? I think of how he touches me, the sparks that ignite in my body despite my efforts to resist.

I slow my steps, my feet feeling like lead. “I won’t ever run again, Phoenix.” My voice is quiet. “But please don’t take me underground. I’m scared of the dark.” The words slip out before I can stop them, exposing my deepest fear.

The tension between us is palpable. I brace myself for his reaction, for the storm to erupt. But instead, Phoenix’s eyes soften, searching mine. He hesitates, and in that moment, I see the conflict within him—the tortured soul behind the ruthless exterior.

“Okay, Tills. No underground cell for you.” His voice is low. “But that means you can’t try to escape again. Ever. You have to promise me that.”

I know the weight of my words even before they leave my mouth. “I promise.”

I’m committing myself to a future with Phoenix, accepting my captivity.

Phoenix’s grip on my arm loosens, and he pulls me closer, his eyes burning into mine. “Good. That’s settled, then. Now, let’s get you back to the trailer. You need to rest.”

I nod, feeling dazed as he walks me back to the motorcycle he left on the side of the road. The cool night air brushes my skin, but I’m numb to the temperature, my mind spinning.

I imagine what my life will be like from now on. Will Phoenix keep his word? And what about my promise? Have I just condemned myself to a life of captivity?

Questions swirl in my mind, but I push them aside, focusing on the here and now. One step at a time. I have to play this game if I want to survive.

I slide onto the back of the motorcycle, my heart heavy as I lean into Phoenix's back and wrap my arm around him. I still can't believe I'm giving in to him, agreeing to return to my prison. But what choice do I have? The idea of being trapped underground in the dark terrifies me more than anything.

"Sorry, no helmets. I had to borrow this bike from a friend in a rush," Phoenix says as he kicks the bike to life with a roar.

As we pull away, the wind whips through my hair, and I feel a fleeting sense of freedom. I breathe in the crisp night air, knowing it might be the last time I feel the wind on my face for a while. I'm torn between relief at not being put in an underground room and dreading returning to his trailer.

I clear my throat when the bike slows back at the carnival, and the engine silences. "Can I ask you something?"

Phoenix tenses slightly. "Sure."

"Were you panicked because you lost control over me or because you cared?" I demand

I feel his body tense under my hands as he grips the handles tighter. I know my question has hit a nerve. I'm probing the depths of his psyche, trying to understand the man who kidnapped me.

"Is there a difference?" he asks.

My heart skips a beat at the raw honesty in his response.

“I think there is,” I say, leaning closer to him. “Caring suggests a level of emotion and attachment. And losing control means you want to keep me as your possession.”

Phoenix is silent for a moment as if considering his response. “Maybe it’s both. Maybe I care, and losing control means losing you.”

His admission sends a jolt through me. Phoenix cares? The idea seems absurd, and yet, at this moment, I can believe him. “Let’s go.” He slides off the motorcycle and helps me off it.

Back at the trailer, Phoenix unlocks the door and ushers me inside. All I want to do is bolt, to put as much distance as possible between us, but my legs feel like jelly, and I know it’s useless.

Phoenix breaks the silence. “Are you hungry? I can cook something.”

My stomach rumbles in response, and I nod. Hunger pangs ripple through me as I realize I haven’t eaten since... I can’t even remember.

He disappears into the tiny kitchenette, and I sink into the chair, watching him move around the space. I’m acutely aware of the silence and the sound of my breathing.

“So...” I attempt small talk, unsure what else to do. “How long have you been with the carnival?”

Phoenix chops vegetables, his back to me. “Twelve years now. I keep to myself mostly.”

My brow furrows as he must have been a kid when he joined. “How old are you?”

His jaw clenches. “Twenty-six. Why?”

“So you were fourteen when you joined? How did you end up here?” I ask, genuinely curious.

“Tyson found me.” He pauses as if debating whether to say more. “I had nowhere else to go.”

I wait for him to elaborate, but he falls silent, unwilling to divulge more. I want to press further to understand their connection, but something in his demeanor stops me.

The sizzle of food hitting the pan and the scent of garlic and onions fills the trailer. Hunger grips my stomach, and I realize just how hungry I am. I watch him move confidently around the small space, a man in his element. My mind flashes to how he moves over me with the same confidence and grace. Heat rises to my cheeks at the memory.

“Here.” Phoenix sets a plate of pasta before me and sits across from me. “Eat up.”

I dig in. The pasta is simple yet delicious, and I savor every bite. Phoenix watches me as I eat, his eyes hooded.

We eat silently, our forks clinking against the plates, filling the space between us. I try to focus on my food and taste each bite, but my mind keeps drifting to my captor .

“This is delicious,” I say between mouthfuls, breaking the silence. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” He offers a small smile, and at that moment, I see a glimpse of the man behind the mask.

My heart skips a beat at the sight, and I quickly look down at my plate, unsure how to process this version of Phoenix. I’m drawn to him. That much is clear. But I’m also his captive, and that reality keeps me on edge.

PHOENIX

I stand in the shadows, watching her chest rise and fall with each breath. Tilly's face is relaxed as she lies there, utterly defenseless.

Earlier, I'd slipped something into her drink—just enough to make her compliant, to ensure she wouldn't resist when I bound her to the bed. Now, she's completely at my mercy.

I step closer, my eyes taking in the sight of her. She's stunning, even in her vulnerability. Her chest is bare, her nipples hardening in the cool air. My fingers twitch as I fight the urge to touch her. Not yet.

I've placed a vibrator inside her and a butt plug, the first time she's experienced that particular sensation. A smile stretches over my face as I imagine the pleasure that will soon rip through her.

Her eyelids flutter, and momentarily, I wonder if she's waking. But then her breathing evens out again, deep and steady. I glance down at my hand, gripping my hardening cock. She needs to wake up. Now. I need to see her reaction.

Reaching for the remote, I tap the button, and the vibrator comes to life. Tilly's body jerks, her eyes snapping open as a strangled moan escapes her throat. For a moment, she looks confused and disoriented. Then, realization dawns, and her eyes widen.

“Wh-what are you doing?” Her voice is hoarse.

“Shh.” I step closer, my gaze holding her captive. “Just relax and enjoy it.”

The vibrator buzzes again, and she arches her back, a soft cry escaping her lips. Her cheeks blush a pretty pink, and I can see the conflict in her eyes—the desire warring with her need to regain control.

“Please...” she whispers, her voice breaking as another wave of pleasure washes over her. “I can’t... stop it...”

I chuckle. “Why would you want me to stop it, Tilly? You like it. I can see it in your eyes.”

She swallows, her chest heaving. “I-I don’t...”

I lean closer. “Don’t lie to me. I know your body’s on fire right now. You want to come, don’t you?”

She nods hesitantly, her eyes closing as the vibrations wash over her.

“Say it,” I demand, my voice firm. “Tell me what you want.”

“I want...” she bites her lip, her cheeks flaming, “I want to come.”

“That’s my girl.” I step back, my thumb hovering over the remote.

I turn off the vibrator, and suddenly, the room fills with silence as Tilly blinks at me, confusion and desire warring in her eyes. She opens her mouth, but before she can speak, I explain, “This is your punishment, Tilly. You tried to run away so you don’t get to come.”

“What? No, please!” Her voice is filled with desperation as she begs. “I won’t try to escape again, I promise.”

I tap the button on the remote for the butt plug, and Tilly’s eyes go wide, squealing while her body arches off the bed.

“Oh God!” she cries out, her hips writhing against the restraints. “Please, Phoenix, I’m sorry! Turn it off, please!”

Instead, I step closer, reaching out to trail my fingers lightly over her breasts, circling her nipples without quite touching them. She moans, her eyes fluttering closed as her breath quickens.

“Say it again,” I murmur, leaning down so my lips barely brush her ear. “Say you’re sorry.”

“I’m sorry!” she gasps, her chest heaving. “I promise I won’t try to run away again.”

I chuckle, a dark, possessive sound, kissing her neck softly. “Not yet, baby. I want to hear you beg.”

“Please,” she whimpers while the vibrations pulse through her. “I’ll do anything. Just make it stop.”

“Anything?” I trace the shell of her ear with my tongue, enjoying how her body trembles. “Are you sure about that?”

“Y-yes...” Her eyes squeeze shut. “Just stop the vibrator, please.”

I chuckle again, the sound making her visibly tremble. “As you wish.” With a final tap of the button, I stop the vibrating butt plug, leaving Tilly panting and trembling in

the aftermath.

Her breathing evens slowly, and her eyelids flutter open, her eyes meeting mine. We stare at each other briefly, the air thick with unspoken words.

Then, with a soft groan, she shifts against the restraints, testing their strength. “Let me go, Phoenix. Please, I can’t take much more of this.”

I smile as I reach for the remote again. “Oh, we’re just getting started, baby. You haven’t felt the best part yet.”

As if reading my mind, Tilly’s eyes flicker downward, her breath catching as she notices the clamps for the first time.

“What the—?” She tugs at the restraints again, her eyes wide. “Let me go, Phoenix! This isn’t funny!”

“Oh, it’s very funny, Tilly. Especially when I tell you what these clamps do.”

Her eyes narrow, and she strains against the cuffs. “What do you mean? What did you do to me?”

Reaching into my pocket, I pull out my phone and tap on the screen several times. “I designed these clamps myself. They’re linked to my phone.”

“What?” Tilly’s voice rises an octave, her eyes widening further. “What does that mean?”

I smirk, my thumb hovering over the screen. “It means that I control the intensity of the clamps.”

Her eyes dart to the clamps, and she swallows, her chest rising and falling rapidly. “What are you going to do? ”

Without answering, I tap a button, and Tilly gasps, her back arching as the clamps tighten further.

“Oh God!” she calls out, her body squirming against the restraints. “That hurts!”

I smirk, feeling a twisted sense of power as I watch her writhe.

“Please, Phoenix!” she begs, her voice laced with pain. “Turn it off! They’re too tight!”

“Not tight enough, I think.” I tap the button again, and Tilly screams, her body bucking against the bed.

“Stop!” she pleads, tears welling in her eyes. “Please, I’m sorry! I won’t try to escape again. Just stop!”

I step closer, my eyes never leaving hers. “You don’t get to make demands. You’re mine, remember?”

“Please...” she whimpers, her body going limp against the restraints. “I’ll do anything you want!”

My thumb hovers over the button, a sense of power coursing through me. “Anything?” I ask.

Tilly nods frantically, her eyes wild. “Anything! Please, stop!”

I smile, a dark, twisted expression. “As you wish.” With a final tap, I turn off the

clamps, and Tilly collapses back against the bed, her breath coming in sharp gasps.

Her eyes, usually so defiant, plead with me, and it only makes my cock harder.

“You shouldn’t offer to do anything I want, Tilly,” I warn her, my voice a low, husky whisper.

She swallows, her eyes fixated on me. “What do you want?”

I smile, my eyes raking over her body. “Right now?” I ask, my thumb tapping idly on my phone. “I want your tight ass wrapped around my cock.”

Her eyes widen, and her cheeks flush, but she holds my gaze. “I can’t...” She bites her lip, her eyes flicking to the restraints and then back to me. “I’ve never?—”

“It’s non-negotiable,” I interrupt, my voice brooking no argument. “You said you’d do anything, and I plan to hold you to that.”

She looks horrified, and my cock leaks in response. “I—I can’t just?—”

“You can and you will,” I assert. “You took the butt plug easily enough. A bit more lube and playing, and my cock will stretch your ass wide open.”

I move toward the bed, my eyes never leaving hers. My girl’s gorgeous, even in her fear. Slowly, I begin to undo the restraints, enjoying the way she watches me, her eyes full of uncertainty.

“Get on your hands and knees,” I order.

She hesitates, and I narrow my eyes. “Now, Tilly.”

She nods, breathing rapidly as she shifts onto her hands and knees. The position exposes her pussy, wet and glistening, a clear sign of her arousal despite her reluctance.

I smirk, my cock twitching as I move toward her. She flinches as I reach out, but I merely trail my fingers lightly over her ass, spreading her cheeks to expose her hole, which is stretched around the butt plug. She's so tight, so untouched, and the thought sends a bolt of desire through me.

I hum in appreciation, letting my fingers dip lower, my touch feather-light as I stroke her engorged clit. She moans, her breath quickening as I tease her. Slowly, I tug on the butt plug and pull it out a bit before pushing it back into her, watching as her body accepts the intrusion.

Her breath catches, and she bites her lip, her body tensing.

"Relax," I murmur. "Breathe through it."

She begins to relax slowly, her body softening as she adjusts to the sensation.

With slow, deliberate movements, I move the butt plug in and out, fucking her ass slowly, watching as her pussy leaks even more. She moans, her body rocking with the motion, and I pick up the pace.

I add more lube to the plug, ensuring her ass is stretched and ready. My cock twitches as I imagine plunging into her, claiming her in the most intimate way possible. She might be reluctant now but will beg for more when I'm balls deep.

"You like that, don't you?" I murmur, fucking her with the plug. "You like the way it feels."

She nods, her body squirming as she tries to find relief. “Please...” she whispers. “I need?—”

“I know what you need,” I interrupt, my voice firm as I pull the plug out slowly, leaving her empty. “You need my cock.”

She whimpers, her body trembling as she waits for me to continue.

I chuckle, a dark, husky sound, as I position myself behind her. “Don’t worry, baby. I’m going to give it to you.”

Adding more lube to her ass and my cock, I ensure I’m slick and ready to slide in. With one hand, I guide my cock to her entrance. She’s so tight, so perfect, and I can’t wait to feel her wrapped around me.

Slowly, I begin to push into her, her body resisting at first before gradually accepting my length.

Tilly makes these little whimpers of pain, and fuck, it makes me harden more. I push into her, feeling her tight heat envelop me. She’s so small, so snug around me, and the thought of claiming this untouched part of her makes me fucking feral.

She tenses around me, her body resisting my invasion.

“Relax, baby,” I murmur. “It’ll feel much better if you relax and let me in.”

Slowly, I withdraw and then thrust back into her, my body demanding more.

“Oh God!” she cries out, her voice a mix of pain and pleasure. “You’re—so big...”

“I know, baby,” I grunt, my control slipping as I begin to move in and out of her.

“Just let me fill you up.”

“I—I can’t...” she bites her lip, her body squirming. “It hurts!”

I ignore her words, focusing on the sensation of her intense warmth enveloping me. Slowly, I thrust long and deep as I claim every inch of her.

“Please...” she whimpers, her voice breaking. “Stop, it hurts!”

I shake my head, my eyes closing as I savor the sensation. “It’ll feel better in a moment, I promise.”

Her breath catches, and she whimpers, her body tensing with each thrust. “Oh God, please...”

I reach around, my hand finding her clit as I continue to move inside her. “Let go, baby,” I whisper. “Relax and enjoy it.”

I keep thrusting into Tilly, savoring the way she feels around me. Her body slowly relaxes, the resistance melting away, and soon, she’s meeting my thrusts, pushing back against me.

Her moans fill the room, music to my ears, spurring me on. I lean over her, my hands gripping her hips as I pound into her, claiming every inch of her.

“That’s it, baby,” I encourage, my voice a low, guttural growl. “Take every inch deep in that ass.”

“Oh God!” she cries out, her body writhing beneath me. “It feels so good!”

I grin, picking up the pace and driving into her harder. “Of course it does, I was made

to fuck every one of your holes.”

“Yes!” she moans, her head tossing back as she surrenders to the pleasure. “Harder, Phoenix, please!”

I oblige, my cock thrusting deep and hard, my balls slapping against her cunt with each powerful thrust. She’s so responsive, and it drives me wild.

“You’re so tight, baby,” I groan. “I’m not going to last much longer.”

“Neither am I!” she gasps, her fingers clawing at the sheets as she meets my thrusts. “Don’t stop, Phoenix, please!”

“Come for me, Tilly. Now.” I demand, my voice harsh.

Tilly glances at me over her shoulder, biting her lip as she teeters on the edge. “I—I can’t...”

“Do it.” The order is harsh as I punctuate it with a thrust. “I know you’re close. Let me feel it.”

With a strangled cry, she falls apart, her body clenching around me as she orgasms. Her muscles clenching me so tight.

“Fuck, sweetheart,” I groan. “Such a good girl.”

With a final, powerful thrust, I bury myself deep inside her, feeling my release rush over me like a fucking atomic bomb. Tilly groans, her body still trembling from her orgasm. I grasp her hips securely, maintaining her position as I come, filling her up and marking her as mine.

Temporarily, we're both breathless, our bodies spent and sated. Then, slowly, I withdraw, my softening cock slipping out of her stretched hole. Tilly collapses onto the bed, her chest heaving as she catches her breath. I kneel there, admiring the image of her—hair tousled, cheeks flushed, body glistening with sweat—and feel a possessiveness unlike anything I've ever experienced.

That was meant to be a fucking punishment, but I got her off. And that annoys me. She's a bad girl for trying to run, but soon she'll have to accept the truth. She's mine from now until the day we fucking die, and nothing will ever tear us apart.

PHOENIX

In the following days, I attempt to make Tilly feel more at ease around me. I don't tie her up. Instead, I give her some freedom to move around the trailer and do simple tasks like cooking dinner or dabbling with code on one of my old laptops that isn't connected to wifi. After all, I can't trust her not to try and contact her family. And I bought her some clothes so she's more comfortable.

It's a small gesture, but I hope it shows her I mean no real harm—that I want to keep her.

Each night, we share the same bed to sleep. My body betrays me every time, getting aroused just from her proximity. The memories of that night in the woods play vividly in my mind, and then her punishment which resulted in me fucking her ass. But I resist acting on my urges, not wanting to push her too far too fast. This has to move at her pace now .

Tonight, while we're cleaning up after a simple chicken dinner she prepared, I attempt a different approach. "Hey, how about tonight you show me how good you are at coding? It could be fun to see your skill level before we start our lessons."

Her eyes light up briefly before the guarded look returns. But she nods slowly. "Okay, yeah. Sure."

I gesture for Tilly to follow me to my pride and joy—my sprawling computer setup

with multiple high-definition monitors. It's the nerve center of all my hacking activities, though I don't mention that part to her.

Settling into my plush gaming chair, I pull up a complex-looking coding interface on the central screen. Lines of code scroll by in a terminal window while a 3D wireframe model rotates on the display above it.

"This is one of the IDEs I use pretty often," I explain, glancing over at Tilly. "You familiar with this environment at all?"

Her eyes widen as she takes in the high-tech setup. "Yeah. We used this same program in my advanced programming course last semester. I was starting to get the hang of the 3D rendering integration."

"No shit? Well, color me impressed." I flash her a grin. Most people look at this stuff like it's ancient Greek. "Want to show me what you were working on?"

Tilly nods, a glimmer of excitement in her eyes. I slide my chair back, giving her room to approach the keyboard. Her fingers fly over the keys, pulling up the project files and dependencies with quick commands.

In moments, she has a basic 3D model of a castle rendering in real time as she changes the underlying code. I watch, fascinated, as she adds shading and texture and manipulates the virtual light sources. She has a real talent for this.

"Damn, Tilly," I say after watching her work for a few minutes. "You've got some skills. I mean, this is quality stuff."

A small, proud smile tugs at her lips. "Thanks. I love working with the visual and design aspects, making something from nothing, you know?"

“Absolutely. You’re a natural at this.” I meet her eyes, letting my admiration show. And I mean it. With time and training, she could be a formidable hacker herself.

The thought sends a secret thrill through me. Tilly and I would be an unstoppable force. Maybe, in time, she’ll be ready to see this other side of me. But for now, baby steps.

There’s a spark in Tilly’s eyes that I haven’t seen since I kidnapped her as she delves into the code. She’s in her element, and damn, is it sexy to watch. I show her some tricks to speed up the rendering process, and her eyes light up even more. She’s a fast learner, quickly picking up some of my advanced techniques.

“How did you even do that?” She leans closer to me as I navigate through a particularly tricky section of code.

“Trade secret.” I grin at her, feeling her body close to mine, our arms brushing. “You’ll have to stick with these lessons to learn the good stuff.”

“I’m not going anywhere,” she murmurs .

Our fingers brush on the keyboard as we reach for the same key, and an electric jolt passes between us. My dick goes rock hard at the contact, and I shift in my seat.

“Sorry,” she says, her cheeks flushing.

“Don’t be.” I turn to face her, our faces just inches apart. I can feel her breath on my lips. “I was just going to say, you’re pretty good at this.”

“Me?” She laughs. “You’re the one with the insane skills. This is like child’s play to you.”

“I told you I could teach you anything.” I let my voice drop lower, and our gazes locked.

I’ve been holding back, trying to give her space, but it’s driving me fucking crazy. I’m about to lose it, and she knows it. Her eyes keep flicking down to the bulge in my pants, and I see the desire burning in them.

“Have you been thinking about this cock, baby?” I growl, my voice gruff with need. I adjust myself in my pants, unable to hide my arousal any longer.

Her eyes are glued to my crotch. “Maybe,” she whispers.

I let out a hoarse laugh, savoring the moment. “Don’t play coy with me. I’ve seen the way you keep looking at it. Bet you’ve been thinking about everything I could do to you.”

She bites her lip, but a spark of defiance enters her eyes. “What things?”

I lean in close, my voice low and gravelly. “Filthy things. Bet you want me to spank that pretty little ass of yours until it’s nice and red. ”

Her breath hitches, and I see her nipples pebble under her shirt. “Maybe I do,” she challenges.

“Oh, you do, do you?” I squeeze my cock, letting out a groan at the pressure. “Do you want me to bend you over this desk and fuck you from behind until you scream?”

“Yes,” she moans, her cheeks flaming red. But her eyes are locked on mine, daring me to continue.

“How about I fill that tight pussy up and pound into you until you no longer know

you're own name?" I growl. "Do you want me to breed your tight little cunt, so everyone knows you belong to me?"

"Yes," she breathes, her eyes fluttering shut as she surrenders to the fantasy. "Oh, God, yes."

"That's what I thought." My voice is thick with desire, and I stand up, pulling her with me. "You've been begging for it all night, Tilly. Asking for this cock without even knowing it. Get on your knees, baby," I command. "It's time you tasted what's been teasing you all night."

Tilly's eyes spark with something dangerous, something that tells me she's not just playing along anymore. She's into it, and I will take full advantage of that.

She doesn't hesitate, sinking to her knees in front of me. My heart pounds as I undo my belt, freeing my straining cock.

"You want this?" I ask, my voice gruff, even as I know the answer.

"Yes," she breathes, and it's like a struck match to my soul.

I step forward, my cock hovering in front of her face. I feel her breath on the sensitive tip, and my balls draw tight, aching to release.

"Then take it," I growl, guiding my cock to her lips.

Her mouth opens, and she takes me inside, her tongue swirling along the underside of my shaft. I groan, threading my fingers into her hair and guiding her further onto my cock.

Fucking hell, the last time I felt her mouth on me was in that coffee shop. Her lips are

soft, her tongue swirling as she takes me deeper, sucking gently.

“That’s it, baby,” I encourage, my eyes rolling back at the pleasure. “Suck that cock. Get it nice and wet.”

She takes me deeper with each bob of her head. The warmth of her mouth and the slickness of her saliva make me want to explode right then and there.

But I hold back, wanting to make this last. Wanting to savor every second of this intense, mind-blowing blowjob.

“You like having my cock in your mouth, don’t you, Tilly?” I ask.

She hums her agreement, the vibration shooting through my dick. “Fuck, yes,” I groan, pulling her hair gently, directing the pace. “You’re such a good girl for me.”

Pulling out of her mouth, I stroke my cock, leaking precum at the tip. “Open wide for me, baby. I’m going to fuck that throat of yours until you’re gagging on my cock.”

I guide my cock back to her lips, and she opens obediently, taking me deep into her throat. I begin to thrust, slowly at first, but soon picking up speed as she relaxes around me.

“Fuck, yes,” I groan, the head of my cock bumping against the back of her throat. “Take it all, baby. Take my whole cock down your throat like a good little slut.”

She makes a muffled noise of agreement, her eyes watering from the force of my thrusts. But she takes it all, relaxing her throat around me, and it’s the hottest fucking thing I’ve ever seen.

I know I’m not gonna last long with this level of stimulation. The sight of her pretty

lips wrapped around my cock, the feel of her soft mouth sucking me in—it's too much.

“Fuck, I'm close,” I warn, even as I know it's futile. The tightening coil in my balls tells me there's no stopping this tsunami of pleasure that's about to hit.

Tilly sucks even harder as if she knows what I need, and that's all it takes. With a harsh groan, I explode into her throat, my cock twitching as I fill her with my release.

“Swallow it all, baby,” I pant, riding out the waves of pleasure. “Take my cum like a good girl.”

She does, moaning softly, her throat working as she obediently swallows every drop.

I slip my cock out of her mouth, groaning while she looks up at me with tear-filled eyes. “Did you like that, Phoenix?” she asks, drops of my cum adorning her thick lips.

I cup her face, leaning down to kiss her softly. “You know I did, baby.”

I pull her up by her hands and kiss her deeply, tasting myself on her tongue. “Tonight, baby, I'm gonna make you mine in every way.” I tangle my fingers in her hair, my cock already stirring with anticipation. “I'm gonna fill every hole, mark every inch of that gorgeous body, 'til there's no doubt whose you are.” I gently push her down onto the mattress. “Lay back and let me worship that perfect body.”

I peel off her shirt, revealing her lacy bra and the swell of her breasts. With a flick of my wrist, I undo the clasp, baring her creamy skin to my gaze.

Tilly bites her lip but holds my gaze as I lower my head to taste her. My tongue swirls around one taut nipple as my hand cups the other, palming and weighing the soft flesh.

A soft moan escapes her as I suck gently, nipping at the sensitive peak with my teeth. “Fuck, you’re so responsive.”

Her body arches off the bed, offering herself to me, and I smile against her skin. “That’s it, baby,” I encourage. “You just take what you need.”

I move to her other breast, swirling my tongue, sucking gently, and her hands come up to thread in my hair. “Right there,” she whispers.

I grin against her skin, loving how responsive she is. Knowing that every flick of my tongue, every suck, is driving her wild.

Trailing kisses down her stomach, I pause to unbutton her jeans, sliding them slowly down her legs, along with her cotton panties. She lifts her hips to help me, and I admire the view, her pussy bare and already glistening with arousal.

I groan, unable to resist leaning down to kiss her swollen lips. “God, I love seeing you like this, all spread out for me.” My cock twitches at the sight, aching to be inside her .

“Don’t you dare stop there,” she says, a challenge in her eyes.

“Oh, baby, I’m just getting started.” With those words, I settle between her thighs, my mouth hovering just above her pussy. “This sweet cunt is all mine now.”

With a growl, I dive in, my tongue finding her clit and swirling firmly.

“Oh, fuck,” she moans, her hips bucking off the bed. “Phoenix, please.”

Please, what, baby? You want me to keep licking that sweet pussy?”

“Yes,” she moans, her hands twisting in the sheets. “Don’t stop, please.”

I happily oblige, lapping at her pussy, tasting her arousal as I suck on her swollen clit. Her scent fills my nostrils, driving me wild, and I know I won’t be able to hold back much longer.

Her hips buck wildly as she gets closer to the edge. “Please, Phoenix, I need?—”

“I know what you need,” I growl, pulling away to slide my fingers into her. “Tell me you want my cock inside this tight little cunt.”

“Please, I need your cock,” she moans, her legs falling open wider to give me better access.

“With pleasure.” I position myself at her entrance, the head of my cock nudging against her wet folds. “But remember, this pussy is mine now. Only my cock gets to stretch that sweet cunt.” I meet her eyes, wanting to see her surrender in their hazel depths. “Say it. ”

“Yours,” she breathes, her voice filled with desire and resignation. “This pussy is yours, Phoenix.”

“That’s right, baby.” I grin, rubbing the head of my cock against her sensitive clit. With a slow, torturous slide, I push into her, relishing the feeling of her tight heat surrounding me.

“Oh, fuck,” she moans, her eyes fluttering shut as she takes me in. “God, your cock feels so good.”

I lean down, kissing her lips deeply as I move. “You feel even better, baby,” I groan against her mouth. “Your tight little cunt is made for my cock.”

Her hips rise to meet my thrusts as I drive into her, our bodies slapping together. The sound fills the room, a lewd, erotic rhythm that fuels my desire. Tilly is gasping beneath me, her body squirming as my cock hits that spot that has her seeing stars.

“You like that, baby?” I growl. “You like my cock pounding into that sweet pussy?”

“Yes,” she pants. “It feels so good. Don’t stop.”

“Never, baby.” I lean down and kiss her as I thrust harder, my balls slapping against her ass. “This pussy is mine, and I plan to mark it as such.”

My thumb finds her clit, rubbing in tight circles as I continue to drive into her. “Come for me,” I command. “I want to feel that tight cunt clamp my cock like a vise.”

My name tumbles from her lips, and she digs her nails into my arms the moment her orgasm hits. I feel her pussy clench around my cock, milking me, and it’s all I can do not to lose control.

But I want to give her more. Pulling out of her, I flip her over onto her hands and knees, positioning myself behind her. “I’m going to give it to you hard now, baby,” I warn, my voice rough with desire. “I’ll fuck this tight cunt so good. You’re going to be walking funny tomorrow.”

“Please,” she whimpers, her head lowered as she submits to me.

I line myself up with her pussy and thrust into her with one sharp stroke, burying myself balls-deep.

“Fuck,” I groan, resting my hands on her hips as I begin to move, snapping my hips back and forth. “Your pussy feels so damn good, baby.”

I set a brutal pace, pounding into her relentlessly, my eyes falling shut as I lose myself in the pleasure. Tilly is moaning, her body pushing back to meet my thrusts.

Reaching around, I find her clit with my thumb, rubbing in tight circles, wanting to drive her over the edge again. “That’s it, baby,” I encourage, my voice hoarse. “Come all over my cock.”

Her pussy clenches around me, and she cries out, her body shaking as another orgasm rips through her.

“Fuck, yes!” I growl, my orgasm building as I feel her tightness milking my cock. “Take it, baby. Take all of me.”

With a harsh groan, I release, my cock twitching as I fill her pussy with my release. I feel her walls pulsing around me, and I lean over her, wrapping my arms around her as I bury my face in her hair, riding out the waves of pleasure.

“That was—” she begins, her voice breathless.

“Incredible,” I finish for her, pulling out of her and gently guiding her onto her back.

She laughs, her eyes sparkling. “That’s one word for it. ”

Pulling her into my arms, I kiss her softly, feeling at peace. “Get some rest, baby,” I murmur, stroking her hair.

Tilly snuggles into my side, her breath evening out as she drifts to sleep. I stay awake a little longer, just watching her, feeling a swell of protective emotion in my chest. She’s been through so much, yet she’s still in my arms.

And there’s no way in hell I’m ever letting her go.

25

TILLY

The guilt is eating me alive.

I sit at the small table, watching Phoenix prepare our dinner. The nervous flutter in my chest surprises me. I don't want to admit it, but I'm getting comfortable here—and that terrifies me.

He glances over, those piercing eyes seeing right through me. "Something on your mind, baby?" He walks over, dries his hands on a towel, and pulls me into his arms.

It's been two weeks since I escaped that night. I felt the rush of freedom as I ran through the shadows, so close to escaping. But somehow, he found me. Again.

When he touches me, my body betrays me. Every kiss, every caress, every invasion of my body... it's like a drug I can't get enough of. I come harder than I ever have before, crying out his name. A part of me hates myself for it, but I can't seem to stop .

My thoughts drift to my friends and my family. Are they mourning me? Do they think I'm dead? A sick feeling washes over me. While they grieve, I'm here, riding this madman's cock and letting him fill me with his cum daily, multiple times a day. Letting him dominate me until I'm screaming his name.

I push the thoughts away. I can't think about that right now. The guilt is overwhelming when I do. I want to drown in Phoenix and how he makes me feel.

His hands trail down my arms, a comforting gesture.

“Feel like helping me with some coding tonight?” He asks.

“You know I love our lessons,” I reply, trying to sound casual despite how my heart rate picks up. It’s true. I’ve learned more from Phoenix in two weeks than in all my college classes.

He smirks, clearly aware of the effect he has on me. “Good girl. Get set up while I finish prepping for tomorrow’s move.”

As I power on the impressive rig he’s assembled, I can’t help but feel a twinge of sadness. We’ll leave this town soon, putting even more distance between me and my home in Oakridge. A part of me still yearns for that life, the familiarity and comfort of my friends and family.

But then Phoenix returns, his presence commanding my full attention. He leans over me, his body radiating heat as he guides me through the next set of coding challenges. His scent, that intoxicating blend of sandalwood and something uniquely him, surrounds me. My focus narrows to the lines of code in front of me and the rumble of his voice in my ear.

As we work, our bodies brush against each other, sending sparks of electricity through me. I fight the urge to turn and capture his lips with mine, losing myself in the all-consuming desire he ignites.

Because as terrifying as this situation is, as much as a part of me still rebels against it, I can’t deny my connection to this brilliant, dangerous man. He’s awakened something primal in me, a craving I can’t seem to satiate no matter how many times he claims me.

In these quiet moments, just the two of us are lost in the world of code. I can almost forget the guilt and fear that constantly gnaw at me.

“Fuck!” Phoenix growls.

I freeze, the lines of code on the screen blurring. “What’s wrong?” I ask hesitantly.

He doesn’t look at me, his jaw clenched tight. “They’re onto us.”

A chill runs down my spine. “Who? What do you mean?”

Finally, Phoenix meets my gaze, his eyes blazing with fury and something else... fear? “The authorities. They’ve found evidence that your death was faked.”

The room spins as the weight of his words sinks in. My death... faked. Of course, I knew that already, but hearing it out loud again is like a punch to the gut.

Phoenix is still talking, the words tumbling out in a rush. “I don’t know how they figured it out, but they’ve issued a search warrant for you. A missing persons case.”

Missing persons. My friends, my family... do they think I’ve been kidnapped? Guilt and grief twist my insides into knots.

“Tilly.” Phoenix’s voice cuts through the haze, and I realize he’s moved closer, his hands gripping my shoulders firmly. “Hey, look at me. We’ll get through this, okay? I’m not letting anyone take you from me.”

Part of me wants to recoil from his touch, from the obsessive glint in his eyes. This is all his doing, after all. He’s the one who took me, who faked my death and cut me off from everyone I love.

As much as I hate to admit it, I'm terrified of what will happen if they find me. Suppose they try to take me away from Phoenix.

My head is spinning, a war raging inside me as conflicting emotions batter me from all sides. Relief that my loved ones haven't given up on me. Fear of what Phoenix might do to keep me with him. Shame at the way my body still craves his touch, his dominance.

I should be desperate to escape, to get as far away from this madman. But as Phoenix pulls me into his arms, I find myself clinging to him, burying my face in the crook of his neck as he strokes my hair.

"It's going to be okay, baby," he murmurs. "No one is going to take you away from me."

A shudder runs through me at the dark promise in his voice. I should be fighting, screaming, trying to get away.

Instead, I wind my arms around his neck and hold him close, feeling both comforted and terrified by his embrace .

Because as much as I want my freedom, a part of me doesn't want to let him go.

I gaze at Phoenix, my heart pounding as he leans close. His lips capture mine in a kiss that sends electricity through my veins.

When we finally break apart, breathing heavily, Phoenix rests his forehead against mine. His piercing blue eyes search my face, a flicker of vulnerability in their depths.

"Tilly," he murmurs, his voice rough with emotion. "Are you worried about them ripping us apart?"

The question catches me off guard, and I feel a sudden tightness in my chest. The thought of being separated from Phoenix and losing this intense connection we've forged fills me with dread.

I swallow hard, my fingers curling into the fabric of his shirt. "I... I don't like the idea of getting split up," I admit softly, surprised by my raw honesty.

Phoenix's arms tighten around me, pulling me flush against his hard body. "I won't let that happen," he promises fiercely, his gaze burning into mine. "I'll do whatever it takes to keep you with me."

"Phoenix," I breathe, my voice trembling with the force of my emotions. "I... I don't want to lose you."

The words feel like a betrayal, a knife twisting in my gut as I think of my family and friends. But wrapped in Phoenix's arms, I can't deny their truth.

He captures my lips in another bruising kiss, pouring all of his passion and obsession into the touch. I cling to him, losing myself in the heat of his mouth, the press of his body against mine.

When he pulls back, his eyes are dark with promise. "You won't lose me, baby. I'll make sure of it."

And even though a part of me knows I should be fighting against this, against him, I find myself believing his words. Because right now, the thought of being torn away from Phoenix is terrifying

PHOENIX

I sit back in my chair, taking a deep breath as the realization hits me. It wasn't the authorities at all. Someone's been playing a twisted game, leaving breadcrumbs for me to follow.

My fingers fly across the keyboard, digging deeper into the false reports. The more I unravel, the clearer it becomes: a rival hacker messes with me, trying to make me slip up and expose myself.

A low chuckle escapes my lips. They should know better than to underestimate me. I'm the best in the game and won't be so easily fooled. I trace the digital trail back to its source with a few keystrokes, uncovering the hacker's identity.

Sickness slams into me when I recognize the signature coding style. Veronica.

The bitch has some nerve. She's playing games, thinking she can get into my head and mess with me. Well, she's about to learn a hard lesson. I lean forward, my eyes narrowing as I focus on the screen.

The anger seethes inside me like a burning pit. I can still feel that snake's hands on me and hear her sickening whispers. She took advantage of my innocence and left me traumatized.

I ran from her, seeking refuge in the carnival, but she didn't give up. She kept trying

to track me down like a hunter pursuing its prey. I had to cover my tracks and live constantly, fearing her finding me again.

But now the tables have turned. The only good thing she ever did for me was teach me how to code, and now I'm no longer that scared kid. I'm a force to be reckoned with. I push back from my desk, the wheels of my chair screeching against the floor.

My heart hammers in my chest as adrenaline courses through my veins. I want to confront the bitch and make her pay for what she did. Make her hurt like she hurt me.

I stare at the screen in disbelief, my blood boiling as the pieces fall into place. How the hell did she get access to my systems? I thought I had covered all my bases, but that conniving bitch managed to slip through my defenses.

I grit my teeth and dive into the code, scouring every line for any trace of her digital fingerprints. It doesn't take long before I uncover the subtle hacks she's implemented, granting her access to my webcams and microphones. A wave of nausea washes over me as I realize the implications. She's been watching me... watching us.

My mind flashes back to the intimate moments Tilly and I shared in this trailer. The way her body arched beneath my touch, the sounds of her pleasure echoing off the walls. Veronica has violated our privacy and tainted those sacred moments with her twisted voyeurism.

I won't give her the satisfaction of seeing me lose control. Staying calm is a must. After removing all her hacks, I secure my systems again.

I clench my fists, my nails digging into my palms as I breathe slowly and steadily. "You won't get away with this," I whisper. "I'll expose you for the monster you are."

A cold smile plays on my lips as I imagine the fear that will consume her when she

realizes I've become the hunter. She stole my innocence, but she won't take Tilly. I will take her down, piece by piece, and show her the true meaning of power.

Tilly enters the trailer, the irresistible scent of fried corn dogs filling the air. My mouth waters briefly before a familiar hunger stirs within me, one that no food can satisfy.

"Hey," she says with a warm smile that can instantly erase the darkness of my past, holding up the paper basket. "Thought you might be getting hungry, so I grabbed us a snack."

A low chuckle rumbles in my chest as I drink in the view, my eyes roaming over the curves of her body. "I'm hungry, alright, but not for food."

Tilly's cheeks flush a delicious shade of crimson as she catches the unmistakable heat in my gaze. She knows that look all too well, and I can see the anticipation building within her .

"Actually," I say, beckoning her closer with a crooked finger, "I've got some good news."

She sets the basket aside and moves toward me, her hips swaying with each step. I reach out, pulling her onto my lap and reveling in the way she melts against me.

"That report I stumbled across earlier? The one about the authorities being onto us?" I stroke a stray hair from her face. "It was all a ruse fabricated by some jealous bitch from my past."

Tilly's eyes widen, relief and confusion playing across her delicate features. "But why would someone do that?"

“Doesn’t matter,” I murmur, trailing kisses along the curve of her neck. Veronica had this sick and twisted idea that I wasn’t her kid but her partner at only ten fucking years old when she took me on.

And when I ran, she hated it. I know exactly why. She’s a jealous bitch. “What matters is that I’m onto them, and I’m going to make sure they regret ever messing with us.”

She shivers in my arms, her breath catching in her throat as my lips find that sensitive spot below her ear. “What are you going to do?”

A wicked grin tugs at the corners of my mouth. “Let’s just say they’re about to learn a painful lesson about the consequences of crossing me.”

I capture her lips in a searing kiss, pouring every ounce of my possessive desire into the passionate embrace. She melts against me, her fingers tangling in my hair as she surrenders to the aching need that consumes us both.

For now, the rest of the world can wait. All that matters is this moment, this insatiable hunger that only Tilly can satisfy. And when the time comes to deal with my demons, Veronica will wish she never dared to threaten what is mine.

TILLY

I smooth out the red and white striped fabric covering the carnival stand, feeling the coarse material under my fingers. It's still a little wrinkled, but it'll have to do. Alice will be selling stuffed animals at this stand.

"Oof, these boxes are heavy!" Alice huffs, dropping an armful of plush toys onto the counter with a thud. Her dark hair falls across her face, and she blows it away impatiently. "Why do we have to lug all this junk around?"

"Junk? These are priceless treasures!" I tease, grabbing a fluffy teddy bear and squeezing it dramatically. "Don't let Duke hear you talking that way about his babies."

Alice rolls her green eyes at me but can't hide her grin. Lily giggles softly beside her, always the quieter one. She runs her fingers over a stuffed elephant, a small smile playing on her lips.

"I think they're cute," she says simply. Her big brown eyes are warm and kind as always.

Aurora steps behind us, looking innocent and dangerous in her tight black shorts and tank top. Her full lips quirk up at the corners.

"You would think that, Lily," she teases lightly. There's a hint of something darker

under the surface, though.

I feel a little shiver go through me like there are layers to Aurora that I haven't even begun to uncover yet. We only met a week ago when Phoenix decided I could leave the trailer, but she intrigues me.

"Oh, don't give me that look," Lily protests with a laugh, giving Aurora's arm a playful shove. "I know you've got a soft spot for the cute and fuzzy ones too."

Aurora arches one perfectly shaped eyebrow but doesn't deny it. The two of them grin at each other.

"Alright, let's get the rest of this stuff set up before the crowd gets here," Alice interrupts, all business again as she picks up another box. She jerks her head at me. "Tilly, grab that case of bouncy balls, and let's get moving."

I hurry to follow her instructions, grabbing the case she indicated. As I straighten up, our eyes meet for a second and she gives me a wink.

With a smile, I return to the task, feeling lucky to have quickly made such amazing new friends here.

After another hour, it's getting late, and I know Phoenix will wonder where I am. And I notice Lars lingering nearby. Nudging Alice in the rib, I clear my throat.

"Looks like your man is calling," I tease, nodding towards Lars, who seems to be seeking Alice's attention .

As she walks away, I head back to the trailer to find Phoenix. The thought of seeing him sends a flutter through my chest. Our connection is still new, but there's an undeniable magnetism between us that I can't quite explain.

I weave through the lively crowd, dodging families and groups of friends, when suddenly, a tall figure steps directly into my path. I nearly collide with him, and I look up, startled.

“Excuse me, could you move, please?” I ask, trying to sidestep him.

But the man doesn’t budge. Instead, he smirks down at me, his gaze appraising. “I know who you are,” he says.

A shiver runs down my spine, and my heart rate picks up. “I... I don’t know what you’re talking about,” I stammer, suddenly realizing how isolated we are in this particular spot.

The man takes a step closer, and I instinctively step back. “Don’t play dumb, Tilly Jane Lawson. I know all about you and your little situation.”

My blood runs cold at the sound of my full name. How does this stranger know who I am? And what does he mean by my “situation”?

I try to back away from the menacing stranger, but he grabs my arm in a vise-like grip. A sickly sweet smell invades my nostrils as he presses a damp cloth over my mouth and nose. Panic surges through me as I realize he’s drugging me.

My vision starts to blur and my limbs feel heavy, like they’re being weighed down by lead. I attempt to scream, but only a muffled whimper escapes. The man smirks cruelly as I slump against him, all strength leaving my body.

“That’s it, nice and easy now,” he murmurs, scooping me up effortlessly.

I’m vaguely aware of being carried, the sounds of the carnival fading into the distance. My eyelids droop, but I force them open, desperate to take in any details

that could help me escape this nightmare.

We reach a dark van, and the man shifts me in his arms to open the rear doors. “Got her!” he calls out gruffly.

A pair of boots appears in my sight as another figure approaches. Though I can’t make out any distinct features, the dread coiling in my gut tells me this is no chance encounter.

With surprising care, the man lays me down on the van’s floor. My head lolls to the side, and I glimpse the carnival lights twinkling in the distance before the doors slam shut, plunging me into darkness.

I hear muffled voices from the front of the van, but no matter how hard I strain, I can’t make out what they’re saying. It’s like deciphering a conversation underwater, the words garbled and indistinct.

Fear courses through my veins as I realize the true extent of my predicament. My entire body is frozen stiff, completely immobilized by the drug. I try to wiggle my fingers, move my legs, and do anything to prove that I’m still in control, but it’s useless. I’m a prisoner in my skin, trapped and helpless .

Despite the paralysis, my mind is painfully aware of everything happening around me. I can feel the vibrations of the van’s engine, the hard metal floor pressing against my back, and the suffocating darkness that engulfs me. It’s like being buried alive, conscious but unable to scream or claw my way out.

Tears prick at the corners of my eyes, but even they refuse to fall. I want to cry out, to beg for help, but my lips remain stubbornly sealed. The only sound is the thundering of my heartbeat in my ears, a mocking reminder that I’m still very much alive and aware of this waking nightmare.

Questions swirl in my mind, each one more terrifying than the last. Who are these men? And why did they target me specifically? I think back to the stranger's words, how he knew my name and hinted at my "situation." Does this have something to do with Phoenix faking my death and the reports he came across?

The van turns sharply, and my body rolls limply with the motion. I try to brace myself, but I'm completely at the mercy of the vehicle's movements, being paralyzed by the drugs in my system. The voices up front grow louder momentarily, and I catch a snippet of their conversation.

"...boss wants her alive..."

"...gonna have some fun..."

Ice-cold dread seeps into my bones at the implications of their words. Whatever they have planned for me, it's clear it's sinister. I'm trapped, both physically and mentally, with no way to escape or even call for help .

As the van speeds into the unknown, I close my eyes and silently pray for a miracle. For Phoenix to somehow find me, for this to all be a terrible misunderstanding, for anything that could save me from the horror that awaits. But deep down, I know that I'm on my own now and can only try to survive whatever comes next.

28

PHOENIX

A routine has started to develop—Tilly’s routine. So when she doesn’t return by seven, my heart stops. Something’s wrong. I feel it in my bones.

I try to distract myself by diving into the depths of the dark web, seeking information on the recent breadcrumbs left by Veronica. But my mind keeps wandering, my eyes darting to the clock.

And then it happens. My screens flash with an unfamiliar IP address. A live feed. I freeze as I recognize Tilly, bound and helpless, with two men circling her like vultures. Rage consumes me, clouding my vision. I know this has to be Veronica’s doing.

I try to keep my breathing steady as I analyze the video. Every detail matters. Tilly’s eyes are wide, fear swirling in their depths. The men are dressed in black, their faces covered by ski masks.

One of the men makes a sound that makes my blood run cold. They think this is a game, but they have no idea who they’re dealing with or what I’m capable of.

I can’t lose her. Not now. Not after everything.

My fingers fly across the keyboard as I trace the signal from the nano-tracker I implanted under Tilly’s skin. While I expected to need to use it for possible escape

attempts, I never expected her to get kidnapped. But thank fuck I put it in her, as I know where to find her.

She's in a warehouse about fifty miles from the carnival. I should leave now. But there's a problem. The only way to get there quickly is to borrow one of the guy's vehicles. And that means asking Ty.

The thought fills me with dread. Tyson is my partner in crime, but he's also unpredictable and volatile. Explaining my situation with Tilly and admitting that I need his help to save her feels like stepping into a minefield, but I have no choice.

Grabbing my jacket and keys, I head out. The night air is crisp as I walk to Tyson's trailer. My heart hammers in my chest. I'm taking a risk, but I can't lose Tilly. Not now. Not ever.

I knock sharply on his door, my palms sweating. After a moment, he answers, brow furrowing as I never come knocking on his door.

"Phoenix? What's going on?"

I hesitate, choosing my words carefully. "I need your help."

His eyebrows shoot up. "What? With what?"

"There's someone I care about. They've been taken. I need to borrow your car to get to them. "

Tyson's eyes narrow. "What the hell, Phoenix? Why are you just standing there? Spit it out. Who is it?"

I take a step forward, my voice low and urgent. Tyson believes I just met Tilly here.

He has no idea about the kidnapping or faking her death. “It’s Tilly, Ty. She’s been kidnapped. I need to go now.”

His expression darkens, and he steps aside, motioning for me to enter. “Tell me everything. We’ll get her back.”

I take a deep breath, steadying myself for the truth that will come tumbling out.

“Tilly... she’s not just someone I care about,” I begin, my voice hoarse. “I kidnapped her from Oakridge after seeing her that first night at the carnival.”

His eyes widen, but he remains silent, allowing me to continue.

“I couldn’t help myself,” I confess, the words spilling out in a rush. “She consumed my every thought, my every desire. I had to have her, to make her mine. So I took her, faked her death, and brought her here, to the carnival, to keep her safe.”

I pause, gauging Tyson’s reaction. His expression is unreadable, but a glint in his eye tells me he’s listening.

“But now, someone from my past has caught on. Someone I used to know, someone who knows me better than anyone. My foster mom, Veronica. She’s the one who took her.”

Tyson’s eyes flash with anger, the same rage I’ve seen when someone threatens our operation. His hands clench into fists, and in that moment, I see a protective glint in his eye. A decade older than me, Tyson is like a mix of father figure and older brother. He knows about my past and the abuse I suffered at Veronica’s hands before I ran away and found the carnival.

“That fucking bitch!” He growls, taking a menacing step forward. “She hurt you as a

kid, and now she dares to come after you again? We'll hunt her down, Phoenix. We'll fucking gut her for what she's done."

I nod, a wave of shame washing over me. "I can't let her get away with this. She's the reason I ran away and ended up here. She ruined my life then, and I won't let her ruin it now."

The rage builds inside me, a familiar monster awakening. I think of Tilly, so innocent and full of life, now in the hands of that monster. A tremor of unease travels through me as I recall the twisted way Veronica broke me down.

"I'll make her pay," I say. "But first, we need to focus on Tilly. She's my priority. I won't let Veronica hurt her."

Ty's expression softens. "Alright, we'll get Tilly back, and then we'll deal with that psycho bitch. I promise you that. Veronica is going down, but we need to move carefully."

I nod, grateful for Tyson's support. We head out, our resolve strong. The night is cold, but my blood runs hot with determination. We'll find Tilly, rescue her from Veronica's grasp, and then... then we'll make that woman regret the day she fucking met me.

Tyson slides into the driver's seat of his Mustang while I hop into the passenger seat, my mind racing. We speed off through the night, our mission clear—our destination on the tracker fifty miles away.

The stakes have never been higher, but I refuse to let Tilly slip through my fingers, not after everything I've done to make her mine.

TILLY

The van comes to a halt, and I hear the doors opening and shutting up front. Still paralyzed in my own body, I'm dragged out, my limbs heavy and numb from the drugs.

I stumble, but the men gripping my arms don't let me fall. My heart hammers as they lead me into an abandoned warehouse. I shiver in the cold space. The only sound is our footsteps echoing off the concrete walls.

My eyes struggle to focus as I'm pushed into a chair and tied down. I can't move, can't escape. The men step back, and an older woman appears. She's beautiful, with icy eyes and a cruel smile. My mouth feels dry, and my voice slurs as I utter the words. "Who are you?"

"Shh, you don't need to know that, sweetie," she purrs, circling me like a predator. "Let's just say I'm an old friend of Phoenix's."

Panic washes over me. "Phoenix...where is he? What do you want with me?" My voice rises, infused with fear and desperation.

She chuckles. "Phoenix has no idea where you are. This is between you and me, Tilly. A little payback for running." Her eyes glitter with madness, and I realize with a jolt that she's jealous of me.

“Please let me go,” I beg. “I won’t tell Phoenix about this. We can forget this ever happened.”

Her laughter rings out, bouncing off the warehouse walls. “Forget? Oh, Tilly, you’re adorable. This is just the beginning. Phoenix ran from me, and now I’ll take something from him as payback. And the best part? He’ll never even know it was me.”

Understanding dawns, and my blood runs cold. “You’re going to kill me?” My voice rises to a high-pitched note, cracking with fear.

“Oh, eventually, probably. But first, I think I’ll have a little fun,” she says. “You see, I have plans for you, Tilly. Plans that will make Phoenix suffer in ways he’s never imagined.”

Tears sting my eyes as the reality of my situation sinks in. “Please, I don’t want to be part of your revenge. Just let me go,” I beg.

“It’s too late for that. You’re already a part of it, like it or not. And Phoenix...well, he’ll learn that nothing is truly his. Not even you.”

Her words hit me like a physical blow, and I sagged in my restraints, knowing that my kidnapping was only the beginning of this dangerous game .

I blink away tears, my throat tight with fear. “Why are you doing this? What did I ever do to you?”

The woman steps closer. “You’re his, aren’t you? He chose you over me, kept you hidden like some precious treasure.” Her voice drips with bitterness, and I cringe at the pain etched on her face.

She seems far too old for Phoenix. She must be in her fifties. I wonder if he dated her.

“I don’t understand. If you want revenge, why take it out on me? I didn’t do anything.” My voice rises, tinged with desperation. “Please, I’ve already been through so much. I can’t handle more captivity. Just let me go. I won’t tell Phoenix, I swear.”

She leans in, her breath ghosting over my face. “You’re the perfect weapon to hurt him. And trust me, he deserves it. He played with my heart and then cast me aside. And now, he’s obsessed with you, and I intend to use that to destroy him.”

I search her eyes, seeing the raw pain and jealousy reflected there. “But why involve me? I didn’t choose Phoenix. It’s not my fault he moved on.”

“Doesn’t matter. You’re the one he wants. The one he’s desperate to protect. And I’m going to make him feel the agony of loss.” Her hands clench into fists, the veins in her neck standing out.

I close my eyes, willing myself not to break down. She has a romantic attachment to Phoenix, and I’ve just become a pawn in a game between two ex-lovers. A game I’m not sure I’m going to survive.

Terror claws at my insides like a feral beast. My gaze darts around the empty warehouse, searching for anything that could aid my escape. But there’s nothing—just cold concrete walls and dusty windows too high to reach.

The woman’s footsteps echo as she circles me like a shark swimming around its prey. “Don’t look so scared, sweetie. This is going to be fun...for me, at least.”

I swallow hard, my mouth dry with fear. “What are you going to do to me?”

She smiles. “Let’s just say you’ll help me send a message to Phoenix. A message that will break him.”

Panic rises in my chest. “Please, I don’t want any part of this. Just let me go.”

Her laugh is like nails on a chalkboard. “Sorry, can’t do that. You’re the key to my revenge.” She leans in close. “And trust me, by the time I’m done with you, Phoenix will wish he never laid eyes on you.”

I flinch away, my heart pounding.

What did I ever do to deserve this?

All I wanted was a normal life, to focus on my studies and chase my dreams. But Phoenix’s obsession dragged me into this twisted nightmare.

The woman steps back, appraising me with cold eyes. “Don’t worry, I won’t kill you yet. First, I need to have a little fun.” She wields a wicked-looking knife, running her thumb along the razor-sharp edge.

My breath catches in my throat as she approaches. I thrash against my restraints, but they don’t budge. There’s no escape, no way to call for help. I’m utterly at her mercy.

“No, please!” I cry out, hot tears spilling down my cheeks. “I’ll do anything; just don’t hurt me! ”

But my pleas fall on deaf ears. The knife flashes in the dim light as she brings it closer.

The gleaming blade of the knife slashes through the air, and I cringe, squeezing my eyes shut. I feel the cold edge of the steel against my skin, and I bite back a scream. I

can't fight back, can't do anything but wait for the searing pain.

The blade traces a line down my arm, and the warmth of my blood trickling down my skin follows.

"Shh, don't be such a baby," she coos, her voice dripping with contempt. "This is just the beginning. I haven't even started yet."

I open my eyes, and the sight of my blood sends a wave of nausea through me. "Please, stop," I whisper, my voice trembling. "I'll do whatever you want. Just don't hurt me anymore."

She chuckles, a low, menacing sound. "Whatever I want? Well, that's an interesting offer. Let's see how far you will go to save yourself."

The blade presses against my skin again, and I bite my lip to stifle a whimper. This time, the cut is deeper, and I can't hold back the cry of pain that escapes my lips. I can feel the warm blood trickling down my arm, pooling in the crook of my elbow.

"That's it, scream for me," she purrs. "Let me hear how much this hurts."

The knife slashes again, and I cry out, unable to suppress the sound. Each cut feels like an eternity of agony, and I can feel the blood soaking into my clothes, warm and sticky .

"Please, I'm begging you," I sob. "Just kill me and get it over with."

She laughs, and the sound sends shivers down my spine. "Oh, you're not getting off that easy. I haven't even started with the real torture."

The knife flashes again, and I scream.

The woman leans in close, her breath hot against my ear. “You know, Phoenix took my heart and ripped it to shreds. So, it’s only fair to do the same to you.”

Understanding hits me like a ton of bricks, and I shake my head desperately. “No, please.”

But she just smiles a cruel, cold smile. “Oh, it will be so very painful. Just like how it felt when he left me.”

Tears stream down my cheeks as I realize the full extent of her plan. She’s going to make me suffer, make me feel the agony of a broken heart. And I’m completely powerless to stop it.

PHOENIX

I clench my fists, my knuckles turning white as Ty's Mustang growls to a stop five hundred meters from the warehouse. Rage courses through my veins at the thought of Veronica laying her hands on Tilly—my Tilly. I take a few deep breaths, attempting to steady my frayed nerves.

"You ready for this?" Ty's gruff voice breaks the tense silence. I give him a curt nod, my jaw clenched.

We exit the vehicle, the gravel crunching beneath our boots. My gaze sweeps over the dilapidated building, sizing up our target. Thanks to my hack into Veronica's systems, I know she has no more than two goons with her. Still, I refuse to underestimate her—that jealous bitch is unhinged and desperate.

"Remember, we do this clean and quiet," I mutter to Ty as we approach the side entrance. "No casualties except for Veronica, but I want her to suffer."

Ty grunts in acknowledgment, his massive frame radiating a barely contained violence. With deft movements, I override the electronic lock and open the door, wincing at the rusty creak piercing the stillness.

We move like shadows, our footsteps muffled on the concrete floor. The stale air reeks of mildew and disuse. Rounding a corner, I pause, straining my ears. A muffled whimper, unmistakably Tilly's, has my heart thundering against my ribs.

Fury lends me speed as I race down the corridor, Ty hot on my heels. I burst through a doorway and come to a halt, the scene before me igniting a primal rage so acute.

Tilly sits bound to a chair, her beautiful face marred by tears and smeared makeup. A trickle of blood oozes from gashes on her arm and chest—wounds inflicted by that sadistic bitch, no doubt.

Veronica stands before her, a wicked blade glinting in her grasp as she taunts my sweet Tilly.

I level the gun at Veronica, fury etching harsh lines across my face. "Step away from her. Now."

Veronica's eyes widen in shock as her eyes flick up, darting between the barrel aimed at her heart and my face twisted in rage. "Phoenix? How did you?—?"

"Shut up," I snarl, inching closer with the glock unwavering in my grip. "You're going to pay for what you've done."

Tilly whimpers from the chair, her gaze pleading with me. The sight of her bound and bleeding ignites a searing heat in my core—the instinct to protect her, to destroy anyone who dares harm her.

"I-I was just teaching the little slut a lesson," Veronica stammers, that cruel smirk attempting to twist her lips. "She needs to learn her place and understand she can never truly have you."

A feral growl rumbles from my chest as I close the distance between us. The muzzle kisses Veronica's forehead, her eyes squeezed shut in fear.

"You're the one who needs to learn, you psychotic bitch."

My finger caresses the trigger, itching to squeeze and paint these walls crimson with her blood. So easy to end the torment, the jealousy, her obsession that's plagued me since I was a kid.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," Veronica's sugary voice breaks the tense tableau, dripping with unhinged delight. Tilly and I are intimately connected right now. If I die, she dies, and I've got a dead man's switch set up. No one can disarm it except me—not even you."

My eyes narrow, raking over Veronica's smug expression. I sense her gaze flick to the underside of Tilly's chair, and my heart plummets like a stone in my chest. Straps with blinking red lights confirm my worst fear.

"She's bluffing," Ty murmurs, eyes scanning the situation. "It's a fucking bluff, Phoenix."

But I can't shake the niggling doubt. It's a risk, a gamble I'm not sure I can take. Veronica's tech skills are formidable—the thought of her gaining access to my systems sends a chill down my spine. And if she has rigged Tilly with explosives...

"Phoenix, listen to me." Veronica's tone softens, her eyes gleaming with malicious pleasure. "If you want your precious Tilly to live, you'll lower that gun and let me walk out of here. Otherwise, we all die, and your obsession ends in a bloody mess."

I curse inwardly, my fingers tightening on the gun. I'm trapped in a predicament of her design—move against her, and I risk Tilly's life. I glance at Ty, whose face is etched with the same tormented indecision.

"It's just you and me, Phoenix," Veronica purrs. "Time to decide. Her life or your revenge?"

Revenge. The word echoes in my mind like a discordant melody. Do I dare risk Tilly's life for the satisfaction of watching this treacherous woman suffer? I swallow the acidic lump in my throat, my gaze fixed on Tilly's terrified, hopeful eyes.

With crystal clarity, I know that my revenge must take a backseat.

"Alright," I grind out. "You win. I'll let you go, but Tilly stays with me."

Veronica's face lights up with glee, her fingers typing a sequence into her wrist device. "Wise choice, Phoenix. Always knew you were the smart one. Just remember, one wrong move from you or your friend here, and I detonate the explosives. Tilly's fate rests in your hands now."

I burn with impotent rage as she saunters past me, her eyes shining with insane triumph. She won't get far. I'll track her to the end of the earth if I have to.

My body buzzes with restrained violence, ready to snap and crush her beneath my feet. But I can't, not with Tilly's life in balance .

Tilly's broken sob has me glancing at her again. Her frightened eyes bore into mine.

I pivot toward her. My heart clenches at the sight of her battered form, her lip trembling as she struggles to meet my gaze. Crossing the room in two long strides, I kneel before her, cupping her tear-stained cheek with a tenderness that contrasts the storm raging within me.

"It's okay, baby," I murmur, slicing through her bonds. "I've got you now."

The ropes fall away, and she crumples against me, her slender frame wracked with sobs. I fold her in my arms, tucking her head beneath my chin as I rain gentle kisses on her crown.

"H-How did you f-find me?" she hiccups against the column of my throat.

Drawing back slightly, I brush the matted hair from her face, revealing those soulful eyes that haunted my dreams. "Remember when I said I'd always be able to find you?"

She nods, her brow furrowing in confusion. Gently, I draw back the sleeve of her tattered sweater, exposing the tiny scar below her wrist—the implantation site of the microchip I'd embedded beneath her skin the moment I took her.

Tilly's eyes widen, her mouth forming a perfect 'o' of surprise. "You put a tracker in me?"

I brace myself for the accusation, the anger, the fear that she'll recoil from me like so many others. Instead, she merely buries her face in the crook of my neck, her fingers clutching at the fabric of my shirt.

"Thank god you did," she whispers, her breath fanning against my skin. "If you hadn't, that psycho would've?"

Her voice cracks, dissolving into a fresh wave of tears. I tighten my hold, pressing my lips to her hair in a lingering kiss.

"Shh, it's alright now. I've got you." I allow the depth of my emotions to bleed into my words—the bone-deep relief at having her back, the resolve to annihilate any threat to her safety. "Veronica's never going to lay a finger on you again. I promise."

Tilly nods against me, her tremors subsiding as she draws strength from my presence.

"Who was she, Phoenix?" Tilly asks, her voice quiet and fragile. "Who was Veronica to you?"

Her question hangs between us, a weighty thing laden with the gravity of the moment. I tense, my breath catching as a torrent of unwanted memories threatens to overwhelm me. The scent of her shampoo mingles with the tang of her fear, stirring a maelstrom of emotions deep within me. Her eyes search mine, an ocean of confusion and trust awaiting answers.

I struggle to find the words, the knot in my throat tightening like a noose. The past I've tried so hard to bury is suddenly here, suffocating me. Part of me wants to shield her from the darkness, to spare her the painful truth of my scars. But another part knows that if we are to move forward—if she is to truly understand the depths of my obsession and why I claimed her as I did—she needs to hear this.

Steeling myself, I tighten my arms around her. "Veronica was... someone from my past. Someone who hurt me."

Tilly pulls back, her gaze probing, and I know she senses the layers lurking beneath my words. "Hurt you how?"

I swallow hard, my throat suddenly arid. I can almost feel the hands on me, the touch that was supposed to be comforting but left me soiled. "When I was a kid, I ended up in the foster system after my mom left me when I was five." I try to keep my voice steady, but it cracks on the last word. "Veronica was my foster mom."

Understanding dawns in Tilly's eyes, and I see the realization of the abuse reflected in her tormented gaze. Her fingers reach up to touch my face, her eyes searching mine. "Oh, Phoenix. What did she do to you?"

The pain of long-suppressed memories claws at my chest, but I force myself to continue for her. "She was supposed to take care of me, but instead, she took advantage. She groomed me, used me for her own sick desires." I grit my teeth, not looking away from my girl's empathetic gaze. "It wasn't just the sexual abuse; it was

the psychological manipulation, the way she made me feel special one moment and discarded the next."

Tilly lets out a pained breath, her eyes shimmering with unshed tears. "I'm so sorry, Phoenix."

Her words open a dam within me, releasing raw emotion. "That bitch broke me. She made me question my sanity and my worth. I became obsessed with control, with making sure no one would ever hurt me like that again." My voice lowers to a rasp, the weight of my past bearing down on me. "That's why I took you, locked you away. I told myself it was to protect you, but it was also about control—mine over you."

She listens, her eyes brimming with compassion. Reaching up, she softly traces the tattoos snaking across my forearms. "Did the tattoos help? To give you a sense of control?"

I nod, her touch a balm to my battered soul. "Each one represents a piece of my past, a reminder of what I survived. It's like reclaiming the power, marking myself on my terms."

Tilly's gaze drifts over the intricate designs, her fingers gripping my skin. "How long did it go on for? The abuse?"

I suck in a sharp breath at the memory of the day I finally escaped. "Four years. I was fourteen when I finally ran away and found my way to the carnival where Ty took me in."

"And Veronica?" she prompts.

"I never saw her again until today." My voice turns bitter as the memory of her cruel smirk burns in my mind. "She got off scot-free, never faced justice for what she did."

Tilly's eyes flash with anger, the corners of her mouth turning downward in a grimace. "She won't get away with it this time, Phoenix. Not ever again."

I search her eyes, seeing strength reflected back at me. "No, she won't."

"That bitch is going to pay for what she did to us," I growl, and Tilly stiffens in my arms at the ferocity in my voice.

Ty clears his throat, his brow creased with concern. "First, we must get Tilly back to the carnival, somewhere safe. Then we'll deal with Veronica."

I know he's right. Rationally, I understand that Tilly's safety must come first. But the thought of letting Veronica slip through my fingers, even momentarily, enrages me. My hand clenches at my side, yearning to wrap around Veronica's neck and squeeze the life from her.

"No," Tilly pipes up, surprising us both. "We can't wait, Phoenix. We have to go after Veronica now. We'll miss our window of opportunity."

Tilly, you've been through hell. You need rest, safety?—"

"I can handle it," she interrupts, her chin jutting upward in that stubborn way I recognize so well. "Veronica needs to be stopped, and I won't feel safe knowing she's still out there. Please, Phoenix. Let's end this now."

I search her eyes, seeing the steel within them. I know that look—it mirrors the determination that has driven me time and again. She's strong and fierce, and she's imploring me to let her be a part of this.

With a heavy sigh, I relent. "Okay, we go after Veronica. But you stay close and do exactly as I say. Got it?"

She nods, her eyes sparkling with excitement. I curse myself for putting her in this position, but she's here, and together, we will end Veronica's madness.

TILLY

My heart pounds as we speed through the city streets in Ty's Mustang. Phoenix, focused on his laptop, is determined to track down Veronica—the woman who kidnapped and tortured me. Seated beside him, I watch as he effortlessly hacks into her phone, his fingers flying across the keyboard with a purpose. I feel a rush of adrenaline, knowing we're so close to catching her.

"She's not far," Phoenix says, his voice laced with intensity. "We can apprehend her."

The car swerves as Ty sharply turns, following Phoenix's directions. I tighten my grip on the door handle, feeling a mix of anticipation and unease. I'm not sure what Phoenix plans to do once we find Veronica. Still, I sense the darkness within him.

The Mustang screeches to a halt, and Phoenix is out of the car instantly, his eyes fixed on a lone figure walking down the street.

"There she is." His voice is cold, devoid of any emotion.

I step out, my heart racing as I approach Veronica. She turns, her face a mask of surprise, and immediately, I see the fear in her eyes.

"You," she breathes, taking a step back.

“Did you really think you could get away with it?” Phoenix asks, his voice threatening.

Veronica’s eyes dart between us, and I see when she realizes her mistake. Underestimating Phoenix and his desire for revenge.

“What do you want?” she whispers.

Phoenix steps closer, and I sense his power at that moment. “You’re coming with us,” he says. “And then you’re going to pay.”

Suddenly, she turns and sprints away.

This woman, Veronica, abducted me, put me through hell, and now she’s running?

No way. No fucking way.

I’m faster than she is. The grip of my sneakers helps as I sprint, launch myself at her, and tackle her to the ground. She grunts as the air is knocked out of her lungs, and I straddle her, pressing down to keep her pinned.

“You fucking bitch!” I spit out the words, all the fear and anger pouring out. “You’re going to pay for what you did to Phoenix and me!”

She struggles beneath me, but I’m stronger now. Determined. I lean down, pressing my full weight on her, and punch her hard in the face.

“Tilly, move!” Ty’s voice breaks through my haze of rage .

I shift to the side as he cuffs her. The click of metal sounds so damn satisfying.

Veronica is dragged to her feet, and I watch Ty pull her toward the Mustang. My eyes burn with hatred but also... satisfaction. She deserves everything that's coming to her.

“Well done, baby.” Phoenix pulls me close, his voice soft in my ear. I feel his erection pressing against my ass, and a rush of desire mixes with the adrenaline still pumping through my veins. “You’re something else, tackling that bitch like that. So damn sexy...”

A shiver races down my spine, and I lean against him, feeling his desire for me.

Phoenix’s arms tighten around me, his lips trailing hot kisses along my neck. I can feel his desire, raw and intense, and it ignites something primal within me. I know Ty and Veronica are watching us from the Mustang, but their presence only adds to the thrill of it all.

“Right here, baby,” Phoenix whispers. “I want to fuck you right here, claim you in front of them. Prove to that psycho bitch that you and I belong together.”

I turn my head slightly, catching Ty’s approving nod. My heart flutters at the idea, the exhibitionism of it all blending with the darkness of our situation. I crave Phoenix, and I don’t care who’s watching. It’s wrong, it’s dirty, and that only makes me want it more.

“You want it, too, don’t you?” Phoenix whispers.

I nod, breathless, as he turns me to face the wall, pressing me against the cool brick. His hands are everywhere, pulling my hair back and tugging at my clothes. My heart is pounding, and my breath comes in sharp gasps as I feel his breath on my shoulder.

“She wants it,” he says to Ty and Veronica, his voice filled with possessiveness. “Just like I knew she would.”

Veronica makes a noise, a whimper perhaps, and my desire burns even hotter, knowing she's tormented by the thought of Phoenix taking me. He uses his knee to nudge my legs apart, and I feel the hard length of his cock against my ass.

"Phoenix—" I start, but he cuts me off with a growl.

"Shh, baby. I've got you."

He tears my panties and then slams into me, and I cry out, my hands scrambling for purchase on the rough bricks. It's raw and intense, and my body sings with the pleasure of it. His hands grip my hips, holding me in place as he moves within me, his breath hot against my neck.

"You feel so good, baby. So fucking tight around me." His voice is rough. "But you know what I want, don't you? I want to hear you. Let them hear how much you love it."

I bite my lip. "Please, Phoenix. Fuck me harder."

He groans, and his thrusts become more insistent, more primal. His hands slide up my body, cupping my breasts, his thumbs teasing my nipples. I'm on fire, every nerve-ending singing, and I can't help but let out a string of curses and pleas.

"That's it, baby. Let me hear you." He bends his head, his lips seeking out the wounds Veronica left on my arm. He licks them, tasting my blood, and a shudder runs through me. "I'll never get enough of you," he murmurs.

My body is on the edge, and I feel Phoenix's breath catch as he, too, teeters on the brink. "Come for me, baby," he growls. "Come on my cock."

His command sends me spiraling, and I scream as waves of pleasure ripple through

me. Phoenix follows me over the edge, his touch firmly planted on my hips as he pulses within me.

“Fuck, baby,” he breathes, his forehead resting against my back. “That’s it.”

I’m trembling, my body boneless, and yet, I feel more alive than ever. Phoenix pulls out of me slowly, turning me to face him. His eyes are dark with desire.

“You’re mine, Tilly Jane Lawson,” he says, stroking my hair. “Never doubt that.”

I nod, my emotions overwhelming me. “Yours,” I whisper.

His thumb brushes my cheek, and he gives me a soft smile. “Let’s get you home. You need some rest.”

As he leads me back to the Mustang, the weight of what we did settles on my shoulders. We just had sex in public, in front of his friend and our captor. And I loved it. The thought sends a thrill through me, and I know, in that moment, that I’m his forever.

32

PHOENIX

Veronica dangles from the rafters, her eyes wide with fear as I step into the warehouse, the air heavy with anticipation and vengeance. I've left her here for a few days to stew. But it's not her that concerns me; it's Tilly. I turn to her, my heart hammering in my chest.

"Tilly, maybe you should wait outside. This won't be pleasant." I can't hide the concern in my voice. The vicious side of me is about to be unleashed, and I'm not sure she's ready to witness it.

But Tilly surprises me. "No, I want to see it. I want to watch you put that bitch in her place." Her eyes burn with an intensity that wasn't there before, a darkness borne from my kidnapping of her.

I search her face, seeing the determination etched in her features. It's my fault that the darkness has tainted her, that her pure soul now carries a shadow. And yet, at this moment, I love her all the more for it. She's mine, stronger because of what we've endured together .

"Are you sure?" I question.

She steps closer, her eyes never leaving mine. "I'm sure. I want to be here with you. We finish this together."

I nod, my throat tight. “Together,” I echo. Taking a steadying breath, I turn toward Veronica, who glares at us with hatred.

Tilly stands at my side, her shoulder brushing my arm. We are united against the woman who tried to tear us apart.

It’s time for vengeance.

Keeping Tilly by my side, I move closer to her, smiling grimly. “Hello, Veronica. Long time, no see.”

Veronica struggles futilely against her bonds. “Phoenix, please... I know I hurt you, but I can make it right. I’ll do anything.” Her voice quavers, fear seeping into the cracks of her brave façade.

Ignoring her pleas, I reach into my pocket and retrieve a knife, the metal glinting menacingly in the harsh warehouse lighting. “Anything, huh? Well, I’ve always been a fan of poetic justice.” I tilt my head, studying her with false curiosity. “What was it you used to say to me? ‘I own you, body and soul?’”

Understanding dawns in her eyes as I move closer, the knife glinting in my hand.

Veronica’s eyes go wide as she realizes my intention. “No, Phoenix, please. You can’t?—”

Tilly steps forward, her eyes never leaving Veronica’s face. “Oh, but I think he can. And he will.” Her voice is steady .

“You don’t understand—” Veronica begins, but Tilly cuts her off.

“I understand enough.” Tilly’s gaze shifts to me, her expression unwavering. “Do it,”

she says, her voice a quiet command.

I tighten my grip on the knife, my breath coming in short bursts. Veronica's fear-filled gaze meets mine, and I see the vulnerable boy I once was reflected in her eyes.

With a roar, I slash the knife through the air, slicing through Veronica's clothes and drawing a thin red line across her chest. She screams, the sound echoing off the warehouse walls. I move closer. My actions are frenzied as I continue to cut, needing to erase every last trace of her hold on me. The knife slices through fabric and skin, each cut a release of the pent-up anger and pain she inflicted.

Her screams pierce the air, but Tilly stands her ground. She watches, her eyes never flinching from the gruesome scene. Her presence grounds me, even as I descend into a mad frenzy of violence. My knife cuts deeper, marking her flesh, each slice a promise that I'll never let anyone hurt us again.

As the initial rage begins to ebb, my cuts become more deliberate and more calculated. I want her to feel the terror and pain she inflicted on me and, no doubt, others.

The screams turn to whimpers, her body going limp in defeat. I step back, my chest heaving, the knife falling from my hand. Tilly's breathing fills the silence, her eyes taking in the scene.

"Is it over?" she asks.

I bend down and pick up the knife, my eyes never leaving Veronica's broken form. "Not yet."

With a flick of my wrist, I slice through the ropes, binding her, and let her crumple to the ground. She whimpers, her eyes pleading for mercy. I offer none.

Taking Veronica's chin in my hand, I force her to look at me. "You made me into a monster, Veronica. It's only fitting that I slay the monster that created me."

The knife feels heavy in my hand, but it's a weight I'm used to bearing.

"I was just a boy, ten years old, scared and alone. You were supposed to take care of me, to be my safe haven. But instead, you stole my childhood, piece by piece. You groomed me, manipulated me into believing your sick games were love." My voice trembles, the hurt little boy I once was colliding with the hardened man I am now.

Her eyes plead for mercy, but she doesn't deserve any. "You controlled me, using my fears and my desperate need for affection against me. You made me dependent on you, convincing me that no one else would ever love me." I step closer, the knife poised at her throat. "You stole my innocence, corroding my trust and planting seeds of self-doubt that took root and flourished."

The knife shakes in my hand as I battle my own memories. "You tried to destroy my chance at a normal life, filling my head with your poison. I became obsessed with control, with dominance, and it's all because of you. My whole life veered off course because you decided to take advantage of a vulnerable child." My voice breaks, the years of pain bubbling to the surface. "You're the reason I became a monster."

There's no escape for her, no denying what she did. My hand tightens around the knife, the blade pressing against her skin.

"Please, Phoenix—" she begins, but I cut her off.

"No, it's too late for pleas and excuses. You had your chance to be my savior, and you chose to be my tormentor instead." My voice cracks, the hurt little boy battling the monster I've become. "I hope you burn in hell for what you did to me, for what you did to Tilly."

With a sudden movement, I slash the knife across her throat, ending her life in an instant. Her body goes limp, the light fading from her eyes.

I drop the knife and step back, the reality of what just happened hitting me like a punch to the gut. Tilly's hand finds mine, her touch grounding me. I look down at our entwined fingers, her slender hand offering silent support.

I shake my head, trying to clear the cobwebs of memory. "Let's get out of here," I say hoarsely, turning away from Veronica's body.

Tilly squeezes my hand, offering unspoken comfort as we grab a can of petrol and begin dousing the floor, the fluid spreading in a glistening pool.

I move toward Veronica's body, pouring the fluid over her, cleansing her of the evil that infested her.

The warehouse fills with the sharp scent of petrol, an offering to the gods of vengeance. I trail the fluid like breadcrumbs, a path leading us out of this place of darkness.

Together, we walk, our steps in sync as we approach the exit. Tilly's hand never leaves mine, our connection a tether.

At the door, I pause, turning to look back at the warehouse one last time. I flick open the lighter, the spark of the flame reflecting the burning rage within me.

With a final glance at Tilly, I drop it. The flame catches, igniting the fluid trail, and we step back, watching the fire dance and devour.

The warehouse goes up in a blaze of glory, the flames consuming the darkness, the smoke rising like a purge of all the twisted memories and pain. I breathe in the night

air, tasting freedom for the first time in years.

I feel lighter, the weight of my past lifting from my shoulders. With Tilly's hand in mine, I'm ready to face whatever comes next. We walk away from the burning building, our steps carrying us toward a future that feels brighter than it has in a long time.

33

TILLY

The carnival has moved on to the next town, and Phoenix is finally allowing me some freedom again after everything that's happened. It feels like a massive weight has been lifted off my shoulders. However, I can't shake the lingering unease of being in this unpredictable situation with him.

Despite now being here of my own choice, I can't help but mourn the loss of my family.

Tonight, I'm helping out at one of the food stands alongside Aurora, a friendly girl who also travels with the carnival crew. We've become fast friends over the past week, bonding over our love of junk food and terrible puns. As we banter back and forth, flipping burgers and dodging greasy splatters, I can't help but feel a sense of normalcy creeping back into my life.

"So, you gonna tell me how you ended up with that brooding hunk of a hacker?" Aurora teases, wagging her eyebrows suggestively. "The whole carnival is dying to know the juicy details."

I tense up, my smile faltering. As much as I've come to trust Aurora, the truth behind my relationship with Phoenix is still too raw, too twisted to divulge so casually. Instead, I deflect with a forced laugh. "Trust me, you don't want to know. That man is certifiably insane."

Aurora seems to pick up on my discomfort and drops the subject, launching into an animated story about when she accidentally set fire to a cotton candy machine. I'm grateful for the distraction, letting her exaggerated tale wash over me as we continue working.

By the time we're closing up for the night, my cheeks ache from laughter, and I've almost managed to push my darker thoughts aside. Aurora hugs me. Her easy affection starkly contrasts the possessive intensity of Phoenix's embrace.

"See you tomorrow, Tills," she says with a wink. "Try not to let that bad boy keep you up too late, if you know what I mean."

I shake my head, blushing despite myself, as we part ways. Aurora's playful insinuations are harmless, but they remind me of the complexity of my situation—the way my feelings for Phoenix blur the lines between desire, fear, and something deeper that I can't quite put my finger on.

As I make my way back to the trailer I share with him, I wonder what the future holds.

Stepping into the trailer, I'm jolted out of my musings by the sight of Phoenix sitting there, an all-too-familiar mask obscuring his features. It's the same one he wore that night at the club when he ate me out, fueling my fantasies of masked men. My heartbeat quickens at the memory, and I can't help but wonder if he intends to replay that scene.

"Why are you wearing that?" I ask, my voice catching slightly as I try to keep my tone light. I can feel my cheeks flushing, knowing exactly why he's chosen to put the mask on tonight. "Did you miss the feeling of plastic against your skin?"

His only response is a low chuckle that sends shivers down my spine. I move closer,

reaching up to adjust the mask, my fingers hovering above its smooth surface. “You saw my browsing history, didn’t you?” I whisper, my eyes searching his bright blue eyes. “That’s why you’re wearing this.”

His head tilts slightly, and my heart hammers against my ribcage. I can feel his eyes on me, burning through the mask as if he’s willing me to accept what we both know. “Don’t play innocent,” he murmurs, his voice deep and husky. “Of course, I’ve seen your browser history, dirty girl.”

My breath catches in my throat, a mix of arousal and nervousness fluttering in my chest. “Maybe I was just curious,” I reply, my tone defiant even as my body betrays me with a surge of dampness between my legs. “Maybe I wanted to understand why certain things turn me on.”

“And have you figured it out?” he asks, leaning in close. “Do you know why the idea of being forced by a masked man, of consenting to non-consent, gets you so wet?”

I swallow hard, my eyes flicking downward as my cheeks flame with heat. “I’m not sure,” I admit, my voice little more than a whisper. “Maybe it’s the thrill, the loss of control. Maybe it’s to do with how you took me by force initially.”

He chuckles again, and the sound reverberates through me. “Let’s explore that together, shall we?”

My cheeks flame even hotter, and I can’t help but notice the bulge in his pants, straining against the fabric. Seeing his blatant arousal sends a thrill through me, and I bite my lip, hesitating for only a moment before voicing my desire.

“What if we act out that night in the woods?” I suggest, my voice barely above a whisper. “You could chase me, and we could pretend it’s all happening again. A proper consensual non-consent scene, with a safe word.”

I watch his Adam's apple bob in his throat and eyes darken. Then, slowly, he nods. "A safe word is essential." He leans closer, his warm breath tickling my ear as he whispers, "The safe word is 'mercy.' If you use it, I'll stop immediately."

I shiver at his words, my pulse thrumming in my veins. "Okay," I breathe. "Let's do it."

Without another word, he pushes back his chair and stands, taking a deliberate step back. "Run," he commands, and I waste no time obeying.

I sprint out of the trailer, and the cool night air whips against my skin. The ground is soft beneath my shoes, and the scent of pine needles fills my lungs as I dart into the surrounding woods.

Laughter bubbles up from within me, a mix of nervousness and sheer exhilaration. It's like that night all over again, except this time, I'm agreeing to be chased, and the fear has been replaced by a different kind of excitement.

His footsteps crunching behind me spurs me on. I veer to the left, ducking under a low-hanging branch, my heart hammering with adrenaline. I know he'll catch me, but I can't help wanting to make the chase last just a little longer.

As I round the bend in the trail, I spot a fallen tree trunk and change my course, leaping over rotting logs and tangles of undergrowth. My lungs burn, but the rush of adrenaline coursing through my veins keeps me going. I can sense him getting closer, his footsteps pounding relentlessly in pursuit.

Just a little farther, I tell myself. I want to draw out this delicious tension for as long as possible.

But then his strong arms wrap around my waist, and he spins me around, pulling me

back against his chest. I give a little shriek, feigning surprise, and then relax into him, feeling his hardness pressed against my lower back.

“Thought you could get away, did you?” he breathes in my ear, one hand splayed possessively across my stomach. “There’s nowhere to hide, sweetheart.”

I struggle against him, but he’s too strong, and I’m secretly glad for it. I want him to overwhelm me, to take control like he did that night when I was truly scared. I know what’s coming this time, which makes the anticipation sweeter. My heart is pounding, and my body is already beginning to ache for him.

“Please, no!” I cry out, even as my back arches sensuously against his chest. My voice is high and pleading, my performance convincing even to my ears. “Don’t do this. I don’t want it.”

He spins me around to face him, his eyes dark and hooded, the mask concealing his true expression. “Oh, but I know you do,” he growls, his lips curling into a dangerous smile.

I shake my head, denying it even as my body throbs with need. “I don’t know what you’re talking about,” I whisper. “Let me go. Please, please, just let me go!”

His eyes ignite with lust and something more—a glint of madness that I’ve grown to crave. He leans in close, one hand fisting in my hair, tilting my head back to expose the column of my throat and eliciting a soft moan. “You like it rough, don’t you?” he murmurs, his lips brushing against the shell of my ear. “You like it when I take what I want.”

I whimper as he teases my earlobe with his teeth, nipping gently. “N-no,” I stutter, even as my hips shift involuntarily toward him. “I don’t—I don’t like it.”

His answering laugh is low and husky, sending tremors through me. “Liar.” His fingers tighten in my hair. “Your body betrays your lies. Your sweet little pussy is already dripping for me.”

I gasp as he tugs on my hair, forcing my head back further and exposing the sensitive skin of my neck. His lips are on me, sucking hard, marking me. “You’re mine,” he growls against my skin, his fingers digging into my hips possessively. “Never forget that.”

“Please,” I whisper, my voice catching as my resistance melts. “Stop, Phoenix...”

“Say it,” he commands, his voice harsh. “Say you want me to fuck you. Say you want my cock inside you, pounding you into the dirt.” He unzips his pants and frees his huge, straining erection.

“No...” My denial is weak, little more than a breath, as his fingers dig painfully into my hips. I wish he would get on with it and stop teasing me. I want him to take me here, claiming me like he did when it wasn’t a game.

“Say it!” He demands, his teeth grazing the sensitive skin of my neck, sending shivers down my spine.

“No, stop, please...” My voice sounds pathetic, even to my own ears.

With a growl, he spins me around to face him. “You want this, Tilly. Don’t lie to me.”

“I—I don’t...” I gasp as he pulls me flush against him, his hardness prodding my belly. “Please, just leave me alone. I don’t want it.”

He lifts me against the trunk of a thick tree. “Your pussy says otherwise,” he growls,

his hand tangling in my hair. I can feel him prodding against my entrance, the tip of his cock teasing me but not giving me what I crave.

“You’re so wet for me,” he murmurs, his free hand sliding between my legs to stroke my slick folds. “Tell me again how much you don’t want this.”

“I—oh god...” My words dissolve into a moan as he teases my clit, circling it slowly with his thumb. “I hate you...” I whisper my body thrumming with need, my breath quickening. “Leave me alone...”

His answering laugh vibrates through me, sending sparks of pleasure dancing across my skin. “That’s it,” he breathes, his teeth sinking into my shoulder as his fingers find my entrance, thrusting inside me. “Tell me more.”

“Oh god...” I bite my lip hard, riding his fingers as he begins to thrust in and out, stretching me open and teasing my needy flesh. “I hate you so much,” I moan, my voice thick with arousal. “I fucking hate you.”

His chuckle sends tremors through me, and he tears his fingers away, only to reposition himself, pressing the tip of his cock to my entrance. “Tell me again,” he demands, his voice hoarse. “Tell me again how much you hate me.”

I open my mouth to reply, but he silences me with a bruising kiss, his tongue plundering my mouth as he thrusts upward, filling me in one swift stroke. “Fuck!” I cry out, my body stretching to accommodate his length.

He stills for a moment, buried deep within me, and I can feel his hot breath on my neck as he fights for control. “God, Tilly,” he groans, his voice raw. “You feel so damn good.”

My fingers dig into his shoulders as he begins to move, his hips snapping forward

with urgent thrusts that send sparks of pleasure dancing along my nerve endings. “Please, no more,” I gasp, my eyes fluttering closed as wave after wave of pleasure washes over me. “I can’t take any more.”

“Yes, you can,” he growls, his fingers digging into my hips as he pounds into me with relentless force. “You can take everything I give you and more.”

“Please...” My voice is little more than a whimper now, my body on the brink, teetering on the edge of oblivion.

“Beg me to stop if you really want me to,” he taunts, his cock slamming into me over and over, relentless and unforgiving. “Use your safe word, sweetheart.”

But I don’t want him to stop. I never wanted him to stop.

“Please...” I whisper, my body arching against his, meeting his savage thrusts. “Please, don’t stop...”

“That’s it,” he grunts, his fingers bruising my hips as he finds a rapid, relentless rhythm. “Take it. Take all of me.”

And I do. My body shudders and convulses around him, waves of pleasure crashing over me, sweeping me away into a sea of sensations. I cry out, my voice mingling with his hoarse groans as he fills me, marking me as his.

After a moment, he carries me, still impaled on his cock, to a nearby tree stump. I tremble in his arms, my body still humming with the aftershocks of our intense encounter. Despite the roughness of our lovemaking, there’s a tenderness in the way he holds me now, cradling me gently against his chest.

Slowly, he lifts a hand to cup my cheek, his calloused thumb tracing the curve of my

jaw.

“Tilly,” he murmurs, his voice low and soft. “You have no idea how much you mean to me.”

I lean in and press my lips to his in a soft, lingering kiss.

Phoenix responds immediately, his hand sliding into my hair as he deepens the kiss, his tongue teasing mine in a sensual dance. It’s a far cry from the bruising, possessive kiss he’d claimed from me earlier, and it leaves me feeling lightheaded and breathless.

When we finally part, I can see the raw emotion shining in his eyes, and I know that in this moment, he’s laid his heart bare before me. “I love you, Tilly,” he whispers, his voice thick with emotion. “I’ve never felt this way about anyone before.”

My heart swells with a bittersweet mixture of joy and trepidation. I want to say the words back, to let him know that I feel the same, but the scars of my past still linger, making me wary of opening myself up fully.

Instead, I pull him close, burying my face in the crook of his neck. “I... I’m not ready to say it yet,” I murmur, my fingers tracing patterns on his back. “But I’m falling for you, Phoenix. I can’t deny that.”

He nods, his arms tightening around me, and I know he understands. There’s no need for rushed declarations or empty promises. We exist together now, two souls finding solace in each other’s embrace.

34

EPILOGUE

PHOENIX

One year later...

Tilly readies herself for Halloween, her eyes bright and her body buzzing excitedly. She reminds me of a butterfly emerging from its cocoon, radiant and full of life. It's been a year since I brought her into my world, and she has flourished like a flower in bloom.

Our trailer is filled with the scent of her perfume and the sound of her laughter as she moves about, deciding on the perfect costume. I see her hesitate, torn between a sexy pirate and a mystical fairy. She notices me staring and flashes me a smile, dimples appearing on her cheeks. "What do you think, Phoenix? Should I be a pirate or a fairy tonight?"

I push up from my desk, unable to focus on the coding project I had been working on. Tilly's question pulls me into the present, and I take in the sight of her, so full of life and vibrancy. "You'd look beautiful as either one," I reply, my voice soft. "But I have a particular fondness for fairies."

She giggles and strikes a playful pose, the green and purple wings of the costume fluttering. "Then it's decided. I shall be a fairy tonight and enchant everyone at the carnival."

I stand up and walk over to her, unable to resist the pull of her energy and excitement. “Just be careful who you enchant,” I warn, my hands resting on her hips. “I don’t want to have to murder anyone tonight.”

Tilly’s eyes sparkle with delight as they drag down the length of me. I’ve chosen to dress as her favorite video game character, Ghost from Call of Duty, and the look on her face tells me I’d made the right decision. The costume is nearly complete except for one crucial element.

“You forgot the mask,” she teases.

I smirk, reaching for the mask on my desk. Sliding it on, I transform into the mysterious figure, Ghost. “Better?” I ask, my voice muffled by the mask.

She nods, clapping her hands together. “Much better! Now we’re both ready for fright night.”

Normally, the prospect of attending the carnival would make me feel sickeningly uneasy, but with Tilly, everything has changed.

Together, we step out into the lively carnival atmosphere, with its lights and sounds surrounding us. Tilly’s excitement is infectious, and I feel myself relaxing and enjoying the moment.

We wander through the carnival, attracting curious glances from passersby. Tilly drags me to chat with her friends, Lily, Alice, and Aurora. I’m glad she’s finding her place here, mixing with others.

Lars clears his throat and claps me on the shoulder. “Good to see you out of that fucking trailer, man.”

I glare at him through the eyeholes of my mask, as I hate people touching me.

He just chuckles and shakes his head. "Lighten up. It's Halloween."

Cade, dressed as a zombie, turns to me with a grin. "So, Phoenix, you finally decided to join the land of the living, huh?"

I roll my eyes behind my mask. "Very funny, Cade. I'm here for Tilly, not for your amusement."

Lars chuckles. "Come on, man. You gotta admit, it's nice to see you out and about. I was starting to think you'd merged with your computer."

I flip him off, but there's no real heat behind the gesture. "Fuck off, Lars."

Cade snorts. "Yeah, busy hacking into everyone's lives."

I tense, ready to defend myself, but Gage's deep voice interrupts us. "Leave him be. We all have our ways."

We turn to look at Gage, standing nearby, his usual skull mask firmly in place.

Lars raises an eyebrow. "Speaking of ways, Gage, where's your costume?"

Gage tilts his head. "This is my costume."

Cade bursts out laughing. "Seriously? You're wearing the same damn mask you always wear!"

Even I can't help but chuckle at that. Gage just shrugs, unfazed. "It works for me."

Lars shakes his head, still grinning. “You’re a strange one, Gage. But I guess we all are, in our own ways.”

I nod, feeling a sense of camaraderie with these men. We may have differences but understand each other in ways that outsiders never could.

Tilly bounces over to us, her fairy wings fluttering behind her. “What are you guys talking about?”

I wrap an arm around her waist, pulling her close. “Just admiring Gage’s creativity in choosing a costume.”

She giggles, leaning into me. “Well, I think you all look great. Now, come on! There’s so much to see and do!”

As she tugs me away, I glance back at the guys, feeling a sense of belonging I’ve never experienced before. For the first time, I feel part of something bigger than myself. And with Tilly by my side, I know that anything is possible.

Of course, old habits die hard. As the night progresses, I find myself drifting back toward my grouchy tendencies, especially when we encounter a group of rowdy teenagers. But Tilly quickly senses my shift in mood and gently takes my hand, squeezing it.

“Don’t let them ruin our night,” she whispers, her eyes shining with determination. “Let’s get some cotton candy and find a good spot for the fireworks.”

I nod, grateful for her presence and her unwavering ability to pull me back from the brink of my darker thoughts. As we walk hand in hand, mask still in place, I realize that while I may never fully shake my grouchy demeanor, with Tilly by my side, I can find moments of peace and even enjoyment in the chaos of the carnival.

As the carnival winds down and the crowds begin to disperse, the night takes on a different feel. The shadows lengthen, and a hush falls over the once-lively grounds. It's in these quiet moments that Tilly shines the brightest, her eyes sparkling with mischief. I know what she's thinking—tonight is the perfect night for one of our risky adventures.

I watch as she strolls over to the bumper cars, her eyes scanning the area. I recognize that glint in her eye; she's planning something naughty. I smirk, already knowing what she has in mind.

Slipping back into the Ghost persona, I pull on my mask and follow her silent footsteps. With each step, I embrace the character, becoming the mysterious, menacing figure that fascinates and excites Tilly.

I spot her standing near the bumper cars, her eyes fixed on me with anticipation. Without a word, I stalk toward her, my movements deliberate and purposeful. She backs away, playing the part of the innocent bystander, but I can see the desire burning in her eyes.

I reach out and grab her, pulling her toward me. She resists, but I'm too strong, and I know this is what she wants. I continue the charade, climbing into one of the cars and forcing her to straddle me.

She struggles, her hands pushing against my chest as I hold her down. "Please, let me go," she whispers, her voice laced with fake fear. "Don't do this."

I growl in response, the sound muffled by the mask. My hands grip her hips hard. "You know what I want," I say, my voice harsh. "Don't make this difficult."

She bites her lip, her chest rising and falling with exaggerated breaths. "No," she says. "I won't give in to your demands."

I lean in close, my lips brushing against her ear. “You have no choice,” I whisper.

And with that, I tear her panties in two and unzip my pants, rubbing my dick through her soaking wet arousal.

I grin as her eyes widen in surprise. Her body is soft and warm against mine, her curves pressing into me as she reluctantly sits on my lap. She’s playing the part well, acting reluctant even as I feel her heat and her wetness against my length.

“You don’t want this, fairy?” I growl, my hands gripping her hips possessively. “Tell me you don’t want my cock.”

She shakes her head, her breath coming in short gasps. “I don’t... I won’t...” Her words trail off as I lift her up, positioning her directly over my aching dick.

With a swift motion, I fill her, pushing inside her tight heat. Her eyes roll back, and her mouth falls open in a silent scream. Her walls clench around me, and she tries to shift away, but I hold her firmly in place.

“You can fight all you want,” I murmur, my voice thick with desire. “But we both know you want me.”

I thrust up into her, over and over, reveling in the feel of her softness surrounding me. Her fake whimpers only spur me on, and I groan with pleasure, my hands digging into her hips.

“That’s it, baby,” I encourage, my voice harsh in her ear. “Take it all. Feel how deep I’m inside you.”

She squirms, but it’s no use. I lift her up and down on my shaft, each movement driving me further inside her. The pleasure builds, and her walls clench around me,

her body responding even as she pretends to resist.

“You like that, don’t you?” I tease, feeling her wetness coat me. “Admit it, fairy. Admit that you love my cock.”

“No...” she pants, her chest heaving. “I hate it... please... stop...”

I chuckle, my breath hot against her neck. “Liar,” I whisper before licking and nibbling on her sensitive skin. “You’re so wet for me. Your body can’t lie.”

I continue to move her up and down on my length, each thrust bringing me closer to the edge. The sensation is incredible, and I tighten my grip on her, unwilling to let her go.

“That’s it, baby,” I growl, my control slipping. “Come for me. Let me feel you fall apart around my cock.”

Her breath catches, and her body tenses, her inner walls clenching rhythmically as her orgasm washes over her. I feel her heat consume me, and with a few more powerful thrusts, I let go, groaning her name as I fill her with my release.

Collapsing back against the seat, I keep her pinned to me, my arms wrapped tightly around her. She turns her face away, maintaining the pretense of resistance even as I feel her body relaxing against mine.

“Admit it,” I whisper, my lips brushing her ear. “Admit that you loved it.”

Tilly hesitates, her eyes sparkling with mischief. “What if I don’t?” she asks, her voice playful. “Will you do it again? ”

I growl, feeling my desire stirring once more. “You’re a naughty fairy,” I tell her, my

hands roaming over her body possessively. “A greedy fairy. But I love you for it.”

She leans in and presses her lips to mine, her kiss full of passion and longing. “I love you too,” she whispers, pulling my mask up enough so my mouth is visible.

And just like that, we’re kissing, our bodies still intertwined, the connection between us as intense as ever. Her fingers tangle in my hair, pulling me closer, and I respond eagerly, my tongue tangling with hers.

The world around us fades away, and all that exists is this moment, this connection with Tilly. She breathed life into my soul, chasing away the darkness.

I’d spent so many years living in the shadows, my life consumed by obsession and loneliness. But now, with Tilly by my side, the sun has broken through, casting light on a future I never thought possible. She’s my savior, my light in the darkness, and I know I’ll do everything I can to protect her and keep her safe.

Our lips never break contact as I lift her off my lap and stand up, holding her tightly against me. I walk around the bumper car, placing her on the hood, and then I’m inside her again, our bodies moving in perfect sync.

The intensity builds as we kiss and touch, our hands exploring familiar territory with renewed fervor. I feel my control slipping as I thrust into my girl, her walls clenching around me, drawing me deeper.

I break away from her lips, burying my face in her neck, my breath hot against her skin. “You’re mine,” I growl, my voice thick with desire. “Only mine.”

Tilly moans, her nails digging into my back. “Yes,” she pants. “Yours, always.”

Her hands, which had been pushing against my chest, now find their way to my back,

pulling me closer and encouraging me to take her deeper. “Yes,” she moans, her fake resistance melting away. “Take me, Ghost. Make me yours.”

And I do. With each thrust, I claim her as my own. The bumper car creaks beneath us, its movement adding to the intensity of our passion.

As our pleasure builds, I feel her walls tighten around me, her breath coming in ragged gasps. “Come for me,” I growl, my voice demanding. “Come all over my cock.”

She obliges, her body shaking as she climaxes, her fake fear long forgotten. I follow soon after, my own release surging through me as I fill her with my essence.

I lean down, my forehead resting against hers as we both catch our breath. I know she can feel my heart racing beneath the mask, and I wonder if she can sense the depth of my obsession with her. Slowly, I remove the mask, revealing my true identity to her again.

She smiles, her eyes shining with a mix of satisfaction and love. “You sure know how to make Halloween memorable, Phoenix,” she says softly.

I pull her into my arms, holding her close as the reality of our life together sinks in. “And I intend to make every single one for the rest of your life just as memorable.”

TILLY

Phoenix tucks himself back into his pants and then looks at me. “I’ve got a surprise for you, sweetheart.”

I arch a brow. “What kind of surprise?”

“I can’t tell you.” He offers me his hand. “Come on.”

I take Phoenix’s hand as he guides me through the carnival, intrigued by his surprise. As we approach the woods, I see a picnic blanket set up ahead, glowing jack-o’-lanterns dotting the area.

“What’s all this?” I ask, my eyes sparkling with curiosity.

Phoenix gestures for me to sit, and I lower myself onto the soft blanket, taking in the cozy, intimate scene.

Phoenix sits down next to me, a soft smile on his lips. “I wanted to do something special for you. After everything we’ve been through, I thought we could use a moment of peace and quiet.” He reaches into the basket and pulls out a bottle of wine and two glasses .

As he pours the wine, I can’t help but feel touched by his thoughtfulness. The carnival chaos fades into the background, and it’s just the two of us, surrounded by the warm glow of the pumpkins. I accept the glass he offers me, our fingers brushing gently.

“Phoenix, this is beautiful. Thank you.” I sip the rich red wine, savoring the flavor.

He shifts closer to me, his arm brushing against mine. “You deserve this. I want you to know how much you mean to me.” His ice-blue eyes hold mine, filled with a tenderness that catches me off guard.

I lean into him, resting my head on his shoulder. “I’m so grateful to have you, Phoenix. Despite the chaos you wreaked, I can’t imagine not being with you.”

His arm wraps around me, pulling me close. We sit in comfortable silence, watching the flickering pumpkins and listening to the muffled sounds of the carnival in the distance. It’s as if the world has faded away, leaving just the two of us.

Phoenix shifts to face me, his expression earnest. He takes my hands in his, his touch sending tingles up my arms. “Tilly, you mean everything to me. This past year has been a whirlwind, but you’ve been my light through all the chaos and darkness.”

My breath catches in my throat as he pauses, his eyes shining intensely. Could this be what I think it is?

“Before I met you, I was consumed by obsession and driven by a need for control. But you showed me what it means to truly love someone.” Phoenix swallows hard, steeling himself. “You gave me a reason to let go of the past and embrace a future worth fighting for.”

He releases one of my hands to reach into his pocket, retrieving a small velvet box. My heart pounds rapidly in my chest as he opens it, revealing a stunning diamond ring.

“Tilly Jane Lawson, will you marry me? Be my partner, my love, my everything?”

Tears well up in my eyes as I stare at the glittering ring, the weight of his proposal

hitting me. After everything I've been through—him stalking me, kidnapping me, and then Veronica kidnapping me, the twisted journey to this point—Phoenix is offering me the ultimate commitment.

I meet his piercing blue gaze, letting my love and adoration for this complicated, dark man wash over me. “Yes,” I whisper, my voice thick with emotion. “Yes, Phoenix, I’ll marry you!”

A radiant smile breaks across his face as he slips the ring onto my trembling finger. It’s a perfect fit, just like us. Phoenix pulls me into a searing kiss, tangling his fingers in my hair as our lips move in perfect sync.

When we finally break apart, I’m breathless and beaming. “I love you so much,” I murmur against his lips. “Nothing will ever change that.”

Phoenix holds me tightly, burying his face in the crook of my neck. “You’re everything to me, Tilly. I promise to show you how much you mean to me daily.”

I should question the depth of his obsession and the lengths he’s gone to keep me. But in his arms, all rational thought disappears, consumed by the all-encompassing love for this man.

I know our relationship began in darkness and obsession. I was forced into this world, but now, as I remain with Phoenix, a rush of emotions wash over me. Fear and uncertainty, yes, but also a growing acceptance and an unmistakable love.

“I love you, Phoenix,” I whisper.

In response, he tightens his embrace, his breath tickling my ear. “I know, Tilly. And I’m forever yours.” His voice is hoarse, his words a promise that resonates deeply within me.

I understand that our path forward won't be easy. There will be challenges, obstacles, and consequences to face. But at this moment, here with Phoenix, I am ready to face it all because I know that our love, born out of darkness, has the power to light our way forward.

* * *

Thank you for reading Carnival Stalker!