



Dante (Kings of Chaos)

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hot made man, touch her and die romances

DANTE by Lena Little

Dante

Another day, another dollar. That's how it was supposed to go.

Collecting the Don's debts and making those who can't pay up suffer in unimaginable ways. My idea of a good time, and I get to walk away richer for it.

But it's like the old saying goes, 'If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans.'

I learn that lesson in the form of Natalie Pryce.

An angel who knocks the wind from my sails and leaves me a desperate mess.

I will stop at nothing to make her mine.

I don't care how many bodies I have to leave lying in the dirt to prove it.

Natalie

The Demon of Delta County is in my house?

I've daydreamed about it a thousand times before, but never like this.

His gun fixed on my chest, while those devilish eyes that hold no mercy drink me in like I'm some kind of rare artwork.

Scared is an understatement, but something tells me Dante Vitorri isn't going to hurt me.

But if not pain, what does he have in store for me? For us?

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DANTE

“Mind if I smoke in here?” I bring a lit match to the thin cigar hanging from my lips before I get an answer.

Luke Pryce won’t mind. He’s on the brink of full mental collapse, and the smell of my cherry cigar won’t change it. Plus, it beats the smell of the musky stink wafting through the living room.

“Please do and have a seat.” He waves toward a rusty lawn chair on my right. His offer is a damned insult. It would ruin my suit at best and give me some exotic illness at worst. “Can I get you something to drink? Water? Coffee?”

“No point. I’m not staying long.” Plumes of smoke leave my mouth with the words.

“May I ask what this is about, Mr...?” Emma Pryce asks. Unlike her husband, she isn’t quivering at the lip or on the verge of pissing herself.

Good. The carpets could do without another excretion of bodily fluids.

“Dante. Leave the Mister,” I say as she steps out from behind the kitchen counter and joins us in the conjoined living room. “I’m not in the habit of wasting time, so I’ll get right to the point. Do you have it, Luke?”

Emma stares at him, and the first sign of worry builds on her face. Narrow eyes, a

furrowed brow, and parted lips ready to beg for an answer to her initial question.

“I don’t. I thought I’d be back on my feet by now, but no one wants to hire a cripple,” Luke says, downtrodden.

“What have you done, Luke?” Emma swallows nervously as the concoction of emotions on her face grows more fearful by the second.

“He took money. A lot of money. From men who don’t like to wait,” I answer. Not to appease the building frenzy in her eyes, but I don’t want delays. It’s been a long day of collecting the Don’s debts, and I’m ready for a good, long nap.

“You told me it was settlement money.” She stares at me while she speaks to Luke.

“Their settlement wasn’t enough to cover two months’ rent. I had to do something. Had to provide for my family,” he says meekly.

“And look where that’s landed you.” Venom drips from Emma’s response.

Luke opens his mouth to speak, but before he can utter a sound, I jump in.

“Shut it. Both of you. My patience is running thin, and I won’t be part of your domestic conversations.” I’m not getting angry, but I won’t waste the energy on these two. I make my way toward him before I speak again. “You don’t have the money? Fine. But it leaves me in a terrible place, Luke. How do you think the boss is gonna feel when I tell him you’ve let us down?”

“Bad?” Luke’s eyes widen at every step closer I take.

“Exactly. I gave you a break last week. Understood how hard it is to get back on your feet when you can’t use yours anymore.” I draw a pair of thick leather gloves from

my jacket pocket and pull them on. Even if they won't run to the cops, I'm not about to leave any evidence of being here.

"Wait, please. Don't hurt him," Emma screams. "Now that I know, I can?—"

I shut her down. "You can't do anything. He'd have asked for help if he thought you could."

Luke's trembling violently in his seat as I stop inches away from him. His shakes get worse as I grab his wrist and pull his arm into the air, inspecting each finger individually.

"This one will do nicely," I say, adjusting my hand from Luke's wrist up to his ring finger.

"What are you doing?" Emma's voice is a distant whisper.

I don't bother with a response. Actions speak louder than words, and I'm about to prove it. I grab a pair of needle nose pliers hidden in one of my blazer's many pockets and bring it to Luke's finger. It clangs against his copper wedding band with a satisfying ding .

And yet, Luke doesn't scream. Though, Emma is squealing enough for both of them.

"A finger a week until you've paid up. Do you understand?" I apply enough pressure to the pliers for them to pinch his skin. Almost enough to cut through.

"I do," he says grimly.

I'm impressed by his resilience. He could barely speak moments ago while I was across the room, and the threat of what I'd do lingered in the air. Now, he's facing up

to it with the sort of stoic bravery I couldn't imagine anyone in his position having. But my half-found respect doesn't change what I have to do.

As I tighten my grip around the handles, the front door swings open. In a flash, I spin on my heels and draw the pistol hanging in my waistband, training it perfectly where the newcomer would step in.

"I'm home," a gentle voice comes first, followed by a picture of perfection entering the door.

A single glance at her pure beauty shatters my perception of reality. I'm awe-struck. Glued in place. I can't lower my gun, but for the first time in ages, I feel like a monster for pointing it at this delicate little thing.

This angel.

"What the fuck?" she bellows, noticing me and my weapon. The grocery bags she cradled like a baby to her hip fall, and their contents spill across the floor. Her deep blue eyes flash with the panic and turmoil of what she stumbled into as she cowers against the wall.

"And who are you?" I tilt my head sideways, drinking in her adorable face, scrunched up in terror. Her long flowing river of golden hair, cascading down her shoulders, reaches a loose point above her mountainous tits in a tight crop top. And the immaculate curvature of her breasts, which narrow at the waist and expand once more into full, voluptuous hips squished into a pair of booty shorts a size too small.

"Baby, it's going to be okay. Go to your room," Emma cries out in panic. She's waving the girl along, trying to get her to run.

"Fuck that. She's not going anywhere," I bark. Not after the feverish burn she left on

my brow and the painful throb in my groin. “Who are you?” I repeat the question sternly this time, demanding an answer.

“She’s my daughter,” Luke shouts. “Please don’t hurt her. Do whatever you want to me, but let Natalie go.”

His words barely penetrate the thumping pulse in my ears.

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NATALIE

I know him.

Living in a small town, I guess it isn't surprising. He's been at the bar I waitress at more than a few times, holding shady meetings with dubious folks who carry a bad reputation. Much like himself, I suppose. But I guess you don't get a name like the Demon of Delta County by helping the homeless or rescuing kittens from trees.

And his presence in my house can only mean trouble.

"Please, Mr ... Dante, put the gun down. Don't hurt my baby," Mom screeches. Tears roll down her cheeks, and she's half slumped over, pretty much begging from the knee.

I'm still pinned to the wall, staring down the barrel of Dante's gun. My heart's thumping, and the waves of adrenaline coursing through my veins leave me lightheaded and on the verge of collapse.

Dante listens to her. His arm drops to his side, but his finger remains firmly on the trigger.

"Your daughter?" he asks, shrugging his massive shoulders. His other hand, pinching my father's ring finger between a pair of pliers, releases and returns the tool into his pocket. "Didn't know you had a child."

“What do you want?” As hard as it is to say, I get the words out. If I can keep his attention on me, maybe it’ll stop him from doing whatever he came to do.

“Dear ole dad owes me a lot of money,” Dante says.

Why am I not surprised? I don’t blame Dad for taking money from Dante. He’s down on his luck, and he’s always done whatever he could to support our family.

“Leave her out of this. She does?—”

“Shut the fuck up.” Dante’s attention breaks away from me briefly as he looks over his shoulder at Dad. “I’m not talking to you, so wait your fucking turn.”

I’ve seen Dante’s aggression before, hurling insults and starting bar fights without a care in the world about the consequences. More than once, I caught myself chewing my lip in disbelief at my own twisted fantasies and curiosity the Demon roused in me. Even now, I can’t shake them. A stranger in our home, commanding the room as if he owns the damn place, with unequivocal ruthlessness.

What does that say about me? Managing a way to appreciate his cruelty, even when it’s directed at my parents.

“I can give you money.” I peel myself off the wall, sending a nervous hand into my bag. “It isn’t a lot. It’s what I got off tips from my shift, but you can take it.”

I grab the one-hundred and twelve dollars in various note denominations and hold it out to him.

“I don’t want your money.” Dante holsters his gun and chuckles coyly, as if I’m supposed to be in on whatever got him laughing.

“But it’s all we’ve got. Please, take it. I’ll make sure to have more next week. I didn’t?—”

“I don’t want your fucking money,” Dante snarls. He takes his first step away from Dad and starts making his way to me.

No one speaks. Hell, I’m not even sure any of us are breathing anymore. But I don’t cower or try to run from the monster approaching me. One of us has to stand up to him, even if I barely meet his chest while wearing my platform sneakers.

His haphazard gawking settles on my breasts. It knocks the wind from my lungs, and I don’t think it’s out of fear. My mind races with fear, but my body enjoys his hungry gaze, aches for it, begs for it.

This may be the first time Dante’s noticed me, but I’ve had more than enough time to get acquainted with his features. Handsome, brutish, and strong. Every girl’s wet dream, walking around in suits that cost more than our house like he rules this whole damn town.

Settle down, Nat. Now isn’t the time to slip away into one of your fantasies.

“Then what do you want?” I ask. His intimidating approach is one thing, but it’s the cold look in his eyes that hits the hardest. Even with the smug grin on his face, pleased with whatever thoughts roam his mind, his eyes never lose their sharp edge.

“What I want, you won’t want to give.” He runs a hand through his slicked-back, ebony hair. “You keep your money, keep feeding this house, and I’ll square off your dad’s debt.”

“Baby, it’s going to be okay,” Mom says, but we both ignore her. This isn’t about her or Dad right now.

It's me and Dante playing a dangerous game I'm about to lose.

"What do you get in turn?" I ask as Dante gets within arm's length. I can come up with guesses as to what he wants, but it won't do me any good. I might as well hear it straight from his mouth.

"You," is all he answers.

I'm locked in place, staring straight at his strong jawline and breathing in his woody cologne. But the thing that surprises me most, or maybe makes me feel more insane, is looking into his eyes. Even those dastardly, deep brown orbs flecked with gold hold beauty in them.

Dante takes my open hand and closes it into a ball around the money I held out to him.

"Me?" I ask out of disbelief, but it wouldn't take Einstein to figure out what he meant.

He nods. A smile creeps across his face while he drinks my body in one last time. Without another word, he spins on his heel and steps through the door I just entered, humming a tune all the way back to his car.

"You don't have to get involved in this," Mom says, snapping me from my daze when Dante's car pulls off our driveway. She's in a mess of tears, running toward me with open arms. "You don't have to fix your dad's fuck ups."

A heavy-hearted sigh rolls out of Dad's chest from behind her. "She's right, Nat. Don't get involved with this bad business because of me."

"I'm not," I say, with a newfound confidence in my decision. "I want to help, and I'll

do it anyway I can.”

Even if it means being bought by a mafia enforcer.

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DANTE

The Lion's Den.

Four thousand square feet of green grass, dense woods, and a single mansion in the center of it all. Armed men line the perimeter while others march in patrols across the vast, green expanse. The rest roam the intestines of the mansion with duty-bound smiles hiding their fears.

Somehow, among the enormous crowd of soldiers and staff alike, I've never felt more alone.

Natalie Pryce is to blame for this sudden emptiness brewing inside me.

Loneliness isn't the curse everyone makes it out to be when you don't have anyone you'd rather be with. But the instant I saw her, I never wanted to be without her by my side again. Even the hour-long drive to Don Salvatore Lione's mansion left me aching for another look into the deep blue ponds of her eyes. Get lost in them and the daydreams that she'd actually want to be with a man like me.

But that's all they'll ever be, right? No matter what happens tonight, she'll always view me as a monster. As the demon I've found so much pleasure in becoming and maintaining.

Fuck.

“You didn’t come across any trouble?” Don Lione asks, squaring up against the stacks of hundreds I set down on his table. “I know you’re good at what you do, Dante, but I expected a few holdouts.”

We’re sitting in his office, sharing a glass of whiskey while we talk.

“There was one.” My mind returns to her. Natalie. A guardian angel who swooped in to save her father in the nick of time. He can count his lucky fucking stars. Had she arrived a few minutes later, I’d have taken his finger.

“Who?” Salvatore brings his whiskey to his nose and eases back in his deep red leather throne.

He isn’t angry, against what I let Luke believe. He rarely ever is on missed payouts. The money he gives these people is barely a drop in the ocean of his wealth. Sending me to collect these debts isn’t about his return. It’s about sending a message and demanding power in this town. The more people he can get under his thumb, the further his influence extends.

“Luke Pryce,” I say, taking a seat opposite him.

“The factory worker who lost his legs?” For someone who doesn’t seem to care all that much, his memory of these people surprises me.

“Yes,” I answer and tuck my hand into my breast pocket.

“And you’ve dealt with him accordingly?” He takes his first sip.

“Yes and no.” From my breast pocket, I pull the full fifteen thousand dollar debt Luke Pryce accrued. I hand it to Salvatore, and he drops it on top of the rest.

“Seems to me it’s dealt with. So, what’s the problem?” He pats the stack of hundreds I handed him.

“I’ve squared off his debt, and in return, I’m taking his daughter.” A bold statement, but there’s no sugarcoating what’s happening here.

The stern look on Salvatore’s face cracks, and a devious smile replaces it.

“You rarely cease to amaze me in the new, cruel ways you come up with to torture your victims,” he says. I expected resistance and got praise instead? Must be my lucky day. “So, why do you look so anxious mentioning it? What’s got you worried, old friend?”

“Your blessing.” It was bold of me to make an offer to square Luke’s debt without the Don’s approval. Being in the aftermath of it and having far worse expectations for how this meeting would go, there’s no way to shrug off the anxious look without a clear-cut yes from the boss.

“I get my money, and you thrust fear into the heart of the man who took it. Why would I decline you the simple joys and pleasures of life?” Salvatore asks. “You have my blessing to do whatever you’d like in your personal life, Dante. Always have, always will. As long as you keep up the good work, why would I stop you?”

“Thank you, Don Lione,” I take a small sip. So does he.

“As always, your commission for a job well done.” Salvatore sets his drink down beside the stack of money and hands me half of what I gave him for the Pryce payment.

I pocket it the same way I brought it out and swallow the rest of my drink in a big gulp.

“Is there anything else you need, Boss?” I ask out of habit. But it’s different tonight. I almost feel obligated to do more with the gift he’s given me in pursuing Natalie.

“No. You’re a free man for the time being. Go have some fun with your new prize.” He starts packing the cash into his desk drawer. He doesn’t bother counting it, knowing I’d ensure the numbers all lined up.

I swallow the last of my drink and leave. My bet is I’ll have a few days before the Don calls me back into his office for my next task. And oh, the fun I’m going to have with my golden-haired angel until that call.

4

NATALIE

The Next Night

“I can’t work a double shift tonight, Larry. I’ve got prior engagements,” I say.

I didn’t have plans for the evening, at least not originally. But the second I saw the Demon of Delta County barge through the front door, I knew my night was about to get interesting.

Maybe it shouldn’t be my first thought, considering he uses this place for business now and then. I mean, we still haven’t even said a single word to each other after his bold statement of me being what he gets for squaring off Dad’s debt. But no one has joined him at the table, and he’s nursed the same beer for nearly an hour. I’d be a fool to think this is a coincidence.

“Don’t do this to me tonight,” Larry Kissinger, the Windmill Bar and Grill’s manager, groans. “Bianca called in sick, and we’re understaffed as is. I need you working the floor.”

Larry runs a hand through the sweaty mop of shaggy hair hanging over his forehead.

Bullshit. The only reason he wants me to stay is so that he can keep staring at my ass in these overly tight shorts. And he hasn’t been subtle with his intentions of getting in them, either. Dirty remarks, assigning my shifts to align with his when the rowdiest

clients are around, and even offering to buy me a drink long after the bar is closed.

And after eight months of shutting him down, he still won't take no for an answer. His persistence knows no end, and the only reason I put up with it is because I need the money.

"Why not ask one of the others to stay? Maggie needs the money more than I do anyway," I protest. She's a mother of two without a husband or partner. Sure, I could be helping my own family with the tips I make on a second shift, but the first has yielded enough for a few days of groceries.

"You're not being a team player." Larry's voice is coated in malice. "You know how much we value hard work at the Windmill. Are you sure this is a job you want if you can't lend a hand in times of need?"

I used to fall for this manipulative nonsense. Too afraid to lose my job, I'd fight tooth and nail to get back on his good side. Nowadays, I play along with the power fantasy bullshit because I can squeeze him for extra cash at the end of my shifts.

"You're not giving me a choice, are you?" I sigh. Tonight won't be different, I suppose. Even if it means keeping Dante waiting.

"I can't, and you know it," he answers.

"Fine. I'll stay," I groan.

It's another four hours. I can get through it easily enough, but will Dante be as patient? That's still assuming he plans to do anything other than sit at his table and enjoy the view of me parading around in the Windmill's skimpy dress code.

An hour goes by without a hitch. Most tables have turned to drinking rather than

ordering food, and the customers are starting to get rowdy. Good, the drunker they are, the richer I am at the end of the night.

The passing time hasn't been as easy as I originally thought it would be. Any time I glance over at Dante's table, see his steepled fingers in front of his face, eye fucking me from across the room, doubts start to creep in.

What if I'm not special? What if my attempts at helping are actually just another hindrance moving forward? Sure, he paid off Dad's debt, but does that mean he cares? Or if given the opportunity from one of the other unlucky fools who fell victim to him, to take their daughter instead, would he be lingering in their office instead of my bar?

I don't get much time to mull it over as I pass by a table of three. An arm wraps around my waist and pulls me off course. It makes me trip over my feet, and the tray in my hands with six empty beer glasses smashes to the floor.

"Whoopsie," the guy says while the other two at the table giggle like schoolgirls. "Good thing I was here to catch you."

My jaw clenches painfully as I slap his hand away. "Don't touch me."

He lets go, and I move away from his table, sighing at the thousands of glass spikes glistening on the floor.

"Come now, don't be like that. I'll pay for the damages, and you can sit on my face to pay me back." Howling laughter erupts around the table as his hand reaches out to me again.

I jerk away in disgust and stumble farther from the creep. I don't make it far before bumping into something so hard, I almost believe it's one of the supporting beams

strewn across the building. It's only when the enormous hand wraps around my tiny frame to support me from toppling over that I realize it's a person.

No.

The Demon.

As I look up into his razor-sharp jawline, any fears of what might have happened between me and the three drunken gropers instantly melt away.

"Are you deaf?" His voice is calm, quiet, yet somehow cuts through the obnoxiously loud country music. "Or just fucking stupid?"

Dante's presence brings me peace. I feel so small, so safe in his arms. A heavy sigh of relief escapes my lungs, grateful for his intervention.

"What did he say?" The man who grabbed me asks his friends while launching out of his chair. "What the fuck did you just say?"

"Fucking stupid. Got it," Dante says, gently nudging me over to his side.

"That's some big talk when there's one of you and three of us," the creep answers.

"Is there a problem here?" Out of nowhere, Larry steps into the fray. His eyes shift nervously between the creep and Dante.

"There is, and you're a part of it," Dante's eyes never break from the guy gearing up for a fight.

"I'm sure we can figure this out. There's no need for violence, Mr. Vitorri," Larry gulps. I've never seen him so afraid. My lips curl into a devious smile.

Between Dante's valiant stride to defend my honor and Larry nervously shuffling away from the Demon, I can't contain my bubbling excitement. This is the man I observed from afar. The monster I watched conducting dubious dealings while my imagination ran off to the storage room. The two of us locked away in the dark while he had me bent over a beer keg...

God, Nat, not the time. Get out of this first, then indulge your twisted fantasies.

"Tough guy, huh?" the creep asks, and his two buddies join him to square off against Dante.

"Yes," the Demon answers as his hand starts to snake up my back. It rests loosely around my neck. Without warning, he pulls my face toward his, and I instinctively launch onto my tippy toes to meet his mouth.

A sudden rush of heat courses over every inch of my skin. Our kiss knocks the wind from my lungs and leaves me panting, desperate for another, as Dante's attention returns to the three.

"See, Natalie here is mine." He speaks as if announcing it to everyone in the bar. Making sure that not a single person misses what's about to come next. "And I don't like trash laying their grubby fingers on what belongs to me."

"What are you gonna do about it?" The creep steps forward, and his friends join. In some stupid, bold attempt to prove he's fearless in the face of The Demon, he reaches out to me again.

"Big mistake," Dante says. He grabs the creep's two fingers inching closer to me, and with a flick of his wrist and a thrust of his arm, a sickening pop emits from between their hands. The sound is followed by a blood-curdling scream, and a childish grin splashed across Dante's face.

5

DANTE

Fury is a fucking understatement. I was on my feet and ready to tear his throat out the moment he touched her. And now, Lord have mercy on the cunt who laid his filthy hands on my woman and anyone stupid enough to stand at his side.

How dare they make Natalie feel scared? Unsafe in her place of work? Big men who feel strong throwing their weight around my delicate little flower. They're lucky she's still standing here. If it were us alone, I'd kill 'em.

The ringleader stumbles back, screeching in agony while his eyes lock onto his gnarled fingers that are bent the wrong way. His two goons allow him to pass by, creating a wall of meat between me and him.

If they think that's going to stop me, they're sorely mistaken.

I don't give them a chance to make a move. While they're still getting in position, I drive my fist forward. It connects to the soft, squishy side of the guy to the right, and he wheezes as the air escapes his lungs.

I send another blow, and then a third in quick succession. The second hook strikes his jaw and the third cracks right across his temple. He crumbles to the ground like a sack of shit.

The last man standing gets a swing in while I'm dealing with his buddy. It smashes

against my jaw, hard enough for me to feel it but too soft to make me stumble. All the beatings I've taken over the years working for The Lion have conditioned my body to take much worse than that.

“Wanna take another crack at it?” I ask, grinning wickedly in his direction. I even tilt my head to the side and expose more of my chin for another blow.

His friends wail at his feet as his resolve for a fight fleets by the second. As bad as a punch can be, fighting is a mental game. Once you've lost the will to win, there's no coming back. Still, he manages to prepare another strike. He cocks his shoulder, locks it for a hefty blow, but before it gets anywhere near me, I catch his fist in the palm of my hand.

Using my leverage on his arm, I pull him into me. He storms forward, and I drive the hardest point of my forehead down on the bridge of his nose. His legs buckle, and he crumbles as the blood begins to pour down his face.

Pathetic.

“What the fuck?” the ringleader spouts.

He's on his feet again, stumbling away from me until he hits a dead end. The table where it all kicked off. I follow slowly, cautiously, on the off chance anyone else might try and get involved.

“Don't hurt me,” he mumbles when I get close.

Without the chaos of our battle, I take stock of my surroundings. Everyone's looking at us, with some even brave enough to get up close to the action. But none dare make a sound, nor do they try to stop what I'm about to do.

“Is that really what you want to say?” I grab him by the shirt and pull him with me as I start trudging back to Natalie.

“I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean it. I was just having some fun.” He raises his hands in cowardly surrender. The broken fingers dangle loosely in ways that disgust even myself.

“Better, but I don’t want it.” With my grip on his shirt, I pull him down to Natalie’s feet. He falls without a fight. “You’re going to say sorry to her.”

Larry’s standing on the edge of the crowd, with a slack jaw and wide eyes at the sheer brutality on display. Good. I’ve had my eye on this sack of shit since Natalie was supposed to clock off for the night. He hasn’t even tried to hide his interest in her. And more often than not, I saw him biting his lip and gawking at her body in clothes that exposed too much.

But right now, he isn’t much of a threat. I’ll deal with him if he becomes one.

“What’s your name, son?” I ask, grabbing the guy by the neck while I force him to look at Natalie.

“Rick,” he says.

“Well, Rick, it’s your lucky day. I’m feeling generous.”

I can’t tell if she’s impressed or terrified by me. Both have their place.

“What are you gonna do to me?” Rick asks, cowering away from my grip. I don’t let him get far.

“It’s not my decision,” I answer.

Many more of the onlookers have taken to standing so they can get a better view of what's happening. Some watch with smiles of twisted satisfaction, and others clutch their pearls in sheer disgust at how I'm treating one of the locals.

"What would you like me to do, my angel?" It rolls off my tongue and brings a quaint smile to her face.

It's the only thing that makes sense. Natalie Pryce is the closest thing to a holy being I've set my eyes on, and she deserves to know it. No more squabbles with a man when she should be ruling the empires of heaven themselves.

"I..." Her eyes are glued to mine. "Don't know."

"Do you want an apology?" I ask.

"I do," she says.

Rick starts sputtering apologies in a thousand different ways while spit and snot dribble from his orifices.

"Not good enough." I tighten my grip around his neck and sink to one knee while plunging his face to the ground. "You're going to kiss her feet and beg her forgiveness."

He does. His mouth meets the grimy black covering her otherwise pristine white shoes. "I'm so sorry. Please. I didn't mean it."

I look up at her. Behind a nervous gulp and those big puppy dog eyes staring down at us, her lips curve upward with satisfaction. How many of these derelict pricks would suffer the same fate if she had the strength to do it alone?

Now, she'll never have to worry about it again. I can be her strength. Make anyone, everyone, who upsets her suffer in ways unimaginable. Have them beg, praise, and worship at her feet the same way I want to.

"I forgive you," she says. And with it, I release his neck.

I stand and wrap a hand around Natalie's waist before kissing her with furious passion. Our lips explode into an inferno of burning while our tongues run long, soothing laps across the heat. She gives into me without question, and I give myself to her fully.

A sign. A warning. To anyone else in this shit-hole town thinking they can try and take what's mine.

6

NATALIE

That was insane. Bouncing off the walls bonkers.

Dante took a hit and beat the hell out of three guys for me. He let the world know I'm his without a second thought or any worry of what it might mean for him. And that kiss ... An embrace so intense I can still feel the heat of his lips against mine. It leaves a burning in my chest that extends up to my rosy cheeks and straight down to my soaked panties.

"She's taking the rest of the night off, understood?" Dante barks at Larry, but his eyes flick through the crowd to see if anyone else wants to challenge him.

Larry bobs his head with such intensity, I'm sure he's gonna give himself whiplash. He stares dull-eyed and pouting while he acknowledges Dante, realizing that whatever chance he thought he had at taking me for himself is gone.

"Ready to get out of here?" Dante asks.

Before I can respond, he grabs my hand and leads me outside. The crowd parts, creating a large gap between them and us. By the time we reach the door, most of the patrons have returned to their tables, continuing their night out. A few of the staff, Larry included, help Rick and his buddies off the floor.

We don't speak while we walk to his car. Dante opens the passenger side for me, and

I get in. And as he walks back to the driver's side, I can't contain the high-pitched squeal of pure, ecstatic delight from what just transpired.

Does it mean I'm screwed up? Relishing the idea that three people are left bloody and bruised in a place I hate working at? I almost want to believe I'm a bad person for feeling this way, but I don't. Guys like Rick and his friends are filth. They deserve what they got.

So, why not enjoy the fact that this Demon wants to protect me?

I compose myself before he opens the door and drops in his chair.

His eyes fall on mine, and he smirks, noticing my delight.

"You didn't have to do that, you know? It's just a shitty perk of the job. Happens all the time," I say.

Working in a bar that insists on skimpy outfits, a few wandering hands are par for the course. It used to upset me, leave me a shaking mess, unable to control my emotions, but nowadays, it's barely an inconvenience. You have to develop tough skin for this line of work, or you'll never make it.

"I did," Dante answers. "You're mine now, Natalie. The sooner this whole damn town learns it, the better. Might make them think twice before trying to pull any stupid shit."

Dante starts the car, and the engine roars to life.

"Anyone else giving you trouble in there?" He brings the conversation back to a more serious topic, even though his dark brown eyes scream that they want to get into the fun of the night.

“Nothing like that,” I answer as we start to move. If I had to remember the faces of everyone who touched me or made me uncomfortable, Dante would be cracking the skulls of half this town. “But...”

“But what?”

“Just the manager. He’s been annoying me since I started working here.” I giggle at the thought.

“Want me to have a word with him instead?” Dante asks.

“No, I’m sure he’ll think twice about making another move after what you did tonight.” I rest a soothing hand on Dante’s leg to still his newly mounting frustrations.

Even while driving, his head tilts to my touch. It lingers longer than I expect it to, considering he’s supposed to be looking at the road. Yet, the car continues moving straight, and he starts to stop at a red light as if by instinct alone.

“I didn’t know you were going to come by tonight,” I say. “With the way you left things yesterday, I didn’t know what to expect at all.”

“That makes two of us,” Dante answers. “But I had to see you again. I was awake all night thinking about it.”

“Only see me?” I bat my eyelashes at him, even though his attention is back on the road.

“Trust me, if I was sure you’d let me tear away your panties and drown myself in your pussy juice, I’d do it. But I want you to want this,” he says.

The directness of his statement makes my heart sink into my loins. My mind flashes with filthy images of every fantasy I've had of him. Those strong arms gripping my waist, pulling me into thrust after hard thrust of his intense fucking. His hand gripping my throat. Sucking his fingers into my mouth as he has his way with me. Yet nothing could've prepared me for a sentence like that.

"And what does being yours entail, exactly?" I nibble on my lower lip. I'm smart enough to know pleasures of the flesh are expected, if not mandatory. My entire body tingles in delight at the mere thought.

"Exactly what it sounds like." Dante smirks. "No wandering thoughts or shared intentions. Mine alone. To do with as I please. But something about the smile on your face says you already knew it. Want it."

He's not wrong. But hearing him say it out loud brings me back down to earth. His alone? I can get behind the idea, sure, but does it go both ways? Am I his, while he gets to do whatever he wants with whoever he pleases? He admitted it himself; he came here tonight with no goals in mind other than to see me again.

What if I'm just a new shiny toy to him? Bought and paid for to help my dad out of trouble.

"You sure sound confident in what you want," I say, trying to shake the chills my thoughts provoked.

"I've never been more certain of anything," Dante answers. "It's not in my nature. I do everything with intent and purpose."

"Everything?"

"I've already told you I want you to smother me with your thighs. Want me to

explain all the filthy things I want to do to your tight body? Bend you over the hood of my car? The way I'd erupt into a whimpering mess at the first stroke of my cock inside your walls? Or scream out in exquisite anguish while I fill your womb with my seed?" The last sentence leaves his mouth with a deep growl.

"All of it. Every damned word. Speak and never stop. Not until it all comes true," I whimper.

This roller coaster of emotions is driving me crazy. One minute, I'm worried he's going to get bored of me, and the next, I'm a mess, lingering on every word and over-eager to put them to the test.

"Why speak when we can act?" He floors the gas pedal to speed through the streets.

Maybe this is a fleeting fancy, and Dante won't want to pursue it further than a one-night stand or a few nights of intense pleasure. But even if that's the case, why waste an opportunity to be with him?

Especially if he can make my wildest dreams come true?

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7

DANTE

My night's going better than expected.

Waiting around and fumbling for my opportunity to whisk Natalie away from that shit-hole bar aside, our evening together is progressing nicely. Who'd have thought taking what you want would yield such great results?

But where do we go from here? Lazing in my living room and sipping champagne with a beautiful woman isn't my usual style. I'm like a fish out of water, trying to make her comfortable while doing my best to tame my desires.

Kicking the shit out of those goons in the bar is what I'm best at. This? It's a new level of hell I don't think I can escape from.

"I still can't believe you did that," Natalie says, kicking her feet onto the coffee table. Her words snap me out of my daze.

"No one lays a finger on what's mine," I say. A strict rule that has gotten me very far in this life.

"Yeah, but it was three of them and one of you." She places her champagne flute on the small table to her side.

"The odds weren't really fair, were they?" I follow her action, replacing my glass

with her hand. She doesn't seem frightened by my touch, nor does she attempt to pull away. It's a good start, right? "Should've waited for more of their friends to come by."

She laughs, and that heavenly sound washes away my fears.

Don't overthink this. Stay in the moment and enjoy yourself.

"So, my big strong man, if you can beat the pulp out of three dudes, probably more, why do you seem so nervous?" She brushes the back of my hand with her thumb.

"I'm not very good at this," I admit, though it stings me to do so.

"This?" She raises a brow.

"Yes. Whatever this is." I wave my free hand between us. I'm the sort of man who shoots first and asks questions later. Sitting here with a beautiful woman at my side, I'm at my wits' end.

I've always taken everything I wanted. A nice car? The dealers are under the Lion's protection, and they wouldn't stop me from taking whatever I pleased. A big apartment with a beautiful view? Bought the building and kicked the tenants out, so I could have peace and quiet.

But a woman to hold, love, and care for? No amount of money can buy that kind of feeling. Or threaten her to love me. I guess that's why this whole damn thing is starting to eat away at me. I bought her by paying off her dad's debt. Made her mine without so much as a thought to what she wanted. Even now, Natalie could be smiling and playing along, while deep down, she's terrified of what I'm going to do to her.

I'm a monster for throwing her into this position, but I've come so close to having her, I refuse to back down now.

"Seems to me you're doing a pretty good job at it," she says. "But if you're really this concerned, why not stick to what you're good at? Shoot first, and we'll ask questions later."

Her words do wonders for setting my mind at ease, but it's her big blue eyes and the subtle pout on her lips that give me real confirmation. Maybe we're both floating high because of what happened at the bar or maybe she really wants this the same way I do. Whatever tomorrow brings, be it problematic or not, I'll deal with it then.

I pull Natalie onto my lap and press my lips against the bare skin of her chest. I'm burning up, spiraling out of control, and no matter how I try to fight it, I know it's a losing battle. I want her. Need her.

"Do you want this?" I ask, hands already dancing down the sides of Natalie's body. She has to say yes. Has to tell me I'm not a monster for what I'm about to do to her.

"I..." She hesitates. Her big blue eyes stare deep into mine, and her lips start to tremble. "I do. So. Fucking. Badly." With each word, she grinds up against me, desperate, pleading.

I shove my hands under her ass and stand, hoisting her up with me. My lips lock with hers, an instant blazing passion that only furthers my deepest desire to sleep with her. But I won't rush to it. I won't put myself into a situation that could leave me embarrassed and Natalie unsatisfied.

I spin around with Natalie in my arms. She giggles against my lips as I crumble to my knees and drop her onto the sofa. My lips find whatever skin they can. My nose breathes in deep lungfuls of her light, fruity perfume. And my tongue gets its first

taste of Natalie.

She groans at my ferocity, sinking down the sofa while I explore her body with my hands and mouth. I yank down her tube top to expose her voluptuous breasts. With no bra for support, they bounce free and lock me in a mesmerized trance.

“Like what you see?” She squirms beneath my body, a hand of her own wrapping around my neck to guide my face into those magnificent tits.

I oblige without a care and suck a nipple into my mouth. Natalie squeals in delight. I stroke the pointy bead with the tip of my tongue, and it sends her body into euphoric spasms. All the while, my hands travel down her sides, clawing at the tight shorts hugging her ass.

She bucks her hips, giving me easier access to peel them down her legs. I trail kisses down her abdomen, making my way closer and closer to the gate of her promised land.

Every kiss inspires another whimpering sound from Natalie. Those noises push me further into my lust-fueled frenzy. I reach my destination, and her intoxicating scent fills my nose. It makes my mouth water, and I can’t stop myself from indulging in the buffet on offer.

Tongue first. Flat pad running the length of her slit until my lips brush over her clit. I surround it with my lips, treating it with the same flicks and licks I gave her nipple a moment prior.

And she moans. A heavenly sound I never want to stop hearing.

I let a finger replace my tongue as I sink my head lower again. The taste on her outside walls isn’t enough. I need to replace the saliva in my mouth with her liquids

until she is the only thing I taste. No hesitation, I glide my tongue straight into her while my fingers continue to dance over her delicate nub.

I cast my eyes back up to her. A quick glance to see what's happening on her face, and I'm met in turn by a sight that makes me as hard as a crowbar.

She's screaming now. Begging and pleading I go on. Never stop. And I won't. Her arms flail wildly in the air, one finding its way onto my head while the other claws deep into the throw pillow at her side, trying to find any balance while I tear out her first climax with my mouth.

The first of many. Until we're both lying sprawled out, exhausted, and so come-drunk, we couldn't move if we wanted to.

8

NATALIE

One minute, we're giggling and laughing at the silliest jokes. Talking about Dante's valiant efforts in fending off the monsters who attacked me. Sipping expensive champagne I'll never be able to afford and snuggling up on the couch. And the next, his tongue is buried so deep inside me, I can see heaven.

His eyes are locked on my face, studying the contorted features from the pleasure he's giving me. I can't control myself. His hands, his tongue, and the deep, desperate stare. It's driving me crazy. My body spasms against my attempts to command it. Noises I didn't think possible bellow out of my mouth. And my mind explodes with thoughts of Dante.

The Demon of Delta County. The monster who stole me away from home.

The only man I've ever wanted this fucking bad.

"I want you inside me." The words come out without warning.

Dante doesn't hesitate. He's on his feet, with his pants around his ankles in a flash. The girth between his legs bounces as it's set free. It's just as monstrous as I imagined. I can't stop staring at it. Fuck. I've somehow forgotten how to breathe.

"Like what you see?" He's grinning wide while his eyes travel down the length of my body.

“More than you could imagine.” I reach out eagerly for my first touch of the massive rod that’s going to split me in half.

Dante groans as my cool fingers make first contact with his throbbing meat. His head snaps to the ceiling when I start to stroke, and the groans devolve into guttural grunts.

“Ah, fuck, that feels so good.” He starts bucking his hips into my fist, legs shaking and body starting to tremble.

But he doesn’t allow himself to lose control. Not to my hand. Dante’s head snaps back down to me, and his eyes burn with passionate fire and clarity. He grabs my wrist and pulls my hand away from his meat.

“Get up,” Dante orders, and I do as instructed. “No more waiting. No more wasting time. I need you.”

“Then take me,” I say.

And he does.

My confirmation was all he needed to throw his boa constrictor arms around my body and pull me into a kiss. Our mouths lock, with his tongue smashing through my lips. Lost in the throes of ecstasy, Dante lifts me off the ground and into his arms. His hands slot firmly under my ass, and he carries me in the air like I don’t weigh a thing.

He pins me tightly against his body, using his arms to lower me down until our hips are in line. I get my first feel of his cock, and it sends shivers through my whole being. It’s swaying savagely with all his motions, bobbing and bouncing viciously in all directions. It slides between my legs, and his heavy head knocks right up against my door.

I glide a hand between our bodies, trying not to break our kiss. In the blind fumble, I find his shaft and grab a firm hold. Through his moaning, Dante never breaks our kiss. His legs start to shake, yet I've never felt safer in anyone's arms.

I guide the tip of his erection to my entrance and swing my free arm around his neck for stability. He squeezes my ass tightly, spreading my cheeks and, in turn, parting my lips just enough for his head to find easier access. And it does, gliding into my slick wetness without any resistance.

"Ah fuck," he roars, almost losing balance at the sudden sensation.

Unlike Dante, I can't make a sound. My hand goes limp, unable to guide him in deeper. The sudden, overwhelming pleasure and sensation of being filled to the brim by only his tip has left me dazed. Desperate for more but terrified at the implications of what it's going to do to me.

Physically broken in and mentally overwhelmed. All I want is him. This feeling. The look on his face and the intensity of the happiness pumping from my chest.

Dante stabilizes himself, but in doing so, his hips plunge his girth deeper into me. I can't stop myself from squealing this time. A high-pitched noise that embodies the pure joy of feeling his pleasure.

"I was gonna carry you to bed first, y'know?" Dante says, walking blindly until my back smashes against his living room wall. The sudden stop sends the rest of his length plunging the depths of my pussy.

His mouth immediately finds my neck, and he peppers it with frantic nibbles and kisses. It starts as a tickle against my skin, but every action starts to intensify the pleasure between my legs until I can't think straight.

I couldn't wait anymore . That's what I want to answer, but my brain and body won't allow it. No distractions, not anymore. All I want now is Dante Vitorri and everything he's going to do to me.

“Good girl,” Dante whispers in my ear. “Let it consume you.”

His words knock the wind out of me.

He pulls his hips back before thrusting his full length back into me. His hot breath tickles my earlobe as he does it again.

“Your pussy is mine.” Another full, slow thrust follows.

Dante's tongue runs along my earlobe, down my collarbone, and finally to my chest.

“These tits, also mine.”

He starts increasing his rhythm. With my back pinned to the wall, he has full control of me. I couldn't move if I wanted to, but Lord knows I don't want to go anywhere.

“And you better know, I'm not fucking sharing.”

With one long run of his tongue, from the pointy tip of my nipple back to my mouth, Dante locks me in another kiss. He doesn't break it again while he slams his cock into me with hastening speed and ferocity.

All I can hear is meat slapping together and feverish moans. We're incapable of speech. Hell, even thinking is becoming a task too hard to manage while I do as I'm told, like a good girl. Let the sensation of his cock consume me, fill me with glee and satisfaction, while he crumbles to his own desires.

It drives me crazy. Heat flashes across my skin, and my pussy aches as I cry out one last time. Dante grins against my moan, keeping me pinned in place as an orgasm tears its way from my core.

“I can feel you coming on my cock.” Dante breaks away from our kiss, and a look of pure anguish splashes across his rugged features. “So fucking wet. So fucking tight.”

His pacing intensifies, and his grip starts to loosen. I slide down the wall, only for one of his thrusts to push me back up. He can’t draw a single decent breath, and his body starts to rattle and shake.

“Are you going to come for me?” I somehow manage to say a full sentence without choking. “Fill my womb with your seed as promised?”

My words tilt him over the edge.

He roars, tightening his grip on my ass, while he plunges long, hard thrusts into me until it happens. He erupts inside my walls like a fountain, releasing every drop he has. His mighty war cry comes to an abrupt end as he tumbles backward with me in tow.

He falls to the ground, throwing his arms around my body to shield me from the impact. And we laugh at the silliness of it all while his cock still throbs inside me.

We’re sprawled on the floor, with my head resting on his chest. I can hear his heartbeat. It’s unsteady and frantic, just like my own. I look deep into his eyes and see a softness I didn’t know this man was capable of.

And it breaks my heart into a thousand tiny pieces.

Because we’ve had our fun, but I’ll never know if this is genuine. I’ve held off those

thoughts for so long, fought them away when they crept up at various times throughout the day. But I can't now. Not when I feel myself falling deeper into whatever this deluded fantasy is.

Dante Vitorri, the Demon, has claimed me as payment. But I'm not good enough for him. For the life he's shown me tonight. I don't deserve the expensive champagne or luxury apartment. I'm a small-town girl, something for him to play with when he's not off doing God knows what for the Don.

It's silly to think I ever had a chance with him, and it's worse throwing myself into it fully. Tonight, I'll enjoy my time in his arms, pretending we can make this work. I need the escape from the hard reality that tomorrow will bring.

9

DANTE

Three Days Later

I haven't left her side since we arrived at my place. Like a lost little puppy, I follow her around my apartment, eager for another touch or confirmation from my angel. Without trying, Natalie Pryce has hooked me worse than any drug ever could. The thought of letting her go anywhere other than my lap brings with it an intense pressure in my chest that makes me want to keel over and die.

And I fucking love every second of it.

We've spent the last few days at my place. Unable to keep our hands off one another, be it in another glorious sex or cuddling on the couch, pretending this is normal.

It's oddly nice, even if I know it can't last forever. Someday, I'll have to leave again to enact the Don's vengeance on some poor sod who got mixed up in something he wasn't ready for. But until that day, I'll bask in the glory of this perfect daydream.

"Oh, shit, I have to go," she says out of nowhere, shuffling off the sofa where we're mindlessly staring at a cooking show on TV. "My shift's starting in twenty minutes."

"So? Fuck 'em. Larry Kissinger wouldn't dare give you trouble for missing a shift when I'm around." My head feels heavy as I try to turn it to face Natalie. I'm an exhausted mess, and I can't believe she's bouncing on her feet and rushing to get

dressed for work.

Still, I follow along as she heads to the bedroom, where her clothes are still scattered across my floor. In an attempt to preserve them, I've kept her naked as long as I could—at least, that's the excuse I tell myself. But mostly, she's been wearing my shirts that look like a dress on her for the duration of her stay.

"You do know you never have to lift another finger for that prick again, right?" I stop in the doorway and lean against the frame, watching her scurry across the room.

"That prick puts food on the table," she groans.

"He also strips you naked with his beady eyes." My blood instantly runs hot as I say those words. Even while squaring off against Rick and his boys, I caught a glimpse of Larry staring at Natalie's breasts.

Had I not left three men in a puddle on his barroom floor, Larry would have been the one who caught my aggression that night. But in this pursuit of Natalie's affection, I have to remain somewhat stable and lucid. If I lost my temper at every wandering eye, this whole damn town would be blind.

She pulls her tube top overhead and adjusts it to hide her tits. It sucks to see them go. "I'll come back after work, but I can't neglect my responsibilities."

"Your only responsibility is being here," I growl.

Natalie stops dead in her tracks, and her eyes widen at my statement.

"So, that's all it is?" She doesn't move, doesn't blink, staring at me like a deer in headlights.

Shit, I said the wrong thing. It was bound to happen eventually. I've never been good with these conversations. I'm best suited in the field, being a weapon for the Lion, not trying to wear my emotions on my sleeve.

"No, wait, let me?—"

"Bought and paid for, so I don't have a say in what happens?" The doe-eyed stare shifts into narrow-eyed fury.

"It's not like that." I'm backed into a corner, doing my best to stay calm, but aggression is bubbling to the surface. My annoyance isn't directed at Natalie. I don't think it ever could be. It's at myself for fucking this up so soon after it started.

"Then what is it?" she spits, pulling on her pants in a rush, trying to guard herself inside tight short shorts and a revealing crop top.

Talking has never been my strong suit. I use my fists instead of my words, and I firmly believe whoever said the pen is mightier than the sword would've changed his tune if he met me. Living this way has kept me out of touch. I can't even speak to the only woman who has ever lit a spark in my chest without scaring her away.

She starts storming toward me, and I step aside to let her pass. I don't want her to feel trapped in my home. It should be a safe place for her to come and go as she pleases, but allowing her to pass only enhances her speed to escape.

"Please stay. Let's talk about this." I saw it in a movie once, and it worked out for the characters. Why not give it a shot myself?

"Why? So you can convince me I'm not here to be your plaything?"

"Plaything? Natalie, no, I..." —she doesn't let me speak before stepping out the door

and slamming it behind her— “...think I love you.” The rest of my sentence echoes hollowly through my apartment.

10

NATALIE

“Don’t fucking touch me,” I shout and throw a wild slap in the patron’s direction. It connects his cheek with a satisfying thud that makes him stumble two steps back.

“Christ, calm down, woman. I didn’t mean nothing by it.” He clutches his cheek with a flat palm, staring at me with glazed-over eyes.

“Fuck you,” I spit.

My conversation with Dante left me upset. I started my shift sad, but the more I mulled over his words, the angrier I started getting. Maybe it’s good. It gave me the confidence to slap the piece of shit trying to touch my ass the same way the other asshole did a few nights ago. Now he’s scurrying off scared, and watching him slink away makes me feel so damn strong.

“Natalie, my office. Now!” Larry Kissinger roars behind me.

Just like that, my empowerment subsides to the same fears from before. I turn around to see Larry with flaring nostrils, crossed arms, and a disappointed shake of his head. He leads the way, and I follow. Neither of us says a word while the customers glare at the crazy chick who struck one of their fellow patrons.

Larry enters first and locks the door behind us as I pass. He gets to his desk, falls into the cheap office chair, and rests a hand under his chin before he speaks.

“What the hell was that?” he yells. “You can’t go around hitting people, Natalie. Between this shit and Dante’s actions, no one’s gonna want to come back to the Windmill.”

“He shouldn’t have touched me.” I’m not going to give in to the pressure or pretend that I’m upset at how I dealt with another dickhead trying to take advantage of me.

If nothing else, my brief time with Dante taught me one thing—don’t let anyone walk over you.

“There are different ways to deal with these problems. Smashing through them with violence should be a last resort,” Larry sighs. “What’s going on? Did something happen with you and Dante? You’ve been in a mood all night.”

“It’s none of your business.” Disgust contorts my face.

What’s he trying to pull with this ‘caring boss’ act? We’re not friends, and we don’t have heart-to-heart sessions. He pays me for the work I do, and I put up with his bullshit because I need money. That’s not going to change because of a closed-door meeting.

I get a feeling that this prying isn’t because he cares about my well-being. Larry’s relishing in the idea that Dante and I had a falling out. That he’s safe from the Demon. Well, fuck him. Even if Dante isn’t around, I’m going to keep on as if he’s right around the corner, waiting to strike.

“But the Windmill is,” he answers.

Ah, that’s what this is about. Another one of his power plays to make me feel small. I can’t wait to see how he’s going to try and twist this into a way to get in my pants.

“I rely on these people coming back. They should feel safe and secure in the place they choose to spend their evenings. How is it going to look if we keep sending people to the E.R.?” He moves the hand from his chin and crosses his arms over his chest. “I can’t keep supporting this nonsense, Natalie. You’re becoming a liability.”

“Fire me then.” I roll my eyes at his attempts to be a good leader.

Larry’s eyes widen at the suggestion, and he starts shaking his head viciously. “No, no, I don’t think that’s necessary.”

“You keep telling me I’m not a team player and a terrible worker, why keep me around?” I’m not going to stay on the back foot with him. Dante showed me I don’t have to be afraid around people like this. They don’t control me because they hold a place of meaningless power over me.

“Because I have a different way to teach you manners and respect.” His words are followed by a disgusting grin. “Stand up.”

“What?” I raise a brow.

“Stand up. I don’t want to do this, Natalie, but you leave me no choice.” Larry stands and immediately starts unfastening his belt.

His actions send my flight response into overdrive. Fear grips at my core, and I can’t take my eyes off his hands working the belt. What have I gotten myself into here? Worst of all, I don’t see a way to stop it, either. I left Dante back at his apartment and took a bus to work.

“Get up, Natalie. Now,” Larry shouts.

The shrill screech chills me to the bone, and I do as told.

“Bend over the desk.” He points to where he wants me. And even though everything inside me screams no, I do as instructed.

“I’m going to spank this bullshit out of you. Do what your folks should’ve done a long time ago. And I’ll do it every time you step out of line again until you learn your lesson,” Larry whispers with sickening delight.

Tears start rolling down my cheeks. And in my fear, my thoughts roam back to Dante and his offer to stay at his place. Sure, if I did stay, I would only be solidifying whatever fucked up relationship we were building, but I’d be safe.

“Dante will kill you for this.” The words suddenly spring to mind. I saw the fear in his eyes while he spoke to the Demon, and maybe it was enough to scare him again.

“Is that why you’re here instead of his penthouse? Waiting tables and shoveling shit while your hero is off doing God knows what?” Larry snickers. “See, I think you two had a falling out, and that’s why you’re back here. He dropped your ass, crashing back to the real world. And that makes you?—”

A knock comes at his door, silencing his disgusting rant.

“I’m in a meeting. Come back later,” Larry says with his usual pasted-on pleasantries.

No response comes, and with it, Larry continues whatever he’s planning.

“Now, where were we?” he asks, leaning in until his breath tickles my ear. “Ah, that’s right. I was about to beat the Demon out of you.”

Before he has a chance to do anything, a thunderous bang comes from the door. The same barfly I slapped comes barreling through it with a bloody, bruised-up face, and he tumbles straight to the floor in an unmoving mess of limbs.

Looking back at the door, I see him standing there. The same way he stood while trying to convince me not to leave. Begging me to talk instead of letting my anger dictate my decisions. My man. My monster.

The Demon of Delta County, with a deadpan gaze focused on Larry Kissinger.

I've never felt more relieved knowing someone was going to get so hurt.

DANTE

“ M r. Vitorri, w-what are you doing here?” he stutters on every word before snapping his attention in quick succession between me and Natalie. “This isn’t what it looks like. I can exp?—”

“I thought you’d have learned your lesson, Larry.” I enter the office and slam the door shut. With the broken locking mechanism, it dangles loosely in a mostly closed position.

Natalie breaks away from the table and sprints into my arms. She latches onto me, burying her head into my chest while tears roll freely down her cheeks. “I’m so sorry. Please don’t be angry at me.”

“I never could be,” I whisper, pressing a delicate kiss atop her crown.

I don’t move from her hug. Natalie’s my first priority, and I’ll be her support in this time of dire need. I will give it all to her no matter how badly I want to kill him.

“Thank you,” she whispers as she pulls away from my body.

“You should go now, Natalie. You should never have to witness what I’m about to do to this man.” I take my first step in his direction.

“No.” She sounds scared. “I want to watch.”

Her statement reaffirms my belief that she's an angel sent from heaven to protect these poor, mortal cunts. Had Natalie not wanted to stay, I'd have left Larry Kissinger a crucified corpse on his office wall. A statement of finality to any and all who think one miscommunication-induced argument could cause my affection for Natalie to wane.

Not that Larry would know any of it, of course. But I like to think this is a way for me to release some stress about our spat.

"If you insist," I say, cracking my neck from side to side.

"Come on, Dante. We can work something out," Larry pleads. He's not carrying any weapons in the office, it seems—a deduction I made while Natalie hugged me. If he had a gun in here, he would have taken it up while I soothed her aching soul.

"Can we?" I close the distance between us.

Larry's cowering against a filing cabinet. His hands are raised above his chest, insisting on surrender. He can't look me in the eye.

"Yeah, of course we can. Your boss likes money, doesn't he? I can give you a whole lot of it." He nods, satisfied with the response.

I scoff at the blatant arrogance. "Good God, you're a real piece of shit."

"Huh?" Larry's brow furrows.

"What makes you think Don Lione wants anything to do with you?" I thrust my hand forward and wrap it around Larry's thin throat. I squeeze until he's choking out, and my knuckles turn white. "You're not weaseling your way out of this one. It's been a damn long time coming, and I'm going to enjoy it."

He tries to speak, but the lack of oxygen turns his words into a choked mess of vowels and consonants. I keep him in place until his face borders on purple and his hands stop struggling against my wrists. I drive the heel of my boot into his shin to force him to the ground.

Larry howls in agony while he fights to fill his lungs back up.

But I'm not done with him yet. Dropping to his level, I grab a handful of his hair and smash his head into the side of the filing cabinet.

"What was that? Couldn't understand a word you were saying." I'm enjoying this a little too much, and the shrieking delight in my tone reaffirms it.

Larry cries out a constant loop of please stop and sorry, Natalie in an attempt to atone for his sins. Both fall on deaf ears, obscured by the sound of flesh striking metal and the pure satisfaction of watching him suffer.

"Dante." Natalie's voice hits my ear before her delicate hand falls on my shoulder. "He's had enough."

She instantly soothes the raging inferno, burning me to a crisp.

I release Larry's head, and it falls into a puddle of blood, snot, and spit. I look up at Natalie over my shoulder, and she's smiling at me.

"Let's get out of here," she says.

I take the hand on my shoulder and lead her out of the office. Attracted by the noise or maybe me carrying a barfly to the office, a few of Larry's staff stand horrified outside the door.

We brush past them together, hand in hand, chuckling at the scene I've left behind.

12

NATALIE

“Y ou came back for me.” I’m shocked at the sentence, and I’m the one saying it.

“Of course.” Dante’s in the kitchen, pouring himself a stiff whiskey while he brews me a cup of tea.

I found it hard to speak while we drove back to his place. A mix of the fear-induced panic Larry thrust on me and the overwhelming joy and excitement of seeing Dante again. But I know the real reason is because I was afraid I’d upset him. That he’d snap at any minute and tear into me for disobeying him after he bought me.

It never came. Not once while we drove did I get the sense of him being angry that I stormed out of his home, nor did he give me the impression when asking if I wanted tea or cocoa to still my nerves—a trick he learned from his grandmother to soothe even the most broken of hearts.

“I left things poorly, and I couldn’t live with myself if I didn’t make it right,” Dante adds, bringing our drinks to the living room.

“But I was horrible to you.” I accept the teacup, and the warmth radiates from my palms, up my arms, and nestles pleasantly in my chest.

“So?” he chuckles. “It was well deserved.”

He takes a sip of whiskey and sets the glass down on the table before taking my hand in his. I want to apologize again, but I don't dare interrupt upon seeing the pained expression on his face for what he's about to share.

"I'm no good at this, Nat. I stole you away from your home without so much as an explanation of what was wanted or expected. I can't blame you for being angry because I can't imagine what was going through your head." He breathes in deeply through his nose before exhaling a sigh through his lips. "I don't want you to feel trapped or scared when you're with me, but I do want you as mine. Mine alone. You've done something to me no one else ever could—opened my eyes to the beauty in this world and the possibility of being happy."

Dante reaches out and takes both my hands in his. He brushes my knuckles, staring so deeply into my eyes, I'm sure he's gazing straight into my soul.

"If that's how you made me feel in a few days, I can't imagine what you'll do to me in a month. A year. The rest of our damned lives. But I don't want to imagine it, not for a second. I want it to be a reality. Our reality. You and me braving this storm we call life, side by side, hand in hand, happy."

"Dante." Tears rim my eyes, and I can't contain the joy exploding from my chest. "I thought you said you weren't good with words."

"I've been practicing it all night. Didn't want to fuck up the last shot I've got." He plays it off cool, with a warm smile on his face.

But I don't believe a word of it. The nervous quiver in his voice, his inability to look me straight in the eye—they're signs of confirmation that everything he said came from the heart.

"Marry me," he says as if it's a completely normal continuation of our conversation.

“What?” My jaw drops, and my eyes nearly pop out of my skull.

“Marry me. Let me prove that everything I’ve said is true. That I want you for you and not because of what I did. Be mine, and I’ll be yours. Forever and always,” he says.

“Dante, I—” My mind’s racing a million miles an hour. I stormed out of here less than six hours ago, cursing him to the ends of the Earth. Now, we’re back, and he wants to make me his, with ring and all? I want to make the snap decision, say yes, and give myself to him fully, but the intense emotions wafting through me slap any logical thoughts and reasoning out of my head. “I don’t know what to say.”

“Then say yes, and let all our dreams come true.”

I don’t answer, not yet, locked in place from a mixture of joy and nervousness. Instead, I throw my arms around his shoulders and give him a kiss.

No thoughts, head empty, letting everything that happened tonight wash over and consume me.

13

DANTE

Her kiss shatters my perception of reality and leaves me starving for more. Like before, I hoist her onto my lap while we lose ourselves to the tantalizing experience. Natalie lets her hands wander down my body, but this time, I stop her.

No. We're not going to fuck like savages on the couch, against the wall, or on the floor. This time, I'm taking her to my bed to treat her the way I wanted to the first night we shared our bodies. I lift her into the air, never breaking our embrace. I walk blindly through my apartment, squeezing her ass as guttural noises erupt from my core.

I want this so fucking bad, and the way Natalie feels up my chest says so does she.

I lay her down on my bed and fall between her legs. My hands travel up her shins and thighs, feeling every inch they can of her skin before settling on the waistline of her short shorts. I stare eagerly, longingly into her big blue eyes, while I peel away the layers of her clothes. Pants, panties, tube top, discarding the uniform she'll never wear again at the foot of my bed.

And this time, I mean it. I'll burn the whole damn bar to the ground, with Larry Kissinger in it, if that's the only way to keep Natalie from going back there.

I strip for her, shedding my jacket and shirt first, and her eyes dance across my bare, scarred body. A delicate finger slots between the grooves of my abs, gliding its way

upward to my chest before settling in a firm grip behind my neck. She pulls me downward into another kiss while I kick off my shoes and pants.

“I want you so fucking badly,” she whispers against my lips.

“And you’ll have me.” I hook a hand under her thighs and part her legs. “Forever and always. I’m yours.”

I guide her leg around my hip, and she hooks it over by digging her ankle into my side. I return to our kiss, moving my free hand down her body to her soaking wetness, eager and ready for me. As much as I want to delay, treat her like a princess, and make her climax a thousand times before I come close to penetrating her, I can’t.

Not this time. I need to be inside her, feel our bodies fuse together as we become one. Whole. Happy.

I grab the base of my shaft and guide myself toward her. It slips between her slick wetness, but it feels different this time. Almost like it’s the first time I’ve experienced the touch of another in my entire life. It melts my brain and leaves a sharp bolt of electricity racing up my spine.

And maybe I have never experienced anything like this. This isn’t sex, I realize. It’s lovemaking. Soft, tender, and slow. No hard thrusting and painful aching to get the job done. It’s tantric and tantalizing, with every sensation bringing new and exotic pleasure.

I buck my hips slowly, and my legs start to shake. Giddiness makes me murmur inaudible words as I struggle to form any rational thoughts.

Natalie wraps her arms around my shoulders. She gasps while her eyes roll to the back of her skull. But the bright smile of pure delight never washes off her face.

This must be heaven because there's no way in hell I'd ever experience my angel anywhere else.

But with all the bountiful wonders this new experience brings, so too does it bring me to the razor's edge. I never want this feeling to end, yet every gentle thrust into Natalie leaves me dangerously close to climax.

"You're so perfect," I whisper feebly, but I need her to hear it now. In the throes of ecstasy, I must spill my heart to her. "My goddess, my angel, my light at the end of the tunnel."

She wants to speak, no doubt compliments of her own, but she can't get words out between the moans and whimpers.

Well, I've come this far. Might as well tell her the whole damn truth.

"I fucking love you," I howl at the top of my lungs as I hit that sweet release.

She comes right at the heel of my orgasm, and she squeals in delight as her claws sink into my back, accepting every drop I have to offer.

Then I collapse, unable to hold my own weight up. While I lie atop Natalie, using her breast as a pillow, she whispers, "Yes. Let's get married."

Music to my fucking ears.

EPILOGUE

DANTE

Three Months Later

“It was a beautiful ceremony, Dante. I’m glad to see you found someone who can wipe that scowl off your face,” Don Salvatore Lione says from across the table. He’s holding a champagne flute in the air as toast, and the Pryce family raises their glasses with him.

“Thank you, Lion.” I raise my glass to clink with all of them.

My attention only strays to the Don and Natalie’s family briefly before it returns to her. My golden-haired angel, draped in white with a halo of gold surrounding her, drifting through the crowd of her adoring subjects, accepting their well wishes as she skips back to our table.

“Couldn’t have asked for a better man to join the family,” Luke Pryce says, and Emma reaffirms it with a bright smile in my direction.

I’m still stunned at how we got here and that they’re so pleasant around me after I threatened to take a few of his fingers. But what’s done is done, and leaving the past buried is probably for the best.

“Excuse me, everyone,” I say. I can’t handle small talk, even with the Don himself, when my woman is in the same room as us.

They'll have their time with me eventually, but right now, I'm all hers.

I launch out of my seat and start walking toward Natalie at an awkward pace that feels like a sprint. She's in the middle of a conversation with some distant relatives when I swoop in, wrapping my arm around her waist and kissing her.

Our kiss as husband and wife, the second after the priest gave us permission.

The table of relatives applauds. Fuck, this feels good. I've never felt more welcomed or loved in my life, and it swells my heart to three times its size.

"Couldn't stay away, huh?" Natalie winks.

"Not from the second I saw you," I answer before peppering her face with a thousand kisses.

She can't stop giggling, and I can't stop kissing. I never want this moment to end or see another frown on her perfect face. She deserves the world, and I'll give it to her. No matter what it takes.

"How are things over there?" she asks, gesturing to the table where Don Lione and her parents are talking as if they're old-time friends. The Don's even laughing, which is a surprising turn of events.

"Oh, it's torture. But only because I have to share you with a room full of adoring people," I say.

"You know you're really cute when you get jealous, right?" She cups my cheek in her palm and gently rubs her thumb across the bone.

"I'm glad you think it's cute 'cause you're gonna be seeing a whole lot of it." I wink.

“You know, when you say stuff like that, it makes me fall deeper in love with you, right?” She grazes her lips across my jawline.

“Now you know how I feel every time I look at you.” I give Natalie another long kiss while her family looks on. My hands sink to her ass, and try as I might to stop myself, I feel her up until she fights my hands away. Another long laugh drips like honey in my ears.

“Okay, lover boy, I yield. Let’s go back to the table,” she says, taking my hand in hers and starting to walk in the direction I came from.

I stand firmly in place and pull her straight back into my arms. “Not before I say I love you.”

“And I love you,” she says, tapping my nose with her free hand’s index finger. “My husband.”

NATALIE

One Year Later

“ Yes, yes, I understand. Now get out of my way before I kick this door down,” Dante roars from the other side of the door. Though his aggression is mostly unwarranted, it brings a beaming smile to my face.

Oh, the agony he must have felt, not being at my side for the last eighteen hours.

“Sir, you need to relax. Natalie is fine—” The doctor tries to calm Dante, but it doesn’t work.

“You’re starting to piss me off, my man. I’ll be calm, but you’re going to step aside and let me see my wife.” He’s trying to temper his aggression, yet it still shines through even his best attempts.

“As you wish,” the doctor finishes and pushes open the two-way door.

Dante enters first, and he instantly presses a hand against the wall to steady himself from toppling over.

“I can’t believe it.” Pure, unfiltered happiness runs over his face, and I swear I can see a tear in his eye, if only for a second.

“Can’t believe what?” I ask sheepishly as a smirk dances over my lips.

“I leave you alone for a few hours, and you let someone else suck on my tits.”

The doctor clears his throat at Dante’s side, letting us know he’s still in the room, but Dante ignores him completely. He finds his footing and rushes to the side of my hospital bed, dropping down to his knees in absolute astonishment.

“Hey, little man,” Dante addresses our baby in my arms. His tiny head nearly disappears completely at Dante’s gentle stroke across it.

“This is your daddy,” I whisper to our son. “He’s going to keep you safe.”

Our son coos at the sight of Dante, and part of me desperately wants to believe it’s because he understood what I said.

“God, you’ve never looked more beautiful,” Dante says out of nowhere.

“Out of surgery and in a sweaty mess?” I have to laugh at the compliment. I know he means it, too, but pretty isn’t how I’d describe myself.

I’d go for something more along the lines of immeasurably happy, if I had to say anything at all.

“A sweaty mess is what got you in here in the first place,” Dante snickers at his own dirty joke.

The doctor clears his throat again, and my cheeks turn a deep shade of red at how embarrassed he must feel.

“I only need a moment of your time, and I’ll leave you alone.” The doctor rushes the words out, wanting to escape. “Do you have a name for him?”

“Nathan,” Dante answers with finality, “after his mother.”

And yet again, he never ceases to amaze me with just how much he truly loves me.

It took a long time for me to come back down from the high of his love. Long nights of fear-laced doubts that this was all a dream. A fantasy constructed by me and Dante to get through his offer to my father. When they finally washed away, my eyes opened to just how serious Dante was in everything he said. Never once did he mention it again, nor did he try to make me feel bad for clearing my dad's debt. He did it from the bottom of his heart and gave me a life I could only dream of.

"I love it," I say, starting to get weepy at another grand show of his love and affection.

"And I love you," Dante whispers, pressing a gentle kiss against my mottled hair. "And you, even if you're going to steal some of your mother's attention from me." He teases our son, Nathan, and the baby coos yet again, as if chuckling at his daddy's silliness.

It's perfect. So perfect.

And I can't wait to spend the rest of my life with my two boys.

The End

Thanks for reading!