



Falling for a Killer

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Category: Suspense Thriller

Description: I need to get away.

I'm fortunate enough that it's possible to leave and start over in a place no one will find me, but the fact that a man is driving me to do it has me considering murder for the first time in my life. But he's ruined enough, and I won't lose my freedom for him.

Without looking back, I disappear off the map to my family's cabin — a safe house we've ensured no one but us knows exists.

Or so we thought.

Immediately I know I'm not alone, and the man I find squatting in my family's cabin may be even more dangerous than my pathetic ex-fiancé.

One way or another, life as I knew it is over, and maybe that's a good thing.

It's not like things can get worse.

Total Pages (Source): 40

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 2:04 am

Violent knocks make my jaw clench as I hide between the window and the door.

Eyes closed, fists tight, I wait.

I called the cops the second the power went out because I knew.

Sit tight, they said. Someone will be right there.

“Open the door, Josephine. You’re making this so much harder than it has to be.”

Good. I hope it’s hard. I hope every time he stalks me, threatens me, tries to break in, that it gets a little harder.

I don’t answer. I wait. The cops have to be here soon.

But then the window just to my right shatters completely and I know it won’t matter. By the time they get here, it will be too late. He’ll hurt me this time. They didn’t listen, they never fucking listen, and now he’s going to hurt me.

I won’t make it easy for him.

Scrambling, I race down the dark hallway to the kitchen with Ryan right on my heels. I make it to the counter, grab the biggest kitchen knife I have, and face my ex-fiance. “Leave,” I say sharply. “I’m not giving you a fucking cent.”

“You think this is still about money?” he laughs, stepping closer. “All you had to do was open your pretty little pocketbook and none of this would be happening. So yeah,

I guess it's about money, but it's also bigger than that now. It's about you being disrespectful. No one ever taught you prissy rich bitches to know when to kneel."

I don't have it in me to be hurt by his words anymore. This isn't my Ryan, the one I fell for, the one who chased me for months and never stopped acting like he had to earn me once I let him have me. Addiction changes people. All kinds of addiction. "The police are coming," I say flatly. "Just go. You're not going to kill me, you're not going to get what you want. So just leave unless you want to spend the rest of your life sitting in front of other people."

Ryan's laughter sends a chill up my spine, but it's nothing compared to the dread I feel as he pulls a handgun from his waistband. I can hear the sirens now, the cops are close. But bullets are faster.

"Are you sure about that?"

My heart hammers in slow motion. I made a choice a year ago when this all started — I'd rather die than give in. When you give in to an addict once, they'll never stop. I'd have spent the rest of my life paying off his gambling debts, in constant fear that one day, he wouldn't be the one to come asking. So I said no. Over and over again, despite the threats, despite waking up to see him standing over me, despite the dead animals he left on my porch and the fire he started in my closet. I always believed he'd never hurt me, not when it really came down to it.

So I nod.

"I'm sure. My answer is still no, and you're never going to pull that tr—"

Click.

The sound makes me jerk so violently, I nearly drop the knife. It clatters to the

ground as he tries again to pull the trigger, and everything that happens after is a blur. Suddenly, we're both on the ground, weapons kicked to the side by police officers twice my size. They're yelling, but I don't hear them. They're asking questions I have answers to, yet I can't do anything but dissociate as the cold reality hits me.

Ryan will kill me. He's ready.

And I can't stop him.

An hour later, I'm wrapped in a blanket holding the worst cup of coffee I've ever tasted. The metal of the chair beneath me seeps through my leggings, making me shiver. The two cops pacing on the other side of the table don't help. "We're just trying to sort this out," they say for the twelfth time. "Tell us again what happened."

It seems much ado about nothing since no one actually got shot, and my patience is wearing thin. "I told you. He cut the power and broke in through the window, I grabbed the knife to defend myself, and he tried to shoot me. I called you guys the moment I realized he was there because he's been terrorizing me for a year. Look back at your records, you'll see that I'm telling the truth."

The slightly shorter officer glances at the other and shrugs. "His name is on the deed to the house, same as yours. He said he heard screaming and didn't have his keys, which is why he broke in through the window. He claims you're the one who had the gun, you're the one who tried to pull the trigger, and when he wrestled the gun away from you, you grabbed the knife. You see how his story makes a little more sense?"

No, no I don't, and this is everything wrong with our legal system. Anything but justice for the victims, anything to stop a straight white man from getting in trouble. I fucking hate it here. "Yeah, and he cut the power to make it easier to see," I deadpan.

“I told you the truth. If you’re going to arrest me, just do it. I’ll have bail posted before either of you manage to find your next donut and then I’ll be telling every media outlet that will listen that you two sided with an abuser.”

Their smug expressions turn sour. “You’re not being charged, and neither is he. If you’re telling the truth, why haven’t you gotten an order of protection?”

“Because it’s just a fucking piece of paper,” I spit. “What’s a piece of paper going to do for me? Patch a bullet hole? Scare him silly? No. It won’t do anything.”

“If you had one, we could’ve arrested him today.”

“And then what? He gets a slap on the wrist for breaking and entering, maybe a little probation for the attempted murder? Your system is fucked. You refuse to do anything to help people until it’s too late, and then you get all the clout in the world for solving a crime you were warned about months before it happened.” Standing, I walk around the table to the door. “Your parents must be so proud.”

Short Stack grabs my arm with a snarl. “Watch it, girl. You may think you’re owed the world because mommy and daddy are rich, but you’re in our house now, and accidents happen.”

Straightening my spine, I wrench my arm away. “You’re right, Officer. They do. Let’s pray nothing happens to you.”

I slam the door behind me on my way out, knowing this is far from over. Ryan won’t stop, the police won’t help me, and my parents aren’t even in the country.

It’s time I take matters into my own hands.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 2:04 am

My sister stays silent until we're miles away from the police station and walking into a dive bar. It suits me just fine — I might be rich, but I've never understood the lifestyle. Give me old leather boots and a rundown, dusty bar any day of the week over heels and a fancy nightclub.

"Do you want to talk about it?" she asks, after the second shot of Jameson calms my nerves. "Was it Ryan again?"

Nodding, I spin in the seat to face her. The story doesn't take long to tell, but Violet's eyes get larger with every sentence. "I fucking hate cops."

"This is why everyone hates cops. If that gun would've gone off, they'd have been up there on the news talking about what a 'senseless tragedy' it was and using your story as a way to get extra funding. Instead they treat victims like dirt and call themselves heroes."

The only hero around here is her. She's always been my rock. Our parents were decent, but vacant, and the au pairs we were left with never quite matched the warmth of my older sister. "I'm sorry to drag you out like this. I know getting a call to pick me up at the police station wasn't part of your Wednesday night plans," I joke weakly. "But thank you. Seriously."

"Eh, it's fine. I'd rather be there for you whenever you need me than to wake up one day and hear that news story. I mean look at this shit," she whispers, nodding up at the small, staticky tv hanging over the wall of liquor. "It's never anything good."

"Police in Blackridge, Idaho are still on the hunt for the gunman who assassinated

Senator Jack Lawson early last week. Motive remains unclear, though due to the gunman's M.O., it doesn't appear to be a random killing. Lawson was shot three times, once in each leg and once in the head. Police warn that the suspect is armed and extremely dangerous, and urge the public to be on high alert. A reward for information leading to the identification and capture of this gunman is set at \$50,000. Anyone with information is asked to call the number listed at the bottom of the screen..."

They flash a blurry, grainy picture of a tall, broad man whose features are almost entirely obscured by a mask. The only thing visible are brilliantly blue eyes. "Damn, it wasn't Ryan," I mutter. "His eyes are fucking green. You think it could be contacts?"

"Ryan doesn't strike me as the type to kill senators two states away, but the police don't know that. Might be fun to make him sweat a little."

It might.

We watch the news a few moments longer, listening to them ramble on about the upcoming recession, rising unemployment, and a quick blurb about a serial killer on the loose near us. "Isn't it fucking hilarious that there's a serial killer out there targeting normal people and he barely gets mentioned, yet they're pulling out all the stops to find some random guy that killed someone who probably deserved it?" Violet asks, waving to the bartender for another round. "This country is going to hell."

"We're already there."

It's times like these I appreciate my parents a little more. They're in the kind of business that could've made them billionaires by now, yet they donate almost everything to endowments. The principal donation gets invested and only the interest

is spent every year, meaning countless charities and organizations will be able to fund themselves forever thanks to my parents. Everything from school districts and museums to shelters and civil rights groups get their money, and a lot of it. They believe wealth shouldn't be hoarded, and while it's okay to take care of yourself and your loved ones, you should make sure that you're taking care of others, too. They're not perfect. No one is. But at least they're trying little by little to leave the world a better place than they found it.

They've also denied donation requests from multiple police departments until they change their culture.

I should buy them better Christmas presents.

The Jameson goes down a little too easily as Violet rants about the state of the world and how unfair it is, but she grabs my attention again when she asks the one question I've been dreading. "What are you going to do now?"

Cry. Murder him. Blow up a building or two, I don't know.

"Leave," I answer quietly. "He'll never stop, and now I know what his goal is. It's not about the money anymore. He thinks I disrespected him by saying no, and we all know how men can be when they get their fragile little feelings hurt."

"But go where? Your whole life is here."

I handle the endowments for my parents. More often than not, it's virtual. We have Zoom meetings here, a few emails there, and then I hand off the details to the folks who actually set them up. I can do it from anywhere. "My friends will understand and my job is pretty mobile. I'm not even saying I'm leaving forever, just until things die down or Ryan himself dies. Whichever comes first."

“Will you tell me where you’re going?”

Spinning my glass, I make up my mind right there. I hadn’t been sure before. “Windwinter, I think.” It’s a chilly little town up in the mountains of northern Washington, hiding the cabin my family has kept a secret for generations. “No one knows it exists but you, me, mom and dad. It’s built to withstand an apocalypse and I helped dad get everything turned on the last time we visited. Lord knows they won’t be back in the country for the next year at least, and hopefully by then I’ll have something else figured out. I don’t really want to leave San Francisco, but I don’t see what choice I have.”

“You’re not afraid?”

“Afraid? Of what?”

“The wild, Joey,” she laughs. “The bears, the fucking mountain lions or pumas or whatever the fuck. Wolves.”

“The cabin has an impenetrable bunker as a cellar, remember? If worst comes to worst and a bear breaks down the door, I’ll hide in there. And it’ll just be me, so as long as I stock up, I won’t really have to go outside much, and even still... I’d rather be alone in the woods with a bear than stuck in the same city as a man actively trying to kill me.”

“We do choose the bear,” she agrees solemnly. “Alright. Use the satellite phone if you need to reach me. It’s a little crazy having a toddler and a newborn, but you know Greg and I will have your back if you need it. Anything at all, you just have to let me know.”

I’m tempted to ask her terrifying ex-military husband to go all guerilla warfare on Ryan’s ass and end this for me, but I don’t. They’ve got a beautiful life, one that

doesn't need to end when I do have another alternative. "Thanks, Vi."

She sighs as she reaches out to stroke one of my ass-length waves. "Your hair won't like the climate there, you know. And the bunker isn't exactly stocked with cherry red dye."

"I think I can handle a little frizz, and I'll take my own dye, thanks. Not that it'll matter much. Who am I supposed to impress? The bear? The fluffy bastard will take me as he finds me and say thank you."

Snorting, Violet drops some cash on the bar to pay our tab, then links her arm with mine as she walks me to the door. "Come stay with us tonight. I'll have Greg drive you home in the morning to get your car and whatever else you're taking, just in case. He's working the night shift tomorrow so he'll be home."

That's a tempting offer. While I don't think Ryan will come back so soon, I also didn't think he'd pull the trigger. I was wrong about that. I don't want to be wrong about this too.

"Deal," I agree. "I'd like to see my niece and nephew before I run off into the woods to become a bog witch anyway."

She looks at me like she's shocked for a moment, seems to talk herself out of it, then squints at me. "You're not kidding, are you?"

"Was it the Ouija board tattooed on my chest that gave it away?" I ask. "Or the fifty-seven black candles in the house?"

"Both. Well, if anyone's gonna become a bog witch worthy of urban legend, it's you. I look forward to hearing your lore in a few years."

Giggling, I feel lighter than I have in a while. Yeah, I'm going on the run to escape a psychopath I almost married, but this is still my life. Running doesn't mean I'm giving up, it just means I'm starting over.

I'm almost looking forward to it.

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 2:04 am

My stomach growls angrily as I pull onto the road that leads to our cabin in Windwinter. It's over three miles long, barely visible thanks to the overgrowth, and surrounded by so many tall, entangled trees that the sunlight is almost completely blocked out. Thanks to the mountain of shit piled into the back of my white Renegade, I can't see out the back window, either.

If the bears are coming, I've made myself an easy target.

I mentally flip Violet off for putting that nonsense in my head as I brace myself for all the things I'll need to do to get the cabin up and running. Since my parents only visit once every couple of years, the furniture is covered in plastic, all the utilities are switched off, and the windows are boarded up. The bills are still being paid so it's just a matter of flipping a few switches and doing some tear-down, but it's been a while since I've helped my dad and it's a little daunting. Considering it's about 3:00am where he is now, I can't call him for several hours.

That's okay. I got this.

The house comes into view and takes my breath away as always. It's a two-story log cabin with deep green shutters, facing away from a backdrop of snowy mountains and a cliff that seems to go on forever. When I first saw it as a little girl, I was speechless. It looked like something someone painted as a Christmas decoration, or something out of a dream.

I still get that feeling now as I park and unlock my trunk.

It takes me three trips to get everything inside the front door, and even longer to

realize something is absolutely, definitely wrong here. The last bag of fresh produce falls from my hands as I look around the living room to find it clearly lived in. There's no plastic on the furniture, the floor lamp is on, and there's a fire burning in the fireplace.

Blankets and hoodies are strewn all over the back of the couch and there's a dirty paper plate on the table.

Someone is here.

I never trusted Ryan enough to tell him about this place, but he's made some shady friends. Could he have figured it out? How did he beat me here? No, that doesn't make sense. This is probably Violet just fucking with me. She had to have taken a plane to beat me here, but that tracks. She's sneaky, and something tells me she wouldn't want me dealing with this alone.

"Very funny, Violet!" I yell, leaning down to put the bananas, peppers and onions back in their bag. "You can come out now."

For a few moments, there's only a tense silence that reaches my ears, making my heart rate pick up more with each passing second. If Vi is here... why the hell isn't she answering me?

"Sit down on your hands right where you are." A man appears from the hallway with a gun pointed in my direction, a ski-mask sloppily covering his face like he put it on in a rush. His rippling muscles are decorated in swirling tattoos that surround a giant wolf head on his chest, and the light grey sweats he's wearing leave almost nothing to the imagination.

Was he just jacking off on my fucking couch, or does he just get his kicks scaring the shit out of people?

“No,” I blurt. “You’re in my fucking house, you sit down on your hands.”

He cocks it without blinking and steps closer. “Don’t make me shoot you.”

Fucking hell. Angry tears fill my eyes as I sit down, nestling my hands under my ass. I ran from one asshole with a gun straight into the arms of another.

This is karma, I’m just not sure for what. “There, I’m sitting. I’m clearly unarmed and you’re about a foot taller than me, so what did you think I was gonna do? Disarm you with an onion?”

His eyes drop to the grocery bag and then meet mine again. “I didn’t know what you had in your hands that could be used as a weapon,” he admits. “What are you doing here? No one was supposed to come here. The owners are out of the country.”

“Not all of us.” Slowly, I raise one hand just to wipe the tears from my face and slide it back underneath me as I get my shit together. If this is how it ends, this is how it ends. At least Ryan won’t get the satisfaction of doing it himself. “Who sent you here?”

“Stop crying.” He shifts uncomfortably. “I don’t like it when — what do you mean who sent me?”

Oh, a man told me to stop crying. Let me get right on that.

“If you want me to stop, maybe you should quit pissing me off. I’m not crying because I’m scared, I’m crying because I’m angry as hell that I just drove over thirteen hours to get away from an asshole with a gun only to find another one. And I’m asking who the hell sent you because no one — no one — knows about this place except for me, my sister, and our parents. Did Ryan put you up to this? Some enemy my parents made? Who?”

“Ryan?” I can see his perfect lips curl into a confused frown as he lowers the gun slightly. “I don’t know who that is, and I’m no one’s enemy. I just needed a place to crash.”

Great. This cabin stays vacant for decades except for the one time I actually need it. “Well go find somewhere else, big boy. This is my safe house.”

He huffs a laugh under his breath and finally lets his hand drop to his side so the gun isn’t pointed in my direction. “Who are you running from? Ex-boyfriend?”

I’ve already said too much, so I don’t answer him. “The better question is who the hell are you, how did you find out about this place, and why do you have a fucking ski-mask? Did you rob a bank, or was your nose just really cold from sticking it in places it shouldn’t be?”

“Did you forget I’m the one with a gun here, or do you really just not care?” He doesn’t wait for me to respond. “I’m obviously wearing a mask because I don’t want you to be able to identify me when you ultimately call the cops on me. If I had known you’d be here, I’d have been covered completely, but here we are.”

Yes, here we are. My eyes travel down his frame, betraying me. If his face is even half as attractive as his body, I’m in trouble. “Fuck the police. You would’ve shot me already if you were going to, and at this point? I don’t even care. I’m tired, I’m starving, and I just spent two days convincing myself that coming here was the best thing for me. If that means I die, then I die.” Standing up, I wave him off as he raises the gun again. “Tattoos are just as identifiable as your face, so either shoot me or take the mask off. I’m cooking dinner.”

He does neither, but keeps the gun trained on me as I walk over to the kitchen. When he finally lowers it again, I realize he really isn’t going to shoot me. “If I let you cook, you’re not going to stab me, are you?”

“I’m oh for one with kitchen knives, so I think you’re safe,” I mutter, moving around the psycho as I grab the bags from the front door and start unloading them. “This would be a good time for you to go find somewhere else to crash, though. I’ve got a really terrible short term memory and won’t remember your tattoos or your nipples in a few minutes.”

“My nipples? Why would you be looking at my nipples?” He moves in a little to watch me closer. “What are you making?”

He smells like soap and laundry detergent, lulling me into a false sense of security long enough to look up and meet his eyes. They’re beautiful and blue, almost familiar. “Your areolas are the same size. It’s annoying.”

I can see the confusion in his gaze again as he stares back at me, unblinking. “Are you insane?”

“Sweetie, there’s nothing you can do to me that hasn’t been done in the last year. A crazy guy holding me at gunpoint has become a regular Friday for me. Clearly you’re not leaving, so at least make yourself useful and chop this onion for me.” I toss it to him, surprised when he doesn’t let it fall to the floor, but that’s nothing compared to how shocked I am when he sets the gun aside to wash his hands and grab a knife.

“Definitely insane. Just my luck I guess. Karma is karma.” He’s muttering under his breath like he’s the one with screws loose and not me, but I’m half convinced this is a fever dream. Maybe I fell asleep behind the wheel of the Renegade and I’m in purgatory somewhere, or maybe I really just don’t care if I live or die.

I eyeball the gun for half a second before realizing that even if I could grab it and get a shot off before he figured out what I was doing, what would I do with his body? He’s a big boy. Easily 6’3, probably 250lbs of pure muscle. He looks like he could end me with his pinky finger.

Something about it makes my thighs clench.

Maybe he's onto something.

Burying that thought, I rip open some ground beef and fire up the stove. Hey, at least I didn't have to worry about making this place functional again. "Are you hungry, or was the dirty paper plate you left on the table a sign that you had dinner already?"

"Both. I'm always hungry. Are you going to tell me what we're cooking or just order me around?"

The way he begins chopping up the onion tells me this isn't his first time in a kitchen, which doesn't help me at all. Fuck.

"Um... American Chop Suey and grilled cheese. I wasn't aware I'd be cooking for anyone else so I went cheap and easy."

"So you mean to tell me that if you knew there was a guy with annoying areolas squatting in your family cabin you would have splurged?"

"What a stupid question," I scoff. "Also yes. You don't get to judge me when your ski mask isn't on straight and you had a boner when I got here."

"I didn't have a boner," he rushes out. "And if I did, why were you even looking? I had a gun."

Another excellent point. "The boner you absolutely had was bigger than your gun. Now move, I need to start the pasta and the grilled cheese. Get the mayo."

"I was sleeping. It was a half-chub at best, but good to know where your head was." He finishes up the onion and washes his hands, then grabs the mayo like he was told.

“And stop bossing me around. Have you ever said please before?”

“To people who knock, yeah.”

When he reaches out and knocks on the top of my head, I don’t need to see his face to know he’s grinning like an asshole. “Doesn’t look like anyone’s home.”

It takes a few seconds to close my mouth again. I’d like to punch him in the face, but he’s still within arms reach of both a gun and a knife big enough to hurt like hell. It’s enough of a deterrent that I don’t say anything else until dinner is plated and my stomach is growling again. “Enjoy, I guess.”

“I think I liked it better when you were insulting me.” He sits down across from me with the gun to his right, and how quickly he inhales three huge bites makes me wonder how long he’s been on the run. Or if he’s been to prison. “So who’s Ryan?”

He’s still wearing a mask and that gun isn’t far. What makes him think I want to get to know him? Some people might argue that humanizing myself will make him less likely to kill me, but that’s a lie, and I’ll be damned if I give him any piece of myself that he doesn’t take forcefully.

“Just eat your dinner, big boy. We’ll flip a coin to see who has to leave after dessert.”

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 2:04 am

The intruder watches me like a hawk as I clean up and dry my hands. I'm more exhausted now than ever, but I'm not sure how this ends. Will he kill me? Will I somehow get one over on him?

I need a shower and a fourteen-hour nap. I'm not sure if I care how I get there. "My name is Joey," I say flatly, giving in just a little to gain some ground. "Josephine Moran, but I'm guessing you already knew my last name since you found out about my parents. What can I call you?"

"Killer."

Now I know his sense of humor just sucks.

"I'll stick with big boy then." Sighing, I slip my hands into my pockets. "You're not leaving, are you?"

"No. And neither are you, huh?"

He crosses his arms in our standoff, muscles bulging in a way that has me distracted. I really wish he'd put a shirt on.

"Am I allowed to leave?"

"No. Call me an asshole if you want, but I can't let you leave yet."

I nod, lips pursed. "I thought so." Grabbing my purse, I toss him my keys. "I already ditched my cell phone. You're welcome to look through my shit if you don't believe

me, but I'm not responsible for whatever you find."

"What might I find? An arsenal?"

He moves over to my bags and begins to rummage through them, pausing when he finds my vibrators. There are four of them.

"In so many words, yes."

He stares at them long enough to have heat rising to my cheeks. "Why are there so many?"

When he picks one up and clicks it on, I look away. "Because sometimes batteries die. Sometimes I need... different things. I thought I was going to be here alone for at least a year, what does it matter?"

"A year?" he asks curiously, abandoning his search of my luggage sooner than I expected, and when he stands up to move over to the couch I notice he's trying to hide the fact that he's hard. "So no one else is expected to show up? I don't have to worry about your parents coming here to look for you?"

My stomach drops. I might be brave, but I'm not stupid. He knows exactly what that means and so do I. "No, I guess not. My sister knows I'm here but that's it."

"And she's not going to pop up and interrupt you while you're jacking off? That's not a shared sister trait?"

My eyebrows raise, but I'm not touching that with a ten foot pole. At least not yet. "No. She has a family and we live thirteen hours away from here. It's not like she can just swing by for a girl's night."

He seems to relax as he sets the gun on the coffee table. “Alright. Which room is yours? Is it the one with green bedding or pink?”

“Green. If I take a shower, will you promise not to shoot me through the glass?”

“Too messy. You have my word I’ll stay out here.”

Nodding, I grab my suitcases and drag them back to my room, only to find the bed messed up. He’s been sleeping in my bed.

For some reason, that makes me squirm.

My stomach won’t seem to settle as I undress and climb into the shower. I feel his eyes on me even though I can hear him in the living room, and every flicker of the dying bulb above the sink makes me twitch.

I’ll never be able to sleep here.

I’ll never be safe.

Maybe it’s time I just faced it.

Too much time passes before I shut the water off again and get dressed. He must’ve turned the heat up, because the mix of the lingering hot water on my skin and the temperature in the room makes me lightheaded — or maybe it’s just my circumstances.

Either way, I dress lightly in a tank top and shorts before walking back out.

I find him frowning at the television angrily even though it’s on silent, and before he can turn it off fast enough I see he was watching the news.

He was too quick for me to see what they were covering.

When I turn my gaze back on him, I find him watching me intently with that stupid mask still in place.

“Are you planning on keeping that on all year?” I ask.

I watch his chest rise and fall with a deep breath before he shakes his head no. “I’m going to need a little more from you before I feel comfortable enough to remove it. Will you sit?”

My eyes fall to the gun on the end table. Knowing I don’t have a choice, I obey. “You’ve asked about Ryan twice. He’s my ex-fiance. We were together for three years and everything was great, but one night he asked me for eighty-thousand dollars to pay his gambling debts. I said no. A few weeks later, he asked again, but for double the amount. Again, I said no and urged him to get help. The third time he asked, he was in for a quarter of a million dollars and threatening my life. I kicked him out of our house, ended the engagement, and spent the last year trying and failing to avoid him as he stalked me, threatened me, set fires to scare me. Two nights ago, he tried to shoot me. The gun jammed.” I sit back, curling my legs in front of me. “So that’s Ryan. And since the cops wouldn’t do anything about it, I came here to save my own life.”

He looks troubled as he takes in my story, his expression morphing into something more angry by the time he finds his voice. “Fucking cops. You’d think they’d have done more for someone in your tax bracket, but it seems they only give a fuck if you’re one of them or a politician.” His sharp jaw tenses. “So your ex. Why didn’t you stab him in the balls?”

“Because he was bigger than me,” I say simply. “As a woman, if you’re gonna hurt a man, you’d better be prepared — and able — to kill him. If you don’t, chances are

good it'll be you that ends up in the ground."

His eyes drop to his lap, because unless he's a piece of shit, he has absolutely no argument for what I just said. It's a tale as old as time, and it doesn't matter what year we're in or whether women have voting rights, men will always feel superior. "Do you know who he owed the money to? Maybe they'll get to him sooner rather than later. You're right, men prey on who they deem weak and that includes other men like him."

"I don't know. I don't care," I admit. "If he lives, if he dies, I just hope I never see him again. So that's why I'm here. Why are you here?"

"I had nowhere to go," he admits. "I don't have family or friends anymore, and unfortunately I used the last of my money to get me here. I'm pretty good with a computer so I managed to find this place after a little digging. Found the information on your parents and made my plans to disappear here when they went on vacation. All the family photos of this place are from Christmas time so I figured I'd have a few months before I had to find somewhere else. Imagine my surprise when you walked through that door four days into my stay."

That's something, but doesn't tell me why he's on the run. For all I know, he could be the guy who shot that senator. The eyes are similar enough. He has a gun. And four days... the timeline sort of checks out. He's too damn close to that gun for me to say a word, though.

"I'm sorry you don't have anyone. My parents are hardly ever around, but they support me. And my sister has been amazing."

"It was always just my mom and I, and the friends I was surrounded by turned out to be nothing more than leaves in the wind when shit got real."

How real? Like shooting a politician real?

“So where’s your mom?”

Pain and rage blend together in his eyes, a dark storm brewing together when they meet mine again. “Dead.”

There’s a heavy weight on that word as he delivers it through gritted teeth, alerting me that this is a really touchy subject for him.

Okay. He’s got mommy issues. Got it.

“I’m... sorry,” I say honestly. I can’t imagine how painful it is to lose a parent because it hasn’t happened to me yet. “We don’t have to talk about it.”

“Good.” He takes another deep breath, and I swear I can hear him mentally count before he releases it. “So if you’re not going to try and leave or call the cops on me, I need you to say it.”

He says this like he’d actually believe the word of a stranger, but with the way he’s looking at me it feels like he just might. Or maybe he simply doesn’t have another choice.

“The last time I spoke to a cop, I threatened him, and I don’t have anywhere else to go either. There aren’t many places Ryan wouldn’t be able to find me, so all of my eggs were in one basket.”

Nodding, he reaches up to pull his mask off and sets it aside, his hair messy and flat on his head as he watches me take him in.

He’s stunning, and I think I hate him for it. Thick eyebrows frame those expressive

blue eyes, split by a slightly crooked nose and a cupid's bow smile. High cheekbones, a sharp jaw and jet black hair make him look like something out of a fantasy novel — I half expect him to sprout bat wings and shroud himself in shadow.

How does someone like him end up with no one?

“Oh, fuck you,” I mutter. “You’re not allowed to have it all.”

That makes him chuckle. “Literally just told you I have nothing and that’s what you have to say? Fuck you right back, Josephine. Is that a Ouija board tattoo on your chest?”

Twitching, I hold up a finger. “First of all, yes. That’s what I have to say. You know how hot you are, so shut up. Second, my name is Joey. No one calls me Josephine. Third, yeah. I like to talk to dead people.”

“You say that like you aren’t the best looking woman in this entire state, and you’re wrong. I call you Josephine. Do you also let these dead people ogle your boobs? What if it’s an ass guy?”

Butterflies scatter inside me even as I try to shoot them down. This is ridiculous. He’s a stranger keeping me hostage in my family’s cabin, this isn’t some romcom. It doesn’t matter if he thinks I’m attractive. “Where do you think the planchette is?” I counter. “The good ghosts don’t discriminate.”

The way his gaze rakes my body has me squirming. “I guess you’re right.” He licks his lips. “Why don’t you like your name?”

“Because I don’t. There’s no reason behind it, it’s just always made me cringe a little. I’ve been Joey for as long as I can remember, so people only ever called me Josephine when I was in trouble.”

“And you don’t feel like you’re in trouble right now... Joey?”

Did his voice just get deeper?

Am I in trouble?

Am I mad about it?

“I thought we agreed to be friends... big boy. Fuck, I wish you’d just tell me your first name at least.”

I think I hate his smile.

It’s distracting, blinding, borderline painful, and I’m trying to play it cool here. “We can be friends. I didn’t lie about my name. Or better, I gave you a nickname just like you gave me.” The grin fades slightly. “My name is Killian.”

Killian. Even his name is attractive, but it’s hard to imagine ever having feelings for anyone again. Ryan destroyed my trust and broke my heart. There’s nothing left. “It’s weird to meet you, Killer.”

He laughs softly. “No one actually calls me Killer. Not since high school at least.”

If he looked half this good in high school, I bet he was a killer. “I’m still gonna call you big boy.”

“Is this about the boner again? Look, I know you’re impressed, but you have to let it go, girl.”

The rage that was radiating off of him when I walked out here is buried deep under a mask now, one that’s almost too disarming. I can’t forget there’s still a gun behind

him, one that looked at home in his hand.

“It’s more because you’re built like a bodybuilding linebacker, but tell yourself whatever you want about my interest in your boner.”

“Linebackers are bigger than you think, Joey, but alright I get it. You have four different vibrators specifically so you don’t have to think about men and their random hard-ons. We can pretend it works.”

The audacity. The accuracy.

Fuck him.

“And we can pretend that finding said vibrators didn’t do anything for you,” I remind him. “I think it’s best we both go to bed. You have my keys and my word that I won’t try anything overnight. I’m about to drink half a bottle of sleep medicine and I’ll see you in three days.”

He licks his lips slowly before nodding in understanding. “Alright. It’s weird to meet you,” he repeats back to me. “I’ll stay out of your room.”

For now.

He doesn’t say it, but I swear those two words hang between us.

Let’s hope they stay there.

Page 5

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 2:04 am

Killian

The second the rustling noises from her room go quiet, I rush outside to unplug the battery in her car. I can't take any chances right now, and although I'm positive I haven't left a trail here, I know all of my efforts to disappear will be ruined if she goes back on her word and runs to the cops. To be safe, I'll be sleeping on the couch for the foreseeable future.

Based on her attitude and what she said, I know she's running from something she doesn't have any intentions of returning to. I can tell that cops are the last thing she wants to deal with because of her past, but I still can't take that risk.

It's a weirdly nice reminder that I'm not alone in this world though. That there are others out there desperate to escape the hell of their previous lives and start anew, but I can't let sentiment get in the way here. She came here to escape... and now she's my captive.

Ma would kill me for this if she wasn't already gone. I was raised to respect women, to go out of my way to put them at ease — not to instill fear into them like those bastards that got all pissy at girls saying they'd choose the bear. Yet, I pointed a gun at one who was just trying to escape her life because I don't have a choice here.

I was careful. I planned for fucking months so this whole thing would go off without a hitch, and now I'm holding some girl here against her will, and instead of trying to think of a way out of it, I just keep wondering if she wants to fuck me.

Sorry, Ma.

I blame it on the fact that it's been too damn long since I've gotten laid. It's been over a week since I got off at all, and much longer than that since I fucked someone, but my head's been all over the place since the accident.

Sex fell to the back burner, the flame underneath it nearly nonexistent as vengeance and anger corrupted everything inside of me, and now that I've freed myself of those chains I don't know where to begin. I don't know where my head is, and before I could even take the time to figure it out, this beautiful, tattooed goddess barged in here and started bossing me around.

Right when I was trying to jack off too.

I didn't fully lie to her. I was sleeping, but when I woke up throbbing in my sweatpants, I didn't hesitate to pull myself out and try to release all the tension inside of me. I was alone after all, and in the heat of the moment, the mess felt like it'd be worth it. I heard the fucking car door slam just as I felt my balls begin to tighten.

Now they're blue, and they'll probably stay that way for a while.

Pushing all of that from my mind, I run back over all the information she gave me on her and try to be a decent human. The last thing she needs is me making her more uncomfortable after what she's been through with that Ryan asshole, so as I make myself comfortable on the couch, I vow to try my hardest not to come onto her.

The vow is the easy part. Sticking to it is something else entirely.

When I wake to the sound of movement in the kitchen the next morning, I instinctively grab for my gun and jump up. Memories of last night come rushing back as I take in Joey with a thick, messy bun and a grouchy frown on her face. I swear she

looks even more beautiful like this. I can tell she's groggy from whatever sleeping aid she took, but her naturally rosy cheeks and full lips look even better without makeup.

"Thought you were sleeping for three days?"

I set my gun aside and run my hand down my face as I grab a shirt.

"Turns out it's hard to sleep when there's a madman in your house waving a gun around," she mutters. "Sit. I'm making breakfast."

Okay, so she's even more bossy today than she was yesterday. Didn't know that was possible. "Do I have permission to go take a piss?"

She looks shocked for a minute, then her body language relaxes. "Sorry. I'm not much of a morning person, especially since the meds haven't completely worn off yet. I'll be better after a pot of coffee."

"You'd think it was you with the gun," I tease, leaving it on the table when I walk away to show her she can trust me. It's a gamble I shouldn't take, but I have a feeling she isn't going to grab it and try to shoot me.

Hopefully.

I wash my face and brush my teeth before I go back out there and I find her on her tiptoes trying to reach a bowl. The way her tank top slides up her body makes me ache, but it doesn't distract from the amusement of watching her struggle.

I'm just about to offer to help when she shimmies up onto the counter and grabs it herself, cussing under her breath about cabins made for giants.

"Need help down?" I say teasingly, startling her enough that she slips.

She lands on her feet as that giant bun bounces, but it's the blush on her cheeks that holds me hostage. "Very funny."

"That's me, the funny madman. What are we making today?"

I walk over with every intention of helping, but it seems she's been awake longer than I thought. There's a stack of french toast already made and the eggs look just about done.

"The bacon's on the table already. Syrup and butter are in the fridge still."

I can't remember the last time a woman that wasn't my mom cooked me something. It might have been never, and yet this one has done it twice now. "Thanks. Do you like to cook?"

"I like to live, which means I like to eat. I kind of have to cook to do that. I don't hate it, but I don't love it, either. I guess it's better when it's not just me."

"Well it looks good. I'll do the dishes when we're done," I offer, then allow myself to be lured in by the smell of food. "I have to ask. You wouldn't try to poison me, right?"

"I did come here to become a bog witch, so you never know," she says a little too seriously. "I guess you'll have to trust me the same way you're asking me to trust you with that gun you won't seem to put away."

"I don't have it out because of you if that helps, and what the hell is a bog witch? Is that one of the witches that bake cookies to attract children so they can suck out their youth?"

She opens her mouth twice before she says anything. "No one will come here. I don't

know what you did that makes you so on edge, but I'm sure you noticed this cabin isn't on any map. You have no connection to my family, you clearly walked here so they can't trace your car... you covered your tracks."

"Yeah, I know. I planned this for months. But I also didn't expect you."

"No one ever does." She winks as she plates the eggs, then sits with a sigh. "It's a little hard for me to be around an angry man with a gun right now. I'm trying to make the best of this... situation, but I haven't given you a single reason to mistrust me. Please just put it in a drawer or something? You can still get to it if something happens."

I see it. The pain, the fear in her gorgeous, hazel eyes. Watching her douchebag ex pull the trigger on her fucked her up more than she'll admit.

"Okay," I say simply, unable to argue with her after what I've already done to her peace. I know how it feels to live in chaos, so the least I can do is bend here. "If someone else pulls up I'll get it, but I'll put it away for now. I left it out here when I went to the bathroom and you didn't grab it, so I think we've established we don't want to harm each other."

She nods softly, glancing down at her food. "Thanks. I came here to get away from violence, not start more of it."

"Me too."

Again, I feel solidarity between us with another thing, and I have to stuff some food into my mouth to keep from spilling all my secrets.

I can never tell her.

It doesn't matter if the secret is crushing, I'll find a way to hold it up on my own.

"How old are you?" It seems dumb to ask something like that in a moment like this, but seeing as we're going to be trapped here a while, I take the opportunity to get to know her better while she's feeling open. I looked at her family's information, but I didn't retain every detail I read. I probably should have looked a little closer at their kids though.

"Thirty." She makes a face, then shoves a bite of french toast into her mouth and squirms. "You?"

"Thirty-three... as of yesterday."

Her eyes widen. "Shit. Well, happy belated. Sorry I bullied you on your birthday."

I can't help the laugh that bubbles out of me. "It's fine. Only fair seeing as I had a gun. Plus, you fed me, so I think we're even."

"And you stole me kind of, so I'm like a really terrible birthday present." She takes a sip of coffee as she watches me intently. "Most guys just want video games or power tools."

"Pretty sure guys want blowjobs more than power tools, but what do I know? What do girls truly want since we're sharing secrets from the other side?"

"Any man who has to ask for a blowjob as a birthday present isn't with the right woman." Her eyes drop to the table, right over my crotch. "And women just want to be seen. Sometimes that means orgasms we don't have to reciprocate, sometimes it means being gifted something someone noticed we needed or wanted without having to be told. Sometimes it means just being taken care of for once. Every woman is different. Best to pay attention to yours."

Great advice. I shift in my seat and wonder which type of woman she is. Probably all of those things. “Noted. So was Ryan your only partner?”

“Not even close. I had my fun — maybe too much — and I had two sort of serious relationships before him. He’s the only one I considered marrying, though. He completely hid his true personality from me, and I don’t know how to come back from that. I don’t know how I’m ever supposed to trust anyone again.”

“I get it.” I don’t, not fully because I can never really know her struggles, but I know how it feels not to trust. “Maybe that’s something that only comes with time?”

She shakes her head. “Maybe. What about you, Killer? Tell me about your girlfriends.”

“Ah, there’s not much to tell there, Jojo. I dated a girl in high school, then another one in my late 20’s, but I was mostly just passing the time. It usually only took me a couple dates to know they weren’t what I was looking for. None of them bullied me,” I joke, but she still seems stuck on the fact that I called her Jojo.

“Don’t ever do that again.”

I can’t help it, I smile so damn wide my cheeks hurt. How long has it been since I smiled? Weeks? Months? And yet she’s already made me do it more times than I can count. Goddamn, I was lonely.

“Do what?” I know exactly what she means, but her expression is too cute for me to relent this soon.

“Quit trying to find nicknames for me. They’re all terrible, and you’re terrible for trying.” Yet as she raises her coffee cup to take another sip, I swear I see a smirk behind the mug.

“That’s not fair, you call me big boy. I don’t think you’d like it if I called you little girl so I figured I’d have to try a few out until I found one that stuck. We can’t all get it on the first try like you, Joseph.”

It takes her a few seconds, but it’s worth it when she finally reacts. Her nose scrunches up and her French-tipped middle finger finds its way in front of her face. “Okay, Jillian.”

“Jillian? Don’t like that one. Eat your food, grouchy.” I can tell she isn’t someone who likes being told what to do, but that doesn’t stop me from trying. “You can mainline your coffee after.”

“And you complain about me being bossy.” Yet, she obeys me. Her grey mug ends up back on the table and she eats half a piece of bacon in one bite, making it impossible for me to look away.

Her showing up here and changing everything is karma for my sins, but the more time I spend with her, I find myself confused as to what type of karma it is. I did something undoubtedly wrong, yes, but I did it to someone who deserved worse than that, so is it possible the universe might actually be rewarding me?

Or am I just fucking delusional at this point?

I guess time will tell.

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 2:04 am

Cleaning only takes so long. There are only so many ways I can rearrange my drawer and re-fold blankets before I have to admit to myself that I'm stalling — and why? Killian is hot, he's charming, and he's right out there in the living room.

So why am I hiding? He has a gun, sure. One he agreed to put away. He said I can't leave, yes, but I wasn't going to. And even if he turns out to be the serial killer or the guy who killed the senator, who cares? He'd have either killed me by now or shoved me in the bunker downstairs if he was planning on hurting me, especially since I have no desire to call him out about it. If I don't bring it up, he has no reason to be suspicious or angry with me. So why am I being so fucking weird?

Maybe because it is weird to just accept this situation. It's borderline pathological, actually.

Normal people would be crying, hiding, begging for mercy... and here I am wondering what it would feel like to let him put me on my knees.

This is ridiculous.

Cursing myself under my breath, I walk out into the living room and sit down on the chair to the left of the couch he's sprawled across. "Hi."

"Hi." The fire is fuller than it was, and I hate myself a little for thinking about how nice it is to have a man around to do those things. I'll never admit it out loud though. "You get all settled back there?"

"Yeah." A few times. "Where's your stuff?"

He nods at the duffle bag on the floor. “There. Also have clothes downstairs, but I packed light.”

I can see *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens resting on a laptop next to his bag, piquing my curiosity. “Do you need anything else?”

Killian looks at me like he’s confused. “Are you... offering?”

“Yeah, I guess. I don’t really know how because I can’t leave and we can’t have anything shipped here, but... never mind. I promise that wasn’t a ploy to get to leave but I hear how it sounds that way.” My cheeks flush and I wish more than anything I could sink into the floor. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry. There’s nothing to be sorry about. I was just surprised you’d offer me anything at all after I trapped you here. At the moment, I have more than I expected to have. I thought I was going to live off canned food and beef jerky and instead I have a beautiful woman making me french toast in the mornings. Thanks for the offer, but I’m good. Do you need anything?”

For him to understand that the food I bought won’t last forever. We’ve got a week tops. I bought enough for longer than that, but only for me — and with the way he eats, a week might be generous. At some point, he’ll have to trust me enough to let me leave or he’ll have to go himself. “I’m okay.”

I was silent too long for that to be my only response because he sits up straighter and eyes me. “I know you came here wanting to be alone, and I’m sorry I fucked that up, but I still have nowhere else to go. You don’t have to pretend you’re okay with all this, though. I can take it if you want to tell me off.”

Part of me would like that very much, but where would it get us? Nowhere. “I don’t want to tell you off. I get it, okay? We’re all running from something and my parents

would be the first to offer this place to you if you'd asked. I don't care that you're here. I just don't know what we're gonna do when we run out of toothpaste or toilet paper or meat."

"Your dad seemed to prepare for the toothpaste and toilet paper shortage because you're stocked downstairs. The meat and produce is another issue though, especially if you're going to keep spoiling us with those meals. The nearest store is about twenty miles away, and based on my research, it's a pretty sleepy little town. Hopefully by the time we need that stuff you'll already be in love with me and won't want to run."

He smiles at me teasingly, but there's an undertone of seriousness he can't laugh away. Even if the world turned upside down and I did fall in love with him, how would he ever believe it? I wouldn't. Not with what I've been through. "I already told you I don't want to run."

His eyes suddenly snap to the tv droning on across from him, and my gaze follows. There it is again — the grainy shot of the man who killed the senator.

Suddenly he isn't smiling anymore. His body goes rigid as he watches them lay out the evidence they've found so far, and he doesn't relax until they say they need help finding suspects.

The face mask they found at a bus station had no traces of who the perpetrator was.

The coke bottle they believed belonged to the shooter somehow had the victim's fingerprints on it, and the note they found underneath the body gave no tips as to who may have pulled the trigger. They show it hoping someone out there may recognize the handwriting, but when they do, I see something flash across Killian's face that practically confirms my suspicions. Satisfaction.

All the note says is "KARMA" in bold, neat letters, which isn't something new to

him. Didn't he say I was his karma?

"You did it, didn't you," I say softly. "You're the one they're looking for."

Those identical blue eyes we just saw on screen snap to mine, a thick silence settling between us as we both hold our breath and wait for the other to freak out.

But it doesn't happen. And his silence speaks volumes.

"How would you feel if I was?"

"Honestly?" I ask, giving myself a second to breathe. This is it. If I say the wrong thing, his good nature might come to an end. At least I don't have to lie. "I don't know what he did to you, but in my experience, there's no such thing as a good politician."

Those full lips part a little like he's surprised, but it's the relief I see on his face that has my attention. Maybe relief isn't the right word... hope? Is that hope I see?

"Yeah," he says, his voice cracking on the word. "It seems we share the same experience."

"So if you did kill him, I'd probably offer to bake you a cake. It's nice when the people who think they own the world get reminded that they don't." It's true, and I wish I had the balls to do something so bold. "Politicians and most rich people are so out of touch with normal citizens that they don't even realize how bad they screw us over every day. Or maybe they do know and they just don't care, which is worse." I might have money, but I work for it, and not even I'm in a high enough tax bracket to be treated well by the government. And just being a woman is enough to tell me they don't care about me.

“They don’t care because we aren’t people to them, not really. If they humanized us they’d have to feel for us, and that will never happen. Not unless more people show them they bleed just the same as us.”

He hasn’t outright admitted it yet, and for some reason, I need him to. “So you killed him.”

Killian chews his lip silently for a second and then nods once, allowing me a few moments to accept what he admitted before he says anything out loud. “What kind of cake?”

Holy shit.

He really did it.

“Um... it might be boring, but I make a mean chocolate cake.”

“My favorite.” The way he looks when his body fully relaxes is criminal. The flirty smile he offers me sends a shiver down my spine — this man is a killer in more ways than one.

Funny given his name.

“Wait a minute, isn’t Killian kind of... on the nose?” I tease. “Did your parents name you that in hopes you’d be a killer on the run one day, or was it just a happy accident?”

“I don’t know. Keep talking and maybe we’ll find out.”

I lick my lips slowly as I contemplate how far I can push him. If he is going to hurt me... I want to get it over with. “You do know names aren’t supposed to be literal,

right? You don't see me hopping around like a baby kangaroo just because my name is Joey."

"Unfortunately not, but I have something you can hop on if you're feeling the natural urge to, Roo Roo."

My jaw drops, but my eyes flick to his crotch. He got me. That's fair. The way my pussy immediately responded says more about me than years of therapy ever could — and I don't care.

No one in their right mind would turn him down.

"Stop giving me stupid nicknames and maybe I will."

Killian chuckles deeply. "Just Roo then? Got it."

That one's actually kind of cute and it bothers me. I am who I am — I'm Joey. No one deviates, no one gets creative. Except him. "You're awfully needy, you know that? First you want cake, then sex... what's next?"

"It was my birthday yesterday after all, and I don't know about you, but I think if we flipped that order, we'd be nice and sated. Imagine a slice of fresh chocolate cake after five orgasms?"

My eyebrows shoot up. "Sorry, what? How many?"

"Give or take." His gaze travels up my legs until he meets my eyes again. "At least. Going to take a guess that it's been a while for you?"

It has. Over a year, actually. So long that I don't crave it the way I used to... until now. But this is dangerous. He's dangerous. He's a killer, he's admitted it. And

where would this end? We're stuck here together. If we fuck once, we'll do it again and again and again. Things will get messy, tangled. I'm too broken to ever love again, so where does that leave us? We can't start down that road.

"A while," I agree. "I'm not upset about it. When you stop getting it all the time, it stops meaning as much. My vibrators get the job done just fine."

"I know the feeling," he admits. "My hand does the job, but I know it could never compare to... fuck."

Kill reaches down and adjusts himself before putting a pillow on his lap to block it, and I nearly ask him not to. I'm so wet he'd slide right inside of me.

"Do you want me to leave you alone?" I ask quietly. "I can go to my room for a while."

"I have a much better idea... but I promised myself I wouldn't hit on you and you're making it very difficult not to want to fuck you right here."

My breath catches as I force myself to stand up. The kitchen isn't much of a hideaway, but I grab a bottle of water and give myself a second to just drink and try to cool off — but the moment I turn around, he's there. Right in front of me. "Killian..."

"Tell me no."

His hand reaches out to cradle my face and I suddenly forget what that means. Why would I say no? How could I say no?

"Yes."

The word barely leaves my lips before he whispers, “fuck it,” and his mouth is crashing into mine, his body caging me against the counter as he devours me like he’s starved.

I’ve never been kissed like this. I can’t think, can’t reason, can’t do anything but allow myself to be swept up in it.

And god, it feels good.

Just once.

I can let myself have this just once.

Ryan never kissed me like this.

My fingers tangle in his messy hair as he lifts me up onto the counter, and my legs spread a little too easily.

A growl leaves his chest when he presses himself against my center, his rock-hard cock threatening to rip its way through our clothes, and when he grinds his hips into me I forget why I ever wanted to argue with him.

My clit throbs with need as I bite his lip and suck it between my teeth, only letting go when he grips my throat. “Do you have a condom?” I rush out, reaching down to palm him. “Please tell me you brought condoms.”

The word seems to pull him back to reality slightly, but when his hand tightens and his cock throbs, I get the feeling nothing could stop him now. “I don’t have anything. I didn’t expect... do you?”

He kisses me again before I can respond, slower this time, making me drunk on the

way his lips feel. Little bastard. “No, I don’t,” I whisper, squeezing his balls lightly through his sweats. “Oh well.”

That makes him smile a little too widely as he lifts me up to pull my shorts down. “I don’t have anything in the other regard either. I’ve been tested, and I usually always wear a rubber. Fuck, you’re soaked.”

He lifts my shorts up to inhale my scent from them, making me stumble on my words as I reply, “M-Me either, I don’t... fuck.”

“Don’t move,” he says darkly, slowly lowering his face down without breaking eye contact until his cheeks are level with my thighs.

This is one command I’m happy to obey. “Is your tongue as talented as it is sharp?”

As a response, he slides it up my clit painfully slowly before grinning up at me. “I’ll show you.”

He does it again, this time moaning when my juices coat his tongue and then he goes absolutely feral. Both hands grip my thighs hard enough to bruise as he dives in, and I don’t think he’s trying to impress me at all. I think he’s just starving.

But holy hell, someone fucking cooked here. Most men are terrible at this without being taught — no finesse, too much teeth, acting like they’re scared of it.

Not Killian.

He has my thighs shaking within seconds, his name spilling from my lips in seconds more. Every swipe of his tongue over my clit makes me lean back a little more until I’m flat on the counter, completely exposed to him. He tosses my legs over his shoulders and swirls his tongue, one hand reaching up to squeeze my breast and tug

on my nipple while the other just teases my pussy.

With every heartbeat, I'm waiting for him to slip his fingers inside me, to ruin me, but he doesn't. He teases and teases, huffing a breathy laugh against my pussy when I start to squirm.

"Killian."

"Mmm. Fuck, my name sounds so good when you're desperate. You want to be full, don't you?"

Two fingers tease at my entrance as he sucks my clit into his mouth, pulling an orgasm from me I couldn't stop if I tried.

And he doesn't stop there. It isn't until my entire body is trembling and I'm pulling his hair to squirm away that he finally sits up, and the look in his eyes tells me he's about to ruin me even further.

"Taste so good I didn't want to stop," he breathes, shoving his sweats and boxers down in one go before tugging me hard to the end of the counter.

He's so hard his cock bounces as he takes in the sight of me, and as tempted as I am to push him back and show him I can be just as good at this as he is... I kind of want to see what he'll do first.

Reaching down, I spread my lips and let him see. "I'm so wet, Killian. You want to fuck me?"

"Hell yeah I do," he replies, eyes locked on my pussy as he fists his cock. "You want it too. Say it."

I do. The bastard was right, I want to feel full and he wouldn't even give me his fingers. I need it all. "I want it," I whisper, hooking my ankles behind him to pull him in. "I want you."

The cocky smile on his face makes me want to slap him, but something tells me he'd like that. "I'm right here, Roo. You can have me."

The head of his cock nudges at my pussy once, twice, then slides inside in one solid thrust, stretching me open.

It's exactly what I needed. I've been tense, scared, sad, and lonely for far too long, and everyone knows the only cure to that is getting railed by a smoking hot fugitive. I flatten my palm against his chest as I brace myself, but nothing quite prepares me for that first thrust.

He's just as desperate as I am.

"Joey," he groans, hands gripping my waist to keep me in place as he finds a deep, steady pace. "How are you so tight?"

He sounds equal parts amazed and desperate for more, drawing me deeper into his spell. "Maybe I'm not. Maybe you just fit me that well."

"If I'm too rough you'll have to tell me, alright? Been too fucking long and you feel too good."

When he grips my throat tightly, fear spikes through me. He is a killer, one I've known for about a day. Rough could mean gutting me. Rough could mean fucking a hole through me and then fucking that too. Rough could mean any number of things, and yet, I feel the fear dissipate.

“I can take it,” I promise, pushing up into his hand to prove it. “I can handle you.”

“I don’t doubt it,” he says with a chuckle, then he loses himself to pleasure one thrust at a time.

I get to watch his jaw drop after he cusses and curls his fingers a little tighter, those lust-blown blue eyes rolling the second I clamp down on him and make him throb. My turn. Sitting up, I grip his throat and pull his face to mine, kissing him as I push him backward until he’s slipping out of me.

Dropping to my knees, I lift his cock and suck his balls into my mouth, grinning to myself when his leg jerks in response. “Fucking hell,” he growls.

His thick cock pulses in my hand, telling me it’s my turn to tease. I stroke him slowly, barely gripping it, flicking my tongue over his shaft before kissing his balls. Wet, messy kisses that leave him groaning and leaning forward to chase me. Good.

Sitting back, I gaze up at him as I swirl my tongue around the head of his perfect cock. “I’ve always been told I look better with a cock in my mouth. Is it true?”

I suck him in fully, pulling a groan from deep in his chest as he fists my hair. “You’re always beautiful, but the way you look with my cock in your mouth is breathtaking.”

His words are laced with so much possession it catches me off guard and makes me choke.

I need him back inside of me.

Giving him just enough that he’ll know what I’m capable of, I reach up and tug him down to me, smiling when he joins me on the floor without an ounce of hesitation and pulls me up into his lap.

When our lips meet again, he grabs onto my hips and lines himself up, but I don't wait this time. I sink down, chasing the feeling until he's splitting me in half, and grind down.

"Told you I had something for you to hop on," he says playfully. "Hop on that dick. You already have me leaking."

My nose wrinkles. He is a man after all, and says stupid things like men tend to do. Instead, I lean forward and cover his mouth, rising up and sliding down slowly enough to drive us both mad. "I like your tongue better when it's occupied."

Before he can take over, I give him what he wants. I ride him like there's a gun to my head, like I'll never get off again if I don't.

The amusement fades from his eyes as he grabs onto my ass and enjoys the ride, his muffled moans behind my hand spurring me on to move faster. I come once, twice, three fucking times before my lungs and thighs are burning too much to keep up the pace. The moment I falter, Killian takes over, fucking up into me so good it makes me cry out. "You're going to make me come."

"No don't," I rush out, tipping my head back. "Not yet. Don't stop."

It makes him groan, and his cock pulses desperately inside of me as he tries to hold back. "Fuuck."

"Killian, don't you dare." I kiss him hard, so close to another orgasm it's maddening. "Don't stop."

When his body stiffens I know he's lost the battle. An angry growl leaves him as he pins me down on his lap and fills me up with so much cum I can feel it oozing out of me more with each roll of his hips. "Joey," he breathes. "I couldn't stop it."

Teeth find my throat, punishing me in the best way. The only way that distracts me from the orgasm I lost.

But he keeps throbbing, keeps filling me up. It doesn't stop. Shock lines my features and nearly paralyzes me until he finally stills. "Holy shit," I whisper. "It really has been a while for you, huh?"

He's clinging to me with his face buried in my breasts when he nods, and it isn't until he catches his breath that he meets my gaze again. "It has. But that's pretty standard for me regardless. Probably should have warned you."

Slowly, he lays me on the floor and pulls out of me, showing me the mess he made all over the both of us, and the amount of cum that's painting us even though he buried most of it inside me. It makes me a little lightheaded... and also incredibly turned on. "Seriously?"

Long, thick fingers push more cum back inside of me, curling just right to show me he's far from done with me and has no intentions on missing out on my last orgasm. "It's called hyperspermia. Have you heard of it? I promise it's real even though the name is ridiculous."

Oh I've heard of it, I've just never met anyone who had it. I also can't focus on anything but the way his fingers feel right now. "I— um..."

"Shhh... let me take care of you and we'll talk after. I felt how close you were, so give it to me."

When his thumb rolls over my clit, my eyes close. Nothing matters but how it feels. Bloated with his cum, every swipe sends me a little higher until I'm shuddering and shaking on the kitchen floor, clenching my thighs around his hand to make him stop.

Finally fucking sated.

“I could watch you come all day.”

Kill braces his hands on the sides of my head and leans in to kiss me, surrounding me. For a moment, I let myself believe it's real. That it's the start of something altering, something perfect. But it's not. This is complicated and messy, and this was supposed to be — has to be — a one and done, just a way to get it out of our systems.

This kiss will be the last.

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 2:04 am

Showering alone gives me time to think. I don't change my mind, but I do take a few moments to berate myself for the choice.

That was the best sex I'll ever have. Past, present, future, it doesn't matter. That was it. The peak, the top of the mountain. Not only is he sinfully hot, he's also violently dangerous, insanely talented, and a giver on top of it all.

And I'm about to look him in the eyes and tell him I never want to do it again.

One day, some psychology guru will do a case study on me, I just know it.

But when it comes time to actually tell him, I falter — he's relaxing on the couch looking sated and sweet, legs splayed and tattoos on display. How am I supposed to tell him?

Especially when he gives me his blinding, flirty smile.

"Sorry for the mess."

But he isn't sorry and quite frankly, neither am I.

"Mess might be an understatement, but hey. It was worth it." I take a seat next to him, but not close enough to touch. "I'll do just about anything once."

"Anything, huh? Does that mean you daydreamed about how it'd feel for me to come down your throat?" He chuckles deeply and reaches out to grip my thigh with one hand, leaving it there like I'm his. "Or maybe in your ass?"

Fucking hell. My cheeks flush as I feel a rush of heat, but I don't give in. Much. "I've thought about it. But Kill... this is a terrible idea. You know that, right? We shouldn't... we can't do this."

Sighing, his fingers curl into my skin before he tugs his hand away altogether. "Alright. And why is it terrible?"

Treading carefully, I watch his face. "Because I am, and will remain, your prisoner until you decide how to get rid of me," I say gently. "It's not exactly straightforward."

He's frowning down at his lap now, his smile and relaxed demeanor gone as if they were never there at all. "Prisoner in a strong word. I thought we were cohabitating."

"Can I leave?"

"No."

"Then we're not cohabitating," I remind him. "You can call it whatever you want, but there's still a pretty serious imbalance of power here. Not to mention we've known each other for a day. Let's do a little foreshadowing here. Say we keep going for months. You fall in love with me, but I'm broken and don't love you back. What do you do?"

That makes him look up at me again. "Broken? You really believe that?"

"Yeah, I do. I don't see any way forward from where I've been. But that isn't the point, Killian. What do you do in that situation?"

Shrugging, he slumps a little further in his seat and lays his head back. "You're not going anywhere for longer than that so I'd probably believe I have time to change

your mind. You said at least a year.”

“Fine. A year comes, same thing. I don’t love you and I’m ready to go. What do you do?”

His frown deepens. “I don’t know. And who’s to say I’m the one that falls in love?”

Because I can’t. I won’t.

“Okay. I love you and you don’t love me. Still, a year comes and I want to leave because you’ve broken my heart, kept me prisoner for a year, fucked me repeatedly and didn’t even have the decency to grow to love me. Do you trust me out there on my own in that condition? Do you trust me not to rat you out?”

“Why are you making this so complicated? No, I guess I can’t trust you, happy now?” He’s getting frustrated, and part of me thinks this is necessary. I have to see his anger, his darkness. “I get it, it was too much cum and you’re grossed out, but if you didn’t enjoy yourself just say so. You didn’t have to... whatever the fuck this is.” He waves a hand between us and stands. “I need a shower.”

“Of course you’d make it about you,” I mutter. “I’m so shocked.”

“So what’s it really about? Your inability to fall in love? Because I don’t believe that bullshit. If you’ve done it once, you can do it again. It’s really that simple, you just don’t want to. And that’s fine if you think you’re protecting your heart, but I promise you that you aren’t. You’re just making your heartbreak stay with you forever.”

“You’re right,” I snap. “It took three years for Ryan to admit what a jackass he was, and here you are admitting it on day one. How dare I try to protect my heart when you, the killer on the run keeping me prisoner, is so clearly deserving of it? You’re right. We should fuck daily, three or four times. When has sex ever made anything

more complicated?”

My tone has him standing straighter like I slapped him, but I can tell he's far from done. “Whatever, I'm an asshole then. Would you rather I pretend I'm Prince Charming to your face like Ryan did? And by the way, you're an asshole too. I just happen to like it.” He takes three steps toward the bathroom before spinning back around. “This isn't about fucking anymore, Josephine. Who says I want to fuck you again, anyway?”

My jaw goes slack, but it humbles me quickly. “If you didn't want more, why argue with me in the first place? Why not just go along with it when I said we shouldn't do it again?”

“Because I did want to,” he admits. “Funny how things can change so quickly, huh? Now I'll protect my heart just like you seeing as I'm the only one that falls in love here.”

At least he finally gets it. “Perfect. Maybe as friends, one day you'll trust me enough to let me go. That's the only way this ends well for me. I'm sorry.”

“Don't be. It is what it is, friend.”

The tone of his voice makes me nervous. It Isn't cold, but it's sarcastic enough to let me know I might've made a huge mistake here. But what's right? Getting tangled up when the power imbalance is skewed this severely? Gambling with my life for a few orgasms? I shouldn't have fucked him in the first place, I know that. But I did. I let his almost inhumanly handsome face distract me from who he is, what he is.

And now I may never be free.

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 2:04 am

Killian

It's been a week since I've touched her. A week since that dumbass argument that didn't need to happen, especially so soon, but I have to admit I get her hesitation.

After what I've done, I honestly don't know if I'll even make it another year on this earth. Normally I'd say that's dramatic, but I feel like people who have assassinated a politician have a shorter life span, regardless of how righteous they believe the crime was.

The cops would kill me just to silence me.

I guess I was just too ready to hold onto something good for as long as I could, and that sex was really motherfucking good.

I expected an embarrassing talk about my condition after, one where I tell her the story of how I even got diagnosed and how girls tend to run away from me and my buckets of cum. But instead I honestly got something worse. I got rejected... and not for my cum.

That she seemed to enjoy.

I really need to stop thinking about it.

She's been cordial the whole time, cooking for us both like she did that first day, but even still I feel further apart from her than I did the day I met her.

Or maybe I'm just dumb. I don't know, but when she sits down across from me after breakfast and gives me that 'we have to talk look' I find myself tensing.

"What's up?"

"We have enough food for dinner tonight and tomorrow night, but that's it. We'll be out of meat and fresh produce by Sunday. We can survive off of canned beans and MRE's for a while I guess, but I thought you should know."

Well fuck.

I knew this day would come, I just didn't know it would come so soon or that things would be this damn awkward. It feels like what I imagine it feels like to live with an ex... except you've never dated... and you're holding her hostage.

So maybe that's worse.

"What do you propose we do?"

Her lips purse, but her tone remains almost suspiciously light. "I've been thinking a lot about that, actually. You can go if you think you won't be spotted. They don't know your name yet and all they're showing is your eyes, so chances are good you can make it in and out of a small town grocery store without issues. I can give you my card."

The thought makes my heart beat a little faster and anxiety creep its way along my skin.

Yeah, they probably won't recognize me, but I'm tall enough to catch some attention, and if someone looks at me too closely in this small ass town... yet if I let her go alone, I could potentially ruin everything anyway. No. She gave me her word, and

although a week is nothing in the grand scheme of things, we have to learn to trust each other eventually. “What if we both go?”

“We could,” she agrees. “It would be easier than making you a list.”

Scratching my head, I release a deep breath and accept my fate. “Do you think anyone would recognize you?”

“No. I don’t usually leave when I come here, so unless the same people are working who checked me out a week ago, no one will notice me.” She pushes her food around with her fork, squinting at her plate. “And even if they do, it’s not like they’ll automatically assume I’m shopping with a fugitive.”

“Fair.” Goddamn, she’s beautiful. I think I hate it. “You’re going to have to fake date me. You know that, right?”

“What exactly do you think happens in grocery stores?”

“People walk around and get groceries,” I deadpan. “I was meaning like hold my hand or not look like you want to run if I put my arm around you. I’m trusting you here, but that doesn’t mean I don’t have anxiety about it.”

Or that I don’t need a little comfort sometimes. Fuck, that’s pathetic. Glad I didn’t say it out loud.

“Right. Okay,” she agrees softly. “I will hold your hand and be cool if you put your arm around me. When do you want to go?”

“You said we had until Sunday? How about tomorrow evening? Older people shop in the mornings and they’re the ones that watch the news.”

“Good point.” She nods and goes back to eating, throwing us back into the same silence I’ve been dealing with all week. She’s nice enough, but only when I talk to her first.

Guess it’s time to fuck with her for some attention. Who even am I anymore?

“You sure you can pretend you’re into me? I don’t know, someone might call 911 if you look like you’re a captive that wants to bolt.”

“Seriously?” She looks up, licking her lips. “You don’t think I can?”

“I don’t know. I think you’re gonna be all stiff and look like you’ve never even kissed me.”

Roo rolls her eyes as she stands up and holds out her hand, transforming into an entirely different person as she smiles at me. “Come on, baby. I can’t survive off of your meat alone.”

It feels too good not to play along. Standing, I move over and crowd her space, backing her up against the counter without breaking our gazes and she plays along without missing a beat. Her slender hand slides up my cheek and rests there as she meets my eyes. “We’re in public, baby. Behave.”

“How could I when you look like this?”

I fully take advantage and catch her in a messy kiss, one she reciprocates with a soft moan until ultimately pulling back with flushed cheeks. “See?” she huffs, chest rising and falling rapidly. “I can handle it.”

I need more. I lean in again for just that, but when she backs up an inch, I take the hint. That was just practice. “Can we practice one more time before we walk in? Just

to loosen you up?”

It's clear from the look on her face that she's not buying my shit, but she nods anyway. “Sure.”

This is going to be harder than I thought.

Backing away, I let her see how hard I am from just one kiss and then press down on it when I turn away. “Can I borrow your room?”

“Yeah. I was thinking when we go out, we could get you some new sheets and you could move into the other room. The couch won't be comfortable for long.”

I've mostly stayed on the couch to watch the door, but I really only started that when she got here. “That sounds good, yeah.” I'd have somewhere to jack off that isn't the shower. “You need anything out of there before I go in? I won't take long.”

Her eyes drop to my crotch. “No, I don't need anything. Take your time.”

It feels a lot like rejection, but I'm not surprised. She's made it clear where she stands.

As much as it stings, I can't pass up an opportunity to jack off in here. It's a good thing she didn't try and ask me why I wanted to come in her room versus all the others because I didn't have an answer. Or I guess I did have an answer, but it wouldn't be one that she'd like.

I want to smell your dirty panties while I come doesn't seem like something she'd want to hear while she's pretending she doesn't want to fuck me, but I decide then and there that if she asks me after the fact, I'm just going to be honest. She can slap me if she wants.

It doesn't take long for me to find her laundry, and in seconds I have her panties pressed against my face and I'm struggling to get my cock out.

She smells so damn good I leak enough precome to spread along my shaft, then begin stroking myself like this is the last orgasm I'll ever have. As soon as she sees the mess I make in here there's no way she'll let me in here again, so I vow to make the most of the time I have... and maybe sneak in here every so often to snatch a pair because fuuuck . I'm throbbing.

I imagine how it felt when she was riding me on the kitchen floor. The way she looked at me and clenched her dripping pussy around my cock like there wasn't anywhere else she wanted to be. I know I didn't imagine it. She felt what I felt and I don't just mean the best sex of her life, I mean all of it.

"I want it."

"I want you."

The thing those words did to me.

"I can handle you."

Obviously the fuck not. But even as I think that, I know it isn't true. She didn't shut this down because she can't handle me, she ended it because she could. And she really fucking wants it.

"Killian, don't you dare. Don't stop."

It does me in just like it did the first time.

I hate that it does, I want to be known to have stamina, but hearing her tell me she

didn't want it to end felt so damn good I couldn't help it.

I twist my fist around the crown of my dick and slide down one last time before it begins to pulse, cum oozing through my fingers when I try to catch as much of it as I can, but there's too much.

It feels too damn good to care anyway.

By the time I'm spent, my cock is still throbbing and there's cum all over my hand and her laundry basket, so I cover as much of it up as I can and catch my breath. She's absolutely going to see all this cum when she does her laundry and I can't find it in me to be embarrassed about it. Hopefully it stirs something inside of her that pushes her toward me, but even if it doesn't, I don't want her forgetting what she does to me.

If I can't escape this desire, why should I let her?

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 2:04 am

My stomach is in knots as we pull into the store parking lot. He wants to practice to loosen me up — but am I ready for that? The scent of sex was so heavy in my room as I tried to fall asleep last night that it felt like torture. I knew what he wanted to do, but sitting out in the living room listening to it was harder than I thought it would be.

I wanted it to be me, sprawled out and vulnerable for him. I can't fucking think like this.

"We should be able to get everything here. Are you ready?"

His head swivels toward me, eyes raking my frame like he's inspecting me before he responds. "Are you?"

I'm not the one in danger right now, but I don't need to remind him of that — especially since he had to plug my car battery back in before we left. It was a nice little reminder that I may still be in danger, too. "Yes."

Anxiety ripples off of him as he looks past me to the store and the people coming in and out, his leg bouncing and breathing uneven. "I had a good reason," he rushes out. "I just want you to know that before we go in there."

The man he killed was a politician. In my mind, that's reason enough. "No one knows who you are. I saw the news story before I came to Windwinter. I didn't make the connection it was you until you were pointing a gun at me. Right now, you're just a man being dragged through a Walmart by his girlfriend."

I hate how much that word puts him at ease. I can see the way his shoulders relax,

and his lips almost curl up into a smile. “Girlfriend,” he repeats, leaning in to brace on the center console as he raises two fingers to beckon me forward. “Kiss me like I’m your man.”

Fuck. I agreed to this. Hell, I even want it — but I know what a slippery slope this is.

With my heart in my throat, I take my seatbelt off, pivot to kneel on the seat, grab his face with both hands and let all my frustration, fear and lust spill out in a messy, almost frantic kiss.

The way he moans into my mouth shoots straight to my core, and his hands don’t even hesitate to begin roaming.

When he palms my ass and tugs me closer like he wants me in his lap, I can’t resist. Maybe because I know he needs to relax or we’re gonna get busted, maybe because I’m desperate to feel good. I don’t know and I’m not sure I care.

Swinging over the center console, I squeeze between his body and the steering wheel, grinding down.

I can feel he’s already hard, but unfortunately for us both, our clothes make it impossible for him to slip inside me. “I want to fuck you so bad, Roo.”

He trails his tongue down to my neck and sucks my skin between his teeth.

I shouldn’t let him leave a mark. I should make him stop. I should... fuck, that feels good. My eyes flutter closed as desire takes the wheel, and by the time I get my shit together again, I know I’ll wear his mark for days.

Panting, I pull back. “Satisfied? Can we go in now?”

“Not even close,” he breathes. “Goddamnit, I’m so hard. Gonna need a minute before we can go in there... and you’re gonna need to get off my lap for that minute to even begin. You drive me crazy.”

His mouth crashes into mine again, and I know what I need to do. For me, for him, for the sake of this goddamn shopping trip. “Take your cock out,” I whisper, maneuvering back to my own side and leaning over the console.

Pausing, surprise flashes in his eyes a brief second before he’s scrambling to pull himself out of his jeans. “You sure?”

“You ask too many stupid questions,” I mutter, sucking him in the moment he’s free. My hair falls around me in waves, blocking his face from view and sheltering me enough that I don’t try to act like I’m not enjoying it.

“Oh fuck,” he gasps, his hand resting on my head as his fingers flex like he’s holding back from fucking the hell out of my throat. “Suck me so damn good.”

Knowing you’re making a mistake and continuing to make it anyway is so funny. But the way his cock feels slipping into my throat, the veins against my tongue, the heady weight of it... I don’t care. I’m dying to know what it feels like to swallow that much cum. To prove to him I can, that his hyperspermia isn’t the reason I tried to call this off. It’s one of the main arguments to keep going.

Killian thrusts up into my mouth with a groan, his fist tightening in my hair as he loses the battle to hold back, and before I know it he’s fully fucking my throat in the Walmart parking lot. “Don’t stop.”

I couldn’t if I wanted to. He’s got me pinned here, making me take it, and it’s got me so wet I squirm.

Fuck, I don't know how I'm gonna go back to telling him no.

“Take that dick, girl. Take it until your throat remembers the shape of my fucking cock.”

God, he's going to ruin me. His thrusts get harder as I choke, sending the tears pooling in my eyes streaming down my cheeks. My pussy is so wet I could put out a fucking fire with it, but it's taking everything I've got to hold on and stay steady for him.

“I'm gonna come, Joey,” he rushes out. “I'm gonna co— fuuuck!”

The second his rock-hard cock begins pulsing on my tongue, I forget to breathe. I can't. There's so much cum it fills up my mouth, spills down my throat, slips out back down his shaft. I won't disappoint him. Not here, not now. I swallow as much as I can and clean the rest off his cock with my tongue, swallowing that too. When I'm done, there isn't a drop left.

And I'm a mess.

I don't want to know what I look like as I sit up — hair disheveled, makeup running, cheeks stained with tears. Blowing him is not a job for the faint hearted, and I still have to go shopping.

Holy shit.

“That was — fucking everything.” Killian reaches out and wipes the tears off my cheeks, and then fixes my hair, caring for me in a way I didn't expect. “No one's ever swallowed for me before.”

I can't imagine why. Chuckling, I wipe my mouth and try to stop my hands from

shaking. “What else was I supposed to do with it? Let’s go.”

After another breath, he tucks himself away and stares down at the bulge that’s still there. “Will you let me return the favor when we get home? I know you’re wet for me.”

If I say no, then he might shut down and all of that was for nothing. If I say yes, I’d better be prepared to follow through — and I’m not. Nothing changed. He has to know nothing has changed. “Nothing kills a wet pussy like Walmart. Sorry, Killer. I’ll be dryer than the Sahara when we get back.”

Without waiting, I slide out of the Jeep and start walking toward the entrance, realizing just how right he was with every step. I can feel it.

I hear the door shut a few seconds before his huge hand is slotting with mine, fingers tangling like they belong there, and the feeling goes straight to my chest.

I need to focus. Who knows how long it will be before we get out again? I can’t forget anything. Yet with every step, he pulls me a little closer until I’m right up against him. Is he just nervous, or is he really this possessive? “One of us will have to push the cart,” I remind him. Gently, but firmly.

“I’ll do it,” he replies quickly, tugging one out with his free hand, and it only takes him a few steps to realize just how hard it is to push a cart with one hand. “Come here.”

He tugs me in and steps up behind me, caging me in as we begin walking into the store, and when I feel his nose brush against my neck like he’s inhaling my scent I don’t know whether to laugh or cry.

This is suspicious. No one walks around a store like this, doesn’t he know that?

Didn't he ever have to go buy new underwear before he started offing people?

Again, I can't pinpoint if it's nerves or possession, and I'm no longer sure the distinction matters. It's as weird as it is endearing.

"People are staring," I whisper. "This isn't normal."

He seems to realize the attention he's getting and finally backs off, giving me a moment to breathe. "Okay. Fuck, okay." He stuffs his hands into his pockets like it's difficult to act normal, and I almost feel bad for him.

Almost.

Taking over with the cart, I uphold my end of the bargain by getting what we need and smiling at him every time someone gets too close. It feels ridiculous, but truthfully, no one is paying attention to us now that he stopped treating me like a flight risk.

I notice his eyes on me every time someone walks down the aisle with us, again making me wonder if he's worried someone will recognize the blue or if he's holding himself back from claiming me right here, but the longer it goes on the more I start to believe it's both. "I really like those leggings you're wearing."

The urge to say something sassy wells up inside of me, but I made a deal. "Do you?" I ask, tossing some potatoes in the cart. There's a man not far from us giving us the side-eye, so I add, "They'll look better on the floor, babe. Think you can keep your hands off me until we get home?"

"No promises," he says with a grin, but it fades when he notices he isn't the only one eying my leggings.

Immediately he tenses, his hand flying out to grip my hip tightly as he tosses the guy a bro nod, the possession blatant.

Again, weird and endearing all at once. It's a struggle to keep him on task after that — especially once we realize we need a second cart — but we get there.

Checkout is terrible and the walk to the car is even worse, but once everything is loaded, I turn to him.

“See? We made it.”

“Mmhm.” He looks around a little paranoid before releasing a breath. “Yeah. Yeah, we made it. You okay?”

Externally? Yeah, I'm fine. Internally, though... not so much. My stomach is twisting, begging me to kiss him again, hold his hand one more time, hug him, do anything to get just a little more contact with the most attractive man I've ever seen before we get in the car. Once we're in, the deal's over. I don't have to pretend anymore. I won't have an excuse unless I take the ban off the table altogether, and I can't shake the fear that it'll end terribly for me if I do. He is still my captor. He could decide to kill me at any point, for any reason. He has the means and the opportunity, he just needs the motive.

“I'm fine,” I say finally. “Let's head back.”

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Killian

I'm at a point where I don't know how to express what I feel inside with words. I don't understand how she can turn her emotions off so suddenly like they're connected to a light switch, but she pulls it off without a hitch every single time.

When we got home from the store a few days ago, she was immediately back to being as distant as she was before, as if that blowjob never happened. And even more than that, like she didn't buy me hella shit just to keep me comfortable. Getting my dick sucked is nice, I'll never say otherwise, but what killed me more about all of it is the way she casually bought me things like she had no intention of asking me to reimburse her. She ensured I got a better pillow, waving a hand at me when I told her they had cheaper ones, and the navy sheets she picked out are more comfortable than anything I've ever owned. She even offered to get me a new lamp, but I passed on anything unnecessary because the room already had one. I don't care if it's pink. It was sweet of her to want to give me things of my own, but in all honesty I felt guilty accepting the few things I did.

I'm keeping her hostage here. I don't deserve her kindness, and the fact that she wants to give it anyway is fucking me up. I guess it helps that she has the ability to be so cold sometimes, but even then I just want to be the one that warms her up. I'm starting to understand what she meant the longer we stay here though, because with each day that passes, I find myself obsessing over her more and more. How long do I have before that obsession turns into love? And if it does... what the fuck do I do? It's not healthy, that's for sure, but regardless of all the reasons I shouldn't let myself want her, I can't lie and say that I don't.

I want her.

And it's enough to keep me awake at night.

I check the time and sigh when I see it's three in the morning. I want to go grab her and bring her in here, to show her how comfortable the bedding is that she got me, and then fuck her until we fall asleep tangled together, but I know that won't happen. She'll wake up the second I lift her from her bed and then tell me no, and then I'll have to feel that familiar pang of rejection once again. I know it's what I deserve, but I'm a starved man that's desperate for any scraps this woman will give me, so on the off chance that she might be feeling anything near what I am I get out of bed and sneak my way into her room.

When I realize she's sleeping in my old community college t-shirt, my entire body tenses. She looks so fucking beautiful I have to rub the knot out of my chest as I stare down at her. Cherry red hair is sprawled out along her silk pillow, the hunter green comforter bundled up around her thighs so I can see the skin below her navel and the fact that all she's wearing underneath it is a pair of booty short panties.

Fucking hell, I want to eat her pussy so bad. I'm already addicted to the smell of her, and right before I decide to go for it and climb into her bed, I glance back up at her face and find her looking directly at me.

Oh shit. Guess we'll see how she really feels now. No way she lies to me under the moonlight. Only witches have that power, and like I said before, this woman is a goddess.

"Sleepwalking, Killian?"

Will you deny me if I say no?

“Yes,” I whisper, taking the smallest step toward her so she knows I don’t want to leave.

Her eyes are dark, cloudy almost as she studies me. “And what do you want?”

“I want in.”

In your bed, in your head, inside of you.

“Why, so you can jizz all over my blanket, too? My laundry wasn’t enough?”

Oops.

“I’d rather jizz in you, but you won’t let me so I went to the second best thing. At least the clothes were already dirty.”

“And thanks to you, they were sticky,” she mumbles. “You should go to bed.”

She didn’t say my bed, so I climb into hers without another word and pull her to me. It feels so good I reach up to grip her throat so she doesn’t try to move away, her ass pressed against me in a way that drives me mad, but I feel her whole body go rigid.

“I won’t hurt you,” I whisper. “I promise.”

Slowly, I feel her start to relax until she’s sinking back against me.

There she is.

I didn’t realize how much I needed this until she’s breathing normally, and although I know she’s still awake she seems to be getting more comfortable by the second.

“Thank you.”

“You’re sleepwalking, remember?” she whispers. “It’s dangerous to wake a sleepwalker.”

In other words: shut the fuck up before you ruin this. Got it.

I don’t mind. Her telling me to be quiet is better than her telling me to leave, so I bury my face into the back of her neck and take a deep breath of her scent. Who knows if she’ll ever let me in here again.

When we wake the next morning, I’m surprised to find she’s still here. We’re still laying in the same position we fell asleep in, and I don’t even care that my arm is tingling. That was the best sleep I’ve gotten in years. “Morning.”

“Hi,” she whispers.

“You sleep okay?”

I roll over onto my back so she can hopefully roll over and lay on my chest, but I’m not surprised when she doesn’t.

She’s stubborn.

“I did. You?”

“Yeah. I came in here to tell you how much I like the sheets and pillow. Didn’t mean to climb in here too.”

Yeah, I did, but a little white lie to get her to communicate more won’t hurt.

“I’m glad,” she says softly. “Is there a reason you didn’t pick my parents’ room? Is it just because it’s upstairs and further away from the door?”

It’s too far from you. But also... “I feel better the closer I am. I don’t think anyone will find me here, but at the same time it’s hard not to be paranoid about the cops kicking down the door to shoot me. I don’t know if that ever goes away.”

“It doesn’t. I know Ryan can’t find me and I still lay awake at night hearing the click of his gun, wondering if he’s outside my window like he used to be. Just watching, waiting. I don’t see that ever going away.”

And here I am standing over her bed while she’s sleeping. “Did I scare you last night?”

She rolls over to face me, tucking her hand under her cheek. “No. Maybe at first, but I don’t think you’ll hurt me.”

“Good. I won’t.” At this point, I have a feeling I’ll be the one hurt in the end, but at least she warned me.

“Don’t you want to know why I think that?”

“I assumed it was because I haven’t already, but yeah. Tell me, Roo.”

She hesitates, biting her lip. “I never thought Ryan would hurt me because I didn’t think he was capable of hurting anyone. I underestimated him in that way, and that’s my mistake. You, though... you are. You have. I don’t know why you killed Jack Lawson, but I know you had a good reason. A really, really good reason. And I can see that killing him didn’t bring you the kind of joy you thought it would. You didn’t take pleasure in it, which means you won’t do it again unless you have a really, really good reason.”

Her words feel better than I expected even though they make me frown. She's right, she sees me, and I don't really know how to feel about that.

I thought killing the man who ruined my life would bring me some sort of peace, and instead it put me in a place where I'll never feel peace again.

I don't regret it. I can't. But that doesn't mean he won't haunt me while I live on the run forever. Still, Lawson was a bad man, a piece of shit rich guy who got away with anything and everything all because he had money. I don't feel any remorse for him at all. He deserved what I did to him.

Joey doesn't. "Thanks for saying that." I don't know if I'm ready to talk about it, but to be fair I don't know if I ever will be. "Do you want to know what happened?"

"I can't say I haven't been curious, but it's up to you. I won't make you tell me."

My fingers flex, my chest tightens, and I feel my heart rate speed up slightly before releasing a breath and diving in. "He killed my mom." I haven't said that sentence out loud since I screamed it to the police officers, and it isn't any easier this time than it was then. "It was one of those drunk driving accidents people like me go away for, but not people of a higher class. No, for those people it gets brushed under the rug after they toss some money around, and the victims left behind have to pick up the pieces." Even I can hear the anger in my voice, the exhaustion I have with a corrupt system filled with people who hide behind the Bible, and I don't try to hide how I feel inside. Not with her. "I was in the car with her. I walked away with a concussion and six stitches on the side of my head and she didn't walk away at all. She was killed instantly, and he didn't even spend one fucking night in the drunk tank."

Her fingers twitch as she reaches out to touch my face. "I'm so sorry. It's not fair, it's never been fair. No wonder you're starting a revolution."

“I don’t know about that, but I don’t understand how more people aren’t fucking tired of this. How long will we walk around like everything is okay while letting people like that keep us down? We outnumber them — we’re the other 99% and yet we bend or break to them? Because of money? Fuck money.”

I lean into her touch before she takes it away, but she doesn’t move.

“Haven’t you been paying attention? They don’t know who you are, but people are rallying behind you. The support you have from the public is unmatched. They don’t know why you did it either but it doesn’t matter. You stood up to them. You reminded the 99% that the elite bleed red just like them.”

I want to kiss her so bad right now it takes everything not to. “The news is still calling me a villain, and I haven’t looked anywhere else. Can you show me?”

“Yes.” Sitting up, she grabs her laptop and clicks around, and somehow it just now occurs to me that she could’ve used that to call for help at any time.

I really suck at this. “You had that in here the whole time?” I don’t know why but the knowledge that she could have turned me in at any point and didn’t helps ease all that tension inside of me as she pulls up the first article. “I’m an idiot.” But it seems that’s not all I am. Jack Lawson didn’t just kill my mom, he fucked over countless people, put a child in a wheelchair for life drunk driving before he ever crashed into us, and to top it all off he raped more women than we know of. He was a monster, and the world is a better place without him. “Holy shit.”

“Mmhm. Now look.” She switches to social media, showing me hundreds, maybe thousands of comments from people saying they hope I never get caught. That they’re proud of me, that they wish more people had my balls. They’re calling for change, real change.

I doubt we'll ever get it, but this is more than I ever expected.

"If they knew how hot you were, the internet would explode."

I meet her eyes and huff a laugh, but with how intensely she's staring into mine I see she wasn't joking. "You think that'd matter?"

She pulls up a thirst trap someone made from just seeing my eyes, and all the talk about men in masks, and I can't help but smile. Women on the internet are feral.

"They love a man who stands up for what's right. They love him even more when he looks like he could command the shadows around him."

"And what about you? Where do you fall in this?"

"I'm with them. The newscasters keep saying violence is never the answer, but that's false. Violence was always the answer, we're just too afraid to do it. Change has never been brought about by asking nicely."

Yeah. I'm a fucking goner. It won't take me a year to fall for Joey if she keeps saying things like this. "I—" I clear my throat and try to pretend I didn't just have that brain blip. "I agree. When I was eleven I was being bullied by this kid. I was shorter than him so he would make jokes about my height and overpower me when he could. He was reported multiple times, and they never even gave the guy a detention because he was the chief of police's son. Most of the time I ignored him because my mom always told me not to hit people, but I wanted to hit him so bad, Joey. I used to lay in bed and think about punching him in the nose and what the crack would sound like. One day I went to school and he walked up and shoved me against the wall and I lost it. I beat the shit out of this kid because I believed he deserved it, and you want to know what happened? He never bullied anyone again. I got suspended, but it was worth it, and I learned that day that sometimes you have to make it right all on your

own. The system won't help you."

"I get it. My parents do a lot, but it'll never truly change anything. They make a difference where they can but I think they're too scared to do anything real. I think you're a hero, Killian. Even if nothing comes of this, you brought people together for a couple of weeks. That's not something everyone can say." She closes her laptop and sets it back down, then rolls to face me again. "If you ever do get caught, I'll make sure you get the best lawyer money can buy."

"Even after what I've done to you?"

"Good point. The dozen orgasms were really terrible, I've changed my mind. It's the chair for you for sure."

I want to give her so much more, but I bite back that comment to keep from scaring her away. "I was thinking the hostage bit, but yeah, let's focus on those instead."

"Yeah, but... I get it. You can't let me go."

The scary part is I'm starting to believe I could. I just know I don't want to. "Well, I can't let you go until you fall in love with me."

She smiles sadly and settles back into the pillow, closing her eyes. "Good thing we've got nothing but time."

I reach out and slide my hand along her cheek like she did to me, swiping my thumb along her perfect lips. "Good thing we do."

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My fingers rest on the doorknob for a second too long. I don't want to close the door, not this time — and what does it say about me that I want my captor to watch me shower? That I want to see the hunger in his eyes, the bulge in his sweats?

I don't care what it says about me, frankly.

Humans are desperate for attention, all of us. I'm no different. Not even now.

So with the door wide, I start the shower to let the water warm and strip slowly, knowing he can already see me from the living room.

When the tv clicks off, I know I've got him. He stays silent where he is, but his gaze is loud, screaming for me to turn around so he can lure me in.

I don't. Not yet, anyway.

I strip slowly instead, letting him see my curves, my edges. Every piece of clothing that finds its way to the floor makes my heart beat faster, my pussy a little wetter. Is he still watching? Coming closer?

I swiftly glance over my shoulder to find him standing now, his hands clenched at his sides, but I avoid his face for the time being.

Turning back, I feel every step he takes toward me, feel the restraint he has getting closer to snapping.

My heart's beating so fast I feel like it's flying.

Without waiting, I step into the shower and let the water raise goosebumps on my skin. With the door halfway open, there's nothing to trap the heat in here with me, making me shiver as the water coats my hair and runs down my spine, splashing off my ass onto the shower floor.

I don't know where he is, but I know he's close. Every nerve in my body knows it as I slide my fingertips down my stomach and tease my clit.

This wasn't the plan, not originally. But now?

I want to see how far I can push him.

We never splurged for a detachable shower head and all my vibrators are in my room, meaning all I've got to work with are my fingers and the fantasy of the fugitive holding me captive.

He could take me whenever he wants. He's so much bigger, so much stronger than me that I'd never be able to stop him. He could fuck my pretty little ass the same way he's fucked my cunt, my throat. Claim the last part of me without me having a say in it at all.

I can almost feel his hand around my throat as he does it, see the fire in those icy blue eyes. He'd tell me I'm his, I'm sure. That he owns me. He stole me, so I'm his, whispering it over and over again as he tears my ass apart.

My fingers are moving so fast it's making my leg twitch, nearly sending me off balance on the slippery floor. But I don't stop. My breath catches and halts entirely until I force it out in a broken moan.

The door slides the rest of the way a split second before I'm being pinned to the wall, Killian fully clothed and looking like a mad man. "Keep going. Don't stop until you

come.”

Shock makes that difficult for a moment, but as I watch the water run down his gorgeous face and soak his clothes, I can’t deny him.

My bottom lip slips between my teeth as I pinch my clit and keep going, not looking away from him. I’m acutely aware of how close he is, how every heavy breath causes my nipples to brush against his chest. So, so close.

“Who are you thinking about, Roo?”

His pupils are so blown I can hardly see the blue at all, and I know he won’t accept a lie. He never would.

“You,” I whisper, almost gasp. “I was thinking about what it would feel like if you stopped taking no for an answer. If you claimed my ass the same way you’ve claimed every other part of me.”

“Fuck,” he growls, one hand moving over to grip my throat as he leans his face in closer. So close we’re sharing air. “You’d like that, hmm? The thought alone has you dripping, huh? Say it.”

“I—” I’m too close, please don’t ruin this — “I’m gonna come. T-Tighter.”

How quickly he gives me what I need has my eyes rolling as pleasure ripples throughout my body.

“Come for me.” His hand tightens perfectly on the sides of my throat. “And say my name while you do it.”

I’m almost there, just a little more. The blood flow slows to my head, I’m so close,

and then...

“Killian.”

It feels so good my knees give out, but he keeps me upright, pinned to the wall by my throat until I finally stop.

His mouth crashes against mine in a bruising kiss, his teeth nipping my bottom lip until he draws blood and after he swipes it away he releases me fully. Slowly he backs away, water dripping down his face with his soaked clothes sticking to his toned body, and when he slips from the shower without another word, I nearly call after him.

I just told him what I fantasize about, wasn't he listening?

Yet he bends down to pick up my panties and disappears, leaving me sweating and panting and completely alone.

I deserved that. I know I did. I said no, teased him and goaded him. He just proved yet again that he's better than me. Better than most men.

And I've got no one to blame but myself.

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I'm not nearly as strong as I thought. Is it all women, I wonder, or just me? I thought I was above primal lust, that I was better than the animalistic men who fuck first and consider consequences later. But as I watch him instead of the movie he put on, I realize I'm wrong.

He's sitting there with his legs spread, popping kernels of caramel corn into his mouth like he doesn't have a care in the world and I'm simmering.

Simmering with lust, with irritation, with shame, with needs I didn't even realize I had. It's not just the sex that has me twisted. It's the way he held my hand, the way he snuggled up against me. How good it feels to have genuine human contact that isn't coming from someone with ill intentions.

How is he just sitting there like everything is fine?

When his eyes flick to mine, I catch a small smirk on his sinful lips before he eats some more. The fact that I know what he can do with that mouth is a crime. "Damn, that's crazy. Did you see what just happened? Aliens came out of nowhere, huh?"

What? A glance at the screen reveals nothing, so I nod. "Yeah, that was crazy."

Killian chuckles. "Want some of this? Come get some."

Moving close to him is dangerous. Even his attention, however fleeting or mocking, creates butterflies in my chest. He was so possessive when we went shopping, so gentle and vulnerable when we laid in bed and he told me his story. He's charismatic and charming, seductive and exacting.

I have a terrible feeling that this might be more than lust.

Yet like a moth to a very hot flame, I'm drawn forward, scooting across the couch until I'm close enough to grab a handful from the bowl in his lap.

"Did you like the aliens better or that blowjob scene?"

He's doing that thing where his voice deepens because he knows the effect it has on me, but I don't have a fucking clue what he's talking about. I haven't watched a single fucking second of this movie.

"Who said I had to pick?" I deflect. "Both were... good in their own ways."

"Yeah, especially because neither happened." He leans in closer. "So what were you watching, Roo?"

Fuck.

My eyes widen as my heart climbs into my throat. I should've just shut my mouth. "You," I admit. "I was watching you."

Setting the bowl aside, he turns slightly to see me better. "Were you thinking about our shower?"

Our shower. The one where he ruined me and then walked away like he hadn't done anything at all. "Sort of. I was thinking that you're stronger than me. That I'm an idiot, and that this is going to be a very long year."

"Mmhm." He licks his lips and leans in, his face nuzzling into my neck near my ear. "I'm so much stronger than you, Joey. You wouldn't stand a chance."

That wasn't what I meant, but god, if it doesn't do exactly what he wanted it to. "You're right," I whisper. "I don't."

His hand drops to my knee, slowly sliding up my thigh until he's squeezing it tightly. "Have you come since yesterday?"

No, I've been fucking paralyzed by the feelings I'm trying to fight. "I haven't. Am I ever going to get my panties back?"

"Which ones?" He grins like the deviant he is. "They're already in your basket. The smell has faded and I needed a new pair."

Never one to disappoint, I stand up and slide my shorts down, then my panties too. I toss them on his lap before dressing again and stealing the remote. "Your alien blowjobs are boring. My turn."

Big mistake. Killian brings them to his nose without hesitation, groaning when he inhales my scent and I watch his cock harden before my eyes.

The delicious bulge has my fingers twitching, but I don't move. Let him struggle for a change.

"Fuck," he growls, his cock springing free when he tugs his sweats down, and as he wraps a fist around it I can't look away. "Your turn to watch, pretty girl."

Well, shit.

I guess he's not the suffer in silence type.

"Do you even know how good you smell? I don't know what it is." He slides his hand up and down and twists around the head. "Never been like this before."

I shrug, fighting the urge to lean over and suck him in. “Sorry, I guess.”

“Don’t be. It’s amazing. Look at how much you make me leak.”

I don’t want to look. I don’t want to be tempted to throw myself at him, so when the satellite phone rings from the kitchen, I practically leap off the couch to go answer it.

“I understand why you ditched the phone and can’t text me these days, but you can call me too, you know? How’s it going? I miss you.”

I feel Killian stiffen all the way on the couch, but I wave him off.

“I just talked to you two days ago, Violet. Nothing has changed. I’m fine, and I miss you too.”

Slowly, I make my way back to the couch and sit down, a little further from him this time.

His hand isn’t moving anymore, but I can clearly see he’s still hard in his fist, and as Vi starts going on about the kids, Kill relaxes and starts moving again.

Don’t worry, Killer. She has no idea you’re here.

I tune her out a little on accident as I watch his hand, then pull myself out of it and turn slightly away from him. I should be focusing on my sister. “Is anything else new?” I ask. “Did you get that promotion?”

“Nope. They gave it to Billy instead, who’s surprised?” She sighs. “I should just quit. I got the job to get out of the house a few times a week, not to be even more stressed over promotions and bullshit. I should just take a vacation and come visit you.”

Killian moves to straddle my stomach and keep me pinned here, his fist moving faster as he stares down at the tattoo on my chest. When he reaches up to gently slide his rough palm along my throat, I nearly forget how to breathe.

“It’s boring here,” I rush out. “You’d hate it. And you know you’d miss your kids too much, and your man.”

“Those fuckers. It really sucks how much they drive me crazy, and yet I can’t even imagine spending a week without them. So anyway, it’s boring? No hot bears around?”

The way he bites his lip and twists his hand should be a sin, especially because he’s making me a liar.

It’s okay. I can fix it.

“No hot bears. Maybe a hot mountain lion or two, but no bears.”

Staring down, I watch the precum drip from his cock onto my shirt.

I couldn’t repeat what she says next if there was a gun to my head because my captor is jacking off on my chest like he’s nearing the edge. God, he comes so much. I’m practically salivating as I wait for it to happen, but when he grips my shirt and jerks down to tear the fabric, I gasp.

“What was that?”

Violet’s voice sounds far away as the cool air of the cabin hits my bare nipples. I really should hang up on her. “Nothing, I just stubbed my toe,” I mutter. “You were saying?”

My eyes meet his, those intense eyes that seem to stare into my soul and it only makes me wetter.

Killian's jaw drops when that first rope of cum juts out from his cock, and then suddenly he's stiffening above me and painting my skin. I can't think, I can't move, I can't breathe.

Violet's talking but all I hear are his quiet moans, my own heartbeat.

It's so fucking much.

It covers my tits and slides down my stomach, lower and lower until I'm sure it would reach my clit if I weren't wearing pants.

It awakens something in me I wish it didn't.

The sated aura that overtakes him is beautiful. His shining cock pulses where it lays between my tits and he makes no move to get off of me like we have all the time in the world.

"Joey? Are you listening to me?"

Killian reaches down to rub his cum over my chest, making my thighs clench.

"I'm here, Vi. Sorry, I'm watching a really fucked up movie. Can I call you back when it's over?"

"Yeah, for sure. Give me a call later. Actually call this time though. It can be tomorrow or later this week, I don't care. Just call so I know some dude isn't holding you hostage or something."

He is. And he's currently marking me his with his cum.

A nervous laugh escapes me. "Don't be ridiculous. I'll talk to you soon, I love you."

I hang up before she can respond, tossing the phone onto the other couch.

"See what you do to me?"

His cum-covered hand grips my throat as his mouth crashes to mine, unraveling me.

I need more of him. I don't care if it makes me no better than a man, no stronger than an animal. I need more.

I bite his tongue hard as I reach down to grip his messy cock. "I see what you did to me."

"You look good like this. Fucking art."

He ruts into my hand for more, so I let him go to get a little revenge of my own. Swiping up some of the mess on my fingers, I lift my pants up and hold his gaze as I rub my clit with his cum. It feels exactly how I thought it would, hot, wet, and sinful.

"Joey," he moans. "You already miss having my cum inside of you? Put more."

With him straddling me, I don't have much room, but I have enough. My vision goes hazy as I swipe a little more and suck it off my fingers, then run my hand through the mess before lifting my hips and fingering it inside myself.

I can see how pleased he is I'm playing along, and the growl he releases has me shivering. "So beautiful, and so dirty. My filthy girl wants me to take her ass, doesn't she?" His hand tightens around my throat. "Tell me how much you want me to make

a bigger mess of you.”

Licking my lips, I see an opportunity I can't pass up. “Do you remember the fantasy I had, Killian? In the shower?”

The way his cock jumps answers for him. “Of course I do. Don't move an inch.”

Standing, he strips off his clothes and then does the same to me, ripping my shirt the rest of the way without hesitation. He won't stop now, I know that. I don't want him to, either.

I just hope I don't end up regretting it.

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“And what if I say no?” I push, reaching out to stop his hand when he tries to grab me. “What if I say I don’t want you in my ass?”

Killian grips both of my wrists and pins them down, his face leaning in so close to mine I can feel the heat radiating off of him. “Did I say you can move yet?”

He was born for this. Maybe that makes me really fucking stupid, but right now, I can’t seem to bring myself to care. “No, Killian. You didn’t.”

“Then sit the fuck back, Joey. Be a good girl for me.”

Slowly, he backs away like he’s ready to pounce at any sudden movement, but he’s testing me. Clearly. My heart lodges somewhere in my throat as I carefully lean back, sinking against the couch cushions and nodding. I’ve been waiting my whole life for a man who could actually take charge and handle me. All of me. “I’ll be a good girl.”

Killian smiles before disappearing into my room, leaving me there to think about my life choices for a few excruciating moments. When he comes back he’s holding a towel, one of my vibrators, and lube, his cock fully hard again swinging in front of him. “The buttons on this one look a little more worn. Is this your favorite?”

My cheeks flush. “Yes. I really only have the others for when I kill the battery on that one.”

Setting it aside, Kill lays the towel down underneath my ass and kneels in front of me, then clicks the vibrator on as he spreads my legs wider.

I can't get over how gorgeous he is. His hair falls in his eyes as he gets settled, but nothing could hide his face, his broad shoulders, the tattoos covering his skin. And he's here, commanding me to sit back so he can do what he wants with my body.

The first touch of my vibe makes my legs twitch. No one's ever used it on me, certainly not like this.

His tongue slides along his lips as he watches me, a pleased noise leaving him at the sight. "Hold it for me, Roo. I have to get to work."

As soon as I grab it, he tugs me all the way to the edge of the couch and fingers some of his cum around the brim of my ass. "You're gonna be so full."

Oh, god. I can only imagine how that will feel — not just the size of his cock, but all that cum stuffed in such a tiny little hole. It makes me squirm.

"Am I? Have you thought about it?"

"Of course I have. Remember when you wore those small teal shorts?"

The tip of his finger pushes inside, sending heat through me.

"Yes."

"That's why I had to wash my comforter at midnight. I came so hard imagining myself take your ass against the kitchen counter."

I can work with that. Exhaling hard, I change the angle on my vibe just a little bit and let out a moan. "You won't," I mumble. "You wouldn't."

"No?" He tilts his head, his gaze locked with mine. "Is there a certain word you'd say

if you really didn't want me to?"

A safeword. I've never needed one before, no one was ever adventurous enough. "Yeah," I say with a light little laugh. "I'll yell FBI."

Killian tries to pretend that wasn't funny as he lubes up his fingers, but I see the amusement in his eyes. "You're hilarious."

One digit slides all the way inside of me, and as his own little form of punishment, a second soon follows. But I fucking love it. The stretch, the burn, knowing there's no part of me he doesn't want?

"So if I told you to stop, you'd..."

"Fuck you even harder."

I have to pull the vibe away just to stop myself from getting off too soon. I can handle multiple orgasms, but I know what's coming. I've been teasing him and denying him for too long. "I'll fight," I whisper, squeezing his fingers with the rim of my ass. "I never lose a fight."

It's an outright lie — I'm only here because I lost a fight, yet he raises an eyebrow at the challenge and spreads those fingers out enough to make me gasp. "You've never lost and you're up against a man that's done with losing. Where does that leave us, hmm?" Before I can think of a response his hand clamps over my mouth as he crowds my space. "It leaves you bending to me, and me taking what I need."

I might be the dumbest bitch in all of these United States, but I'm also gonna come harder than any of them. Moaning into his palm, I drop the vibe back where it belongs just long enough to send me over. With my eyes locked on his, I make an even bigger mess of myself, strangling his fingers in the process.

“Fuck,” he grunts, his fingers moving faster inside of me until he can’t take it anymore and he’s tugging them out and fumbling with the lube.

He’s about to wreck my ass with not nearly enough prep, but I want it. I might even need it.

It’s not like I won’t have time to recover.

Grinning, I use his temporary distraction to scramble off the couch and race toward the kitchen, my heart skipping a beat when I hear him jump to his feet and rush toward me.

When he pins my face down on the marble, raw, delicious fear licks its way up my spine, and I realize how right I was when I thought about how helpless I’d truly be against him. “Where do you think you’re going? Do you really think you can escape me?”

Nope. I was counting on the fact that I couldn’t.

“You can’t keep your eyes on me all the time,” I tease, squirming enough to make him spank me. It has wetness running down my thighs.

“You think I came all this way unprepared to tie someone up if I had to, Roo?”

Both hands are yanked behind my back, his palm pressing against my crossed wrists as he kicks my legs apart and lines himself up with my ass.

I haven’t felt adrenaline like this in years. The good kind, the kind that makes you feel alive, not like you’re about to die. My heartbeat slams against the countertop as I try to free my hands and can’t. Try to squirm and can’t. “Don’t,” I whisper, yet rock up onto my toes all the same. “Don’t do it.”

“I can’t hear you. Louder.”

Killian shoves the head of his cock inside my ass before I can do anything at all, dragging a strangled, half muffled scream from me instead.

But this... this is exactly what I was fantasizing about that day. Exactly what I’ve dreamed about since then. He’s perfect. “I said don’t!” I growl, clenching around him and rocking back. All it does is drive his cock deeper.

“Goddamn, woman.” He thrusts in deeper once... twice... “Yell at me again. Tell me no.”

He’s full on fucking my ass now, muttering on about how he wants me to push him away, and yet every thrust only brings us closer together.

I’m so full I can barely think straight. “Killian, I said no! Stop,” I pant, clawing his skin with my nails. “You can’t have me.”

The noise he releases as he pounds into me is primal, so brutal it’s borderline unhinged, shoving me closer and closer to another orgasm. The counter is digging into my hips painfully with his warm blood coating my fingertips, and he doesn’t seem to care at all about anything that isn’t owning me.

“You’re. Already. Mine.”

I feel it with every movement, every breath. He won’t let me say no again. I won’t try to say no again. Whatever happens, wherever this ends up... he’s right. He stole me and he’s not giving me back.

“Killian,” I whimper, no longer trying to fight to get away, but struggling to take it. He’s so big it feels like I’m splitting in half. “Too much. Too—”

“It’s not,” he grunts out. “You can take it, you know how I know?”

I can feel he’s getting closer to the edge, but I need him to say it first. “How?”

“Because my good girl is strong. She bends to me, but she will never break. Now whose girl are you, Joey? S-Say it.”

His hips jerk, his hips snapping against my ass impossibly harder, and I have one more little way of fucking with him.

I don’t say anything at all.

“Fuck, Josephine! Say it!”

When I keep my mouth shut he tugs me back just enough to reach around and pinch my clit angrily, but all it does is send a surprise orgasm shattering through my body.

“I’m yours!” I scream, letting out a half sob as I press my cheek hard against the counter. “I’m yours!”

“Mine.”

Killian breeds my ass with a guttural growl, his giant frame trapping me there so taking every drop is all I can do.

I feel every jerk and pulse of his cock, feel it bloating me and filling me up so much that I can’t believe he’s not getting kicked out.

And it just keeps going.

I’m boneless and trembling by the time he finally stops, breathless and sated. “Holy

shit,” I mumble. “You’ve been holding back.”

That makes him huff a laugh, showing me he’s just as breathless as me. “I was trying not to scare you more than I already have.”

“Well stop it. I’ve been waiting my whole adult life for someone to fuck me like that.”

For someone to prove they can hurt me, but choose to bring me pleasure instead. Someone who can let their demons out and still control them.

I’ve been waiting for him.

As a response, Kill pulls me up by my throat and leans around my shoulder to meet me in a searing kiss, his tongue swiping into my mouth in a way that feels like a promise. “I’ve been waiting for someone I could fuck like that too, Roo.”

He’s had all of me now, and I feel like everything has changed. I won’t be able to go back to saying no. I don’t think he’ll let me, anyway. So one way or another, this is happening — and I just have to hope it doesn’t ruin us both in the end.

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Killian takes two steps toward his own room before I stop him. “Where are you going?”

His eyes drop down to where my hand is gripping his, surprise flooding them a brief second before his fingers curl into mine and a soft smile finds home on his beautiful face. “You said you were tired. I thought that meant go away.” He tugs me into his chest and wraps his arms around me. “Was I wrong?”

Normally, no. Every night up until now, that’s exactly what it’s meant — but I’m a little strung out right now and being away from him sounds terrible. “You’re a man, of course you’re wrong,” I mumble. “Don’t make me sleep alone.”

Kill chuckles, leaning in to kiss me again, only this time it’s soft and void of tongue. “You don’t have to tell me twice.”

It almost feels too intimate, like we’ve been doing this for years. It’s just aftercare, I tell myself. I just need a little comfort after sex like that.

It’s just aftercare.

Keeping his fingers laced with mine, I tug him to my room and squirm until I’m comfortable, freezing entirely when he begins gently playing with my hair. “Have I told you how much I love the red?”

“You might’ve mentioned it.” Smiling into the pillow, I wiggle back a little closer to him. I can’t lie to myself, it feels good. “Have I told you I like your tattoos?”

“Once or twice.” He huffs a laugh. “Guess we need new compliments, huh? I love the way you scream my name while I’m fucking your ass.”

And I’m very very glad we don’t have neighbors. Just the memory of him splitting me open makes me shiver. “I can still feel you,” I whisper.

A pleased noise leaves his chest as he rolls his hips against my ass, showing me he’s already getting hard again. “Good. Get some sleep, Roo. You need your strength.”

“Oh?” I ask, almost breathless. “Why’s that? Do you plan on making me chop a few trees down tomorrow?”

Laughing, his hand snakes its way up to my throat the way it did the first time he slept here. “You’ll be dealing with a different kind of wood, but something like that. No chopping though.”

So he’s already planning on fucking me again. It makes my stomach swoop and my clit throb, near desperate for it right now. “Yeah? Which hole?”

“I’ll give your ass a rest, but the other two holes are mine.” He grinds against me again and tightens his grip. “Starting with that mouth.”

Need coils inside me, making me wet. “What if I don’t want a break?”

“Don’t move,” he orders, his hand sliding down inside my panties to my clit. “I’m going to make you come, and then you’re going to sleep like a good girl. You hear me?”

I don’t think I’ve ever been a good girl a day in my life, but if not here, if not now, when? “I hear you. But Killian... I want you everywhere one day soon. Promise me.”

“I promise, baby. One day soon I’ll breed every hole and cover you in my cum, but tonight, I want to make you come without you having to give me anything in return. I hear you.”

There’s no way he’s real. Maybe it’s Stockholm Syndrome setting in or maybe I’ve just lost my mind, but as I sink into the feeling of his fingers on my clit, I swear I’m in heaven. I’m not someone being held captive by a killer, I’m the luckiest girl on the West Coast.

And it doesn’t take long to give him what he wants. I feel his cock jerk against my ass with desire as I moan his name, and as he rubs me through it and kisses along my shoulder, I fight the urge to reach back and return the favor.

I’ll be a good girl like I promised. I think he earned it.

Breakfast is another intimate affair I wasn’t quite prepared for. Soft touches and warm smiles lead to hips bumping in the kitchen as we clean up. Finally, I turn to him with a smile I can’t quite hide. “What do you think you’re doing exactly?”

Killian raises an eyebrow at me playfully. “Staying close to what’s mine. What do you think you’re doing?”

Something about that makes my thighs clench and my brain turn to mush. I stand there, slackjawed, unable to say anything at all.

“Is physical touch not your thing? Because you’ve been giving off ‘touch me’ vibes and I’m just trying to accommodate,” he teases, snapping me out of it.

“It never used to be,” I admit. “But with you? Maybe.”

“Mmhm,” he hums, moving behind me to tug on my hair, and when my mouth opens to yell at him, he seals his lips to mine.

Butterflies explode in my chest, scaring the shit out of me, and they don’t dissipate until he finally lets me up to breathe.

I know my cheeks are flushed when I turn to face him again. “You’re trouble. You know that?”

“What gave it away? Surely not breaking in this place and making myself at home.”

“No, not that at all,” I deadpan.

Laughing, he slaps my ass hard enough to make me gasp and then turns away. “Want to work out with me? I’ve been slacking, and you feed me too good.”

I wrinkle my nose at him. “Unless that’s a euphemism, I’ll pass. I’ll gladly watch you, though.”

“Guess we had a good workout yesterday, huh?” He tosses me a wink and lays down on the ground, waving me over. “Come lay on my hands and I’ll bench press you.”

There’s no way. He’s strong, for sure, but I’m not exactly a pixie. There’s a difference between pinning me down and bench pressing me. “You want to embarrass yourself, huh?” I tease, walking over to call his bluff. “Weird, but okay.”

“You might be surprised. We’ll see if I embarrass myself or your pussy gets wet.”

He holds out his arms, and while I hesitate a moment, laying over them feels weirdly natural. “Like this?”

“Yeah. I know it’s difficult, but try not to squirm.”

The first time he lowers me, I squeal, but manage not to move a muscle. It still makes my stomach do somersaults and my heart skip a beat.

There’s no way he’ll lift me up as smoothly, yet I’m back in the air before I can exhale.

Holy shit, he’s strong. And more than that, he’s got control.

“That’s my good girl,” he says, his voice deep as hell and traveling straight to my pussy. I hate when men are right. “You’re exactly what I needed.”

I’m wet, flattered, and scared all at once. The constant ups and downs are enough to make me nauseous, yet I don’t want him to stop. “Am I? What’re the odds?”

“Yeah,” he grunts, doing one last rep he holds down longer than the last and then he sets me on his torso. “What are the odds you’d decide to crash my hideaway?”

Suddenly he’s tickling me, sending laughter and white hot rage slamming through me. I jerk hard, trying to roll off of him. “S-Stop!” I gasp, elbowing him in the gut as I attempt to move away. “F-Fuck you, stop it!”

Threats don’t sound legitimate when they’re made through peals of laughter, but I do mean it. People who say they like being tickled are fucking liars.

“Damn, girl. That actually hurt.”

He holds his side as he coughs out a laugh, giving me enough space to get free. Panting, I flip him off with a pretty little chipped French tip and a sarcastic smile. “I don’t advise tickling me. I know where you hide your gun.”

“You do?” Reaching out, he grips my ankle and tugs me in close, moving so he’s hovering over me. “Maybe I should tie you up then.”

I don’t know what my face is doing, but I sure know what my pussy is. That traitorous little slut gets so wet so fast I don’t know what to say. “You... huh?”

Biting his lip, Killian stares down at me like he’s reading my every thought. “So you’d like that too.” He leans in close enough to brush our lips together and takes a breath. “What am I going to do with you?”

“Tie me up, apparently,” I mumble, shocked a little at the things I’m learning about myself. “Just remember you asked for this. I tried to stay away.”

“I did,” he admits. “I was close to begging for it, so I think it’s safe to say I’m good with all that comes with you.”

“You just needed a place to put all that cum that wasn’t my laundry basket,” I laugh, reaching up to wrap my arms around him. “I can’t say I’m terribly upset by it.”

“I still can’t believe you were able to swallow all of it. You’re fucking amazing.”

His mouth crashes to mine, stealing any restraint I may have had. I need him, and I need him now.

It’s time for my kind of work out.

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Killian

Joey blows me right there on the floor so good I have a hard time getting up, but I could never deny the hungry look in her hazel eyes. This amazing woman wants me to tie her up, and I'm far too eager to oblige.

I've never been with someone who wanted to try new things like this, so although I know we're crossing lines we can't come back from, I'm not strong enough to stop it.

I want it.

She wants it.

We both might need it.

Finding rope in her dad's apocalypse bunker is easy enough, so once we're back upstairs in my room, I show her the knot I'm going to do before I lay her on her stomach and start tightening it. "You're trembling, beautiful."

"Can't imagine why," she huffs, but her shoulders relax. "I've never let anyone do this before."

Her words make me smile. It means this right here is only ours, and if I'm able to keep her locked away here with me, it will remain that way. "Just call for the FBI if you change your mind, Roo." This is only fun if we're both enjoying it, but even now I know she won't safeword. She was made for this. "I've never done it before either, but I learned this knot because I didn't know if someone innocent would be around

when I did what I did, so I had to research safe ways to restrain someone.” I don’t know why I just admitted all that, but maybe it’s because I want her to continue trusting me. “I’m glad I didn’t have to use it, but fuck me, girl. You look so good like this.”

I tug her to the end of the mattress so her lower half is hanging off, then drop down on my knees to worship her.

It starts with slow kisses over her thighs and her ass, stopping only when I see the ouija planchette on her right cheek. It makes me chuckle — she wasn’t kidding.

“What?” she asks, squirming under me. “What’s funny?”

“I thought you were joking about the tattoo.”

Leaning in, I bite it hard enough to make her jerk, but she just laughs. “I guess you were too busy fucking my ass to look at it, huh?”

Among other things. She’s so beautiful it’s hard to focus on the details, especially back when she was denying me.

Now that I’m here, I hone in on the feminine lines, the moth in the center with a cute little skull face, and the curved sixes at the top. The words “hello” and “goodbye” have me wondering how people actually use these, but I shake the distraction away and take that first swipe of my tongue along her whole center.

Fuck, she already feels like a drug.

Every moan she lets out spurs me on, reminds me this is right. She trusts me. She wants me. She knows my secret and she isn’t shying away.

And that reminder has me starving for her. Eating pussy from the back is different. I've never tried it before, but her ass is so nice I have the best fucking view as I feast on her delicious flavor and drown myself in her scent. It's an aphrodisiac that has my cock throbbing so hard with need that I have to reach down and squeeze myself for some relief. It doesn't help, but she tastes so good I don't know if I ever want to stop. I'd die right here with a smile on my face if I knew she was getting pleasure from it.

And with the mess she's making on my tongue, I'd say she is.

"Killian!" she moans, bouncing her ass just enough to ride my face. "Fuck me. Please."

God, I'm leaking for her. I'd give my left nut to sink inside of her right now, but the way she's riding my face tells me I'd blow the second I did... and that'd be embarrassing. "More," I growl. "You have more for me, Joey."

I spread her cheeks wider so I can suck her clit into my mouth, relishing the strangled little scream she lets out. Her whole lower body trembles as she squirms, but she lets go for me again, and again, and again.

It really is an addiction at this point.

"I can't," she gasps. "Killian, please!"

Poor girl is so much stronger than she realizes, but I'm not. I can't go another second without being inside of her so I scramble up into position and use the last of my resolve to catch my breath. "You're not done, but I want you strangling my cock for your next one. Tell me baby, are you sensitive yet?"

I push myself inside before she can respond, barely catching the broken "yes" she whispers just as I bottom out. Her fingers are curled into fists beneath the rope

keeping her tied up and at my mercy, and the way her deep red hair cascades down her back makes her look like a work of art.

My art.

“Fuck, Joey!” I reach up to grip her hair at the base and squeeze, my hips snapping harder and harder as I lose myself to my own pleasure for a while.

My entire world narrows down to this, to her and me and this ecstasy we bring each other.

I think I might die if she decides to pull away from me again. The thought of not being able to have her this way for even a day is turning me into an animal that can’t think about anything but fucking her. Owning her. “I could keep you like this if I wanted. Tied up and completely at my mercy.”

“Kill—what?” she gasps, but the way her pussy clenches and another orgasm steals her breath says it all.

I don’t think she’d hate me if I did.

She wants to be used like this, wants to be trapped and worshiped and fucked like a whore.

“Tell me I can have you whenever I want. Any time of day, I can bend you over and take what I need. Say it. Promise me.”

I tug her hair back and lean in to bite her neck, leaving a mark I’ll be able to look at for days. Her voice is wrecked as she screams my name... and then she says it. “I promise.”

Whether she means it or not, I let myself believe it. The promise has my balls tightening, but I refuse to be done.

“That’s my girl. My beautiful little captive.”

Releasing her hair, I slap down on her ass hard, gripping the rope for better leverage as I drive myself deeper. Every thrust has her squirming like she’s trying to get away, but I hold her steady until my name is falling from her lips like rain.

She’s mine whenever I want her, however I want her. If she says no, says stop or don’t or whatever else, I’ll tie her up again. She’s got a safeword.

It’s the only thing that can stop me now.

“You want more cum, Joey? Tell me where you want it.”

“Inside me,” she rushes out, digging her nails into her palms. “Fill my pussy up, baby. Come inside me.”

I probably should have waited to ask. Hearing her tell me she wants me to breed her immediately sends me over, my body tensing with that first pulse of cum, and when her cunt squeezes me in response, I can’t fight the groan that vibrates through my chest. My hands fly down to her hips and hold her still, making her take every single drop I have.

She whimpers as her belly bloats with it.

Fuck, I want to keep her like this all the time.

“Give me all of it,” she begs, eyes closed as she rocks back to milk me dry. “Every fucking drop.”

“It’s yours,” I manage to grunt out, my whole body twitching as that sated feeling flows through me.

I wasn’t a virgin before I met this woman, but I’ve also never fucked like this, which means I’ve never felt this level of relief. I didn’t even know what I was missing, all I knew was I walked away from every encounter with a hunger that never seemed to dissipate and now I can never go back to that.

Josephine Moran keeps me fed.

Reaching around her, I slide my hand along her stomach with a smile on my face, knowing it’s full of my cum. I press on it just until I feel the outline of the head of my cock, then hold there as she gasps.

Her whole body is trembling for me. “Who the hell are you?” she whispers, and all I can do is chuckle.

She was right though, when she told me sex would complicate things. She was right to be nervous. Because what started as casual and just to relieve a little tension has turned into an obsession I’m not sure I’ll ever be able to turn off.

“I’m Killian Rhys Blake from Blackridge, Idaho. I was born 33 years ago on May 4th, but if you ask my dick, we’ve never felt more alive. Who the hell are you?”

I kiss her shoulder three times before standing to begin untying her. She doesn’t answer me until she’s sitting up, letting me rub the tension from her wrists. “I’m Josephine Moran, no middle name. Born 30 years ago on October 3rd in San Francisco, California, and I think I’m just now figuring out what being alive really means.”

Thank fuck I’m not alone. Maybe she doesn’t think she can love, but that doesn’t

mean she isn't just as obsessed with me as I am with her. I'll take it.

Grinning, I lean in and kiss her deeply, loving the way she melts into it instead of shying away. Hell, maybe she wasn't lying about letting me use her whenever I want. All I know is that until she safewords out, I'm not gonna stop.

After a few minutes I manage to pull my lips from hers, my forehead pressed to hers as we catch our breath. "Let me take care of you now."

"Now?" she repeats, cupping my face with both hands to keep me close. "What have you been doing this whole time?"

"Learning what you need. Have I been doing alright?"

"I suppose." There's fear in her eyes as she nods. Not the visceral afraid-for-her-life kind of fear, but the quiet kind. The kind that suggests maybe she was wrong about some things, too. Maybe she can love, and maybe she's terrified that I'm proving it to her. "So what do I need, Killian Rhys Blake? What have you learned about me?"

"You aren't afraid to say what you want or need. You want orgasms without expectations, yet you struggle not to reciprocate. You know exactly how beautiful you are, yet blush when you're complimented. You're a strong, independent woman that wants a man to fold her like a fucking lawn chair and take away all the heaviness of the world. And after he's done you need him — me — to show you a tenderness we don't have to discuss. You need me to wash your body, comb your hair, and slide my hands along your skin until you fall asleep in my arms. And I'm about to do all of that."

Her eyelids flutter, fading into a surprised blink. "I struggle not to reciprocate because there's something irresistible about a hard cock when it's attached to a man who actually sees me. I get more pleasure from pleasing a guy like that than I do a

hundred orgasms from a guy who doesn't."

"Sounds like both of us want the other to feel good as much as possible. How will we ever survive it, hmm?"

I pick her up and carry her over to the bathroom, my thumb slipping inside of her pussy so I can feel my cum in there, and possession twists in my gut.

No one's ever taken it like her. Begged for it like her. Wanted more like her. And the way she dances kisses across my neck?

Yeah, I'm fucking done for. There's no question as to whether or not she's going to make me fall for her.

I just have to make sure I don't fall alone.

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I'm not falling for him. I'm not. But something about the way he fucked me over the hood of my car, wouldn't let me come, then put me on my knees to swallow his load, helped me up, wiped my bottom lip, and whispered, "Alright, we can go now" definitely made something flutter.

I could barely concentrate as we shopped, and the drive home involved a lot of thigh clenching and teeth gritting.

Gods, he makes me violently horny.

But I'm also being punished for coming last night when he was trying to edge me. I refused to apologize for it, and then might've gotten a little bit of an attitude this morning. I'm not a morning person. He knows this. God and the devil know this. And what was I supposed to do? We were out of coffee.

So here we are. A full day where I'm not allowed to come and he can still do whatever he likes to me.

I'd probably be even grumpier if I didn't love it so much.

It, not him, let's get that straight.

When he parks the car in the drive, I don't move. I sit there with crossed arms and a pouty lip, still tasting him on my tongue.

Killian sits back in his seat to watch me, reaching out to flick my bottom lip with an amused expression. "You're pouting, Roo."

“I’ve had zero caffeine and less orgasms today. It’s raining, I think I’m about to start my period, and you laughed at me for wanting to buy a stuffed skunk. I’m not having a good day, I can pout if I want to.”

When he chuckles at me, I have a vivid vision of me poking him in the eyes for it. “Yes, you can pout if you want to, and most of those reasons are valid. But skunks are just overgrown farting rats. You really wanted him?”

“Stuffed animals don’t fart, but you sure do. I still put up with you, don’t I?”

“Mmhm and you definitely don’t fart at all.” He reaches over to squeeze my nose, then grabs my chin when I try to pull away. “Give me those eyes.” I flick my gaze up to his without hesitation and see pure satisfaction. “Be grouchy all you need, okay? But while you’re at it, let’s go try those chocolate cake cookies we just got the ingredients for, and then I’ll play with your hair. Think you can do that for me?”

I’m not sure I deserve him.

Deflating, I nod, tipping my face to kiss his palm. “Yes, Killian. I can do that.”

He lets me go and helps me get the groceries inside through the pouring rain, then peppers kisses all over my face until I have to laugh. It’s hard to be mad at him, even when I think he deserves it.

Once we’re dry and everything is put away, I grab the recipe for the cookies and stare at it. “I don’t like baking. I’ve told you that, right? I’m not saying it to be argumentative, more of a formal heads up that there might be some cussing involved.”

“I know, but you promised you’d bake me a cake when we first met, so I know you can do it. We’ll learn together since we’re craving cookies instead.”

“I did say that, didn’t I? A nice chocolatey reward for murder.” Sighing, I preheat the oven and grab a mixing bowl. “Alright, big boy. Let’s see what you’ve got.”

“Big boy,” he mutters, smacking my ass as he sets out the cocoa powder and sugars. We mix the ingredients in silence right up until I’m cracking my second egg, so he catches me off guard when he decides to open a conversation. “Are you on birth control or anything?”

“You’re asking that now?” I laugh. “Bit late, don’t you think? You’ve put enough cum inside of me to father a football team.”

Killian bites his lip. “About that. I was told my condition could lead to uh... low sperm count. Quantity doesn’t always equal quality, so I always assumed I’d probably struggle to have kids. You mentioned your period and it made me think about that, and then I realized I really dropped the ball on that question. Guess it is a little late, huh?”

Suddenly, I’m not laughing anymore. That’s heavy. “I’m sorry. I’ve got an IUD so I’m solid for birth control. It hasn’t failed me yet.”

“Don’t be sorry. It’s not for sure or anything, but I figured it was worth mentioning. Do you get periods every month with that thing or are they more spaced out?”

“Mine have been pretty regular. I do miss some, but the only real difference is I don’t bleed those months. I still feel all the other ridiculous side effects.” Reaching up, I dab a little bit of flour on his nose. “Being a girl is a good time.”

“Sounds like it.” He grabs my hand with a chuckle and leans in to bite my jaw. “I’m really glad you are one though.”

“Mhm, I bet,” I tease, turning away from him before he can turn me on again. “Let’s

finish these.”

I ignore the flirty smile on his face as he brings over the bowl with the dry ingredients because I know he knows the effect he has on me. “Can’t wait to taste.”

The cookies or me?

I don’t have the guts to say it out loud. There’s zero chance I make it through without an orgasm if his tongue goes anywhere near my pussy, so I refuse to give him the idea. Not today. “I’m sure the cookies will be delicious.”

Once the batter is mixed, Killian brings over the cookie tray and we fill it up quickly. We make a good team, even with this.

We only made enough dough for two trays, so once they’re filled and in the oven, he interlocks his fingers with mine and tugs me over to the couch. “What’s your favorite movie?”

“People pick just one?” I ask, leaning back against the counter. “I like a lot of movies but I don’t think I could ever choose a favorite.”

“Alright, fair point. Then which of your favorites is your grouchy ass in the mood for now?”

He braces his hands on each side of me and cages me in, making my heart stutter. “A Knight’s Tale,” I mumble. “That sounds good.”

“You got it. Are you comfortable or would you rather change?”

Yeah, I’m not sure I deserve him.

Kissing him softly, I whisper that I do want to change, then move a little too quickly around him to get to the bathroom.

I felt it. The fucking telltale sign that I'm bleeding — the most heinous and uncomfortable of all feelings, brought about by demons. Normally I'm a prepper. But after four normal periods in a row, I thought for sure this would be the one I skipped.

Fucker must've fucked me so hard he kickstarted it.

Grumbling to myself, I take a super quick body shower with his soap, dry off, put a tampon in, and walk naked into his room to grab a t-shirt and a pair of his boxers. Since this is obviously his fault, he can deal with it.

When I come back out, he has the cookies we baked and some water resting on the coffee table. He's sitting there with his legs wide, and a soft smile that tells me he's happy to see me in his clothes. "Comfy, baby?"

He pats the couch cushion next to him, drawing me in. The pet names should scare me. The intimacy should scare me. These aren't things you do with someone you're casually fucking, and they're damn sure not things you do with your kidnapper. But as I curl up into a ball next to him with my head in his lap, I find I don't care.

I'll take the comfort where I can get it, no matter how many strings might be attached. "Did you try one of the cookies?"

"No, I was waiting for you. This is a big moment for us," he says teasingly, reaching over to get one so he can feed it to me. "Are you cramping?"

"A little, but mine always get worse at night."

We both take a bite and moan at how delicious and soft the cookies are, and after we

demolish two each, we make ourselves comfortable and his hand slides down my stomach to apply pressure exactly where I need it. “So did it start? Is that why you showered?”

I nod, licking a little bit of melted chocolate off my lips. “Yep. It was also a handy excuse to use your soap.”

Killian chuckles, his free hand sliding through my hair. “Well you look good in my clothes, so you can steal those whenever you want. Only fair since I steal your panties so often.”

“Mmhm. I’m running out of clean ones at this point, do I need to come get them back?”

“You might have to fight me for that lace pair from yesterday, but the rest you can wash.”

He put one of my favorite movies on for me and I can’t seem to focus on anything but his hands. They feel so good against my skin, so warm and comforting. Who needs a heating pad when you’re living with an overheated giant? “Mmhm,” I hum. “Keep ‘em all. It’s fine.”

“Nah, I can’t because then you’ll stop wearing them and sometimes I just breathe them in for comfort.” His fingers freeze against my scalp. “Let’s pretend I didn’t say that out loud.”

“Sorry, I can’t. No take backs.”

His movement begins again, and when I peek up at his expression, I find him smiling at the screen. “So I take it you don’t smell my boxers for comfort?”

“No, that’s not really a thing for us,” I laugh. “Armpits, yes. Boxers no.”

“So armpits are better than balls? What about after I chop wood?”

“Armpits on a hygienic man are infinitely better than balls on any man. When you chop wood, your natural scent mixes with your deodorant and makes me want to hump you.”

His gaze flicks down to mine and he bites his lip. “You’re welcome to do that whenever you want.”

“I would right now, but I’m grounded.” Raising an eyebrow, I tip my head back to look at him better. “I’m also on my period so I guess I couldn’t either way.”

“If you think that would scare me away, guess again.” He raises his eyebrow right back at me and then smirks. “Don’t worry, I’ll make you come before bed because I just read orgasms help cramps.”

Satisfied, I hum and snuggle a little closer to him. “Good. Now hush, you’re ruining all of Wat’s jokes.”

“Okay, I’ll hush.”

I keep my eyes on the screen even after his hand moves away, but when he brings it back my vision is blocked completely when he sets something soft on my face. The faint scent of chemicals makes me nervous for half a second until I reach up and feel a long, fluffy tail.

Bolting up, I pull it back and look directly into the eyes of the stuffed skunk we saw earlier. “What? You didn’t leave, how did you get him?”

“I got him when we were there, I just hid him in the basket. I was saving him for when Flow decided to visit so I could make you smile.”

I guess she didn’t wait long.

And here, I thought he was making fun of me for being a grown woman wanting a stuffed animal. Really, he just wanted to find a way to make me happy.

My chest tightens as I spin around and climb into his lap — not to kiss him or seduce him, just to hug him. “Thank you.”

He only hesitates for a second in surprise before his arms wrap around me tightly. “You’re welcome. He’s not sleeping in our bed though.”

“Bold of you to assume I won’t throw you out of the entire house before I sleep without him,” I whisper, entirely serious. “Tell him you’re sorry.”

“I’d like to know exactly how your tiny ass plans on doing that, but I think I know better than to fuck with a woman this time of month. Something tells me you’d find a way.” He nuzzles into my neck and sighs. “Okay sorry, Skunky or whatever your name is.”

“His name is Gus.”

“Gus,” he repeats. “Just glad it’s not Killian Jr.”

“Good idea,” I tease, picking him up again and snuggling him to my chest as I settle back down in Killian’s lap. “But I can’t moan the name of a skunk ten times a day. Gus will do.”

“You do moan it a lot, huh?”

“I’ll do it again if you go back to playing with my hair... and stop interrupting Wat.”

“Which one is Wat?”

His hands return to their previous places as he turns his attention back on the screen, making me laugh. We’re too far into this movie for him to not know. “The redhead with anger issues.”

“Sounds familiar, huh, Gus?” he whispers, but it doesn’t bother me.

“What can I say? We’re pretty awesome.”

The way he plays with my hair lulls me back to a contented silence as we watch.

I thought by now I’d be losing my mind trapped here, but as my eyes start to close on their own... I realize this is the most at peace I’ve ever been.

I hope it lasts.

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Peace never lasts.

I shouldn't be surprised, yet the adrenaline rush of pure fear that overtakes me as the power goes out sends my heartbeat into overdrive.

The last time this happened, it was Ryan's fault. He cut the power so I wouldn't be able to see, to defend myself.

Now it's happening again.

"He's here," I whisper, shaking Killian awake. "Killian, please."

The abrupt movement has him jumping awake and immediately ready for a fight. "Who happened?"

Thunder crashes so loudly, it makes me flinch. "Ry—" I force myself to take a breath. Thunderstorms cause power outages every day, and Ryan doesn't know where I'm at. He can't. It doesn't stop me from shaking. "It's probably nothing."

"Hey," Kill whispers, his hands touching my face softly. "You're alright, Roo. Stay right here, okay? I'll go check it out and make sure."

My stomach twists with fear as I hear something out in the kitchen. "Your gun," I whisper. "It's too far away."

"I'll bring it in here for you. It can stay on your side." He kisses my forehead. "I won't let anyone hurt you."

Lightning illuminates the room a second before thunder shakes the cabin, and suddenly I don't want him to leave. If Ryan takes him from me, I don't know what I'll do.

I swear I hear the floorboard just outside the door creak, and I'm not the only one.

Killian darts over to the door quickly and yanks it open, his fist raised and poised to attack. But there's nothing there. "We have a gun," he yells. "And a killer behind the trigger. Fucking test me."

A killer on each end, but only one of them has followed through.

I scramble out of bed, refusing to die laying down. If he's here and Killian doesn't get him first, I'm going out on my feet.

And then I get an idea.

I snatch my long, black vibrator from the bedside table and rush over to give it to him.

He takes it without question and steps forward, then glances down at it in confusion. "Do I shove it up his ass or what?"

The fact that he's trying to joke right now makes me want to slap him, but I get it.

"It's dark," I whisper. "It'll look like a gun until you can get to your own."

Nodding, he holds it like he's a trained assassin and steps out into the short hallway.

He reaches back to tuck me behind him, ensuring I take each step in his shadow with his giant body as my shield, but it's clear pretty quickly there's no one here. All the

windows are shut, the doors are closed.

I still don't say anything until the real gun is safely in Killian's hands and I'm holding my vibrator like an asshole.

"It must've just been the storm," I say quietly. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be." He sets the gun on the table and cradles my face. "It's better to be safe than dead. What made you think it was him?"

Insanity, apparently. Breathing, I take a second to ground myself and clear my throat. "When he showed up at my house to kill me, he cut the power first. I thought I was fine. I did. I don't even think about him most days now, but when the power went out... I was right back in that house praying the cops showed up before he got in."

"Well good thing no cops showed up, huh?" He nods down at my vibe. "They would have been fucked."

It's such a terrible joke I can't do anything but stare at him.

He laughs for the both of us, then carries me off to bed. "Where should we keep the gun? You pick."

"Next to you. You'll aim better."

It's also closer to the door, so if he has to get to it quickly from a different room it'll be easier. I just have to trust him.

"Okay. If you change your mind just let me know."

It's almost laughable how quickly I became okay with the thought of my captor

having a gun. But Killian isn't like Ryan. He didn't kill for pride or because he was disrespected. He did it because he understood nothing would ever change until they truly started paying for their crimes.

A man like that wouldn't hurt me. He's had too many opportunities for me to think otherwise.

"I won't change my mind — except maybe that we need a few more."

Killian nods. "Your dad doesn't have a shotgun or something? I looked when I first got here but figured it was probably hidden."

"I don't know. I think there's a safe down in the bunker but I never bothered asking what's inside of it." Curious, I glance over toward the trapdoor that leads down there. "We could check. I know what the code is."

"Wanna go now? Going to be hard to go back to sleep, but we'll need a couple flashlights... and you need pants. It'll be cold."

I also need a few shots of the strongest alcohol we've got, but that can wait. This is a distraction, a welcome one, one I desperately need right now. "There are some in the junk drawer in the kitchen. I'll grab them."

One's a standard flashlight and one's a headlamp, so I let him choose when I get back.

After he forces me into some sweats, he takes the handheld one and leaves me the headlamp, grinning once I've got in on. "You look like an adorable miner... wait, that sounded wrong. A person who goes down into mines, not a minor."

"Mmhm, sure," I tease. "That's what you meant."

I click it on and feel a little better now that I can properly see, but it's nothing compared to how safe I feel once we're down in the bunker. My father always told me that nothing could touch me here — not the bad people outside, the monsters under my bed, the weather. He said a bomb could drop on Windwinter and we'd still be okay. If a bomb doesn't stand a chance, neither will Ryan.

"I forgot I stashed extra clothes down here." Killian tosses a duffle bag near the stairs and joins me near the safe. "What do you think is in here?"

"I don't know. He always just told us we'd know when to open it." Stepping forward, I eyeball the tall, wide tan cabinet and reach for the lock. "The code is the day my parents met. He said he knew immediately that he'd spend the rest of his life with her and build a family, so that was also the day he realized he'd do whatever he could to keep her safe."

The door pops open and I nearly shut it again when I see what's inside.

There are four long guns I don't know enough about to identify, three more handguns, and a foam pad filled with grenades.

Fucking grenades.

"Boom," I whisper, stepping back so he can see. "I think we're covered."

"Fucking hell," Killian whispers. "Daddy's ready for the zombie apocalypse."

He reaches out to touch the biggest one, sending a rush of something I wasn't quite expecting through me.

This man didn't hesitate to go make sure we were safe. He didn't stutter when protecting me. And though our situation is complicated, what I feel right now isn't

complicated at all.

“Take it. It’s okay.”

He gives me a look that says “are you sure?” before picking it up and grabbing a box of shells to take up with us. “We can keep one in the bathroom, living room and mine in the bedroom. Sound good?”

I grab one of the little handguns for myself and nod, then hesitate, offering it to him. “I... wait. This is okay, right? Me having one? I’d be able to get to the others same as you, but...”

“Why not? You’re not going to shoot me. You’d miss me too much.” He tosses me a grin and grabs more bullets. “Have you ever shot one before?”

My sense of self-preservation is dying to ask him if that means I’m free to leave. If he knows I won’t hurt him, surely he realizes that extends to not turning him in. It’s not that I want to leave, but knowing I have the option would be nice. “I know the basics. We can’t exactly practice because we’d draw too much attention to ourselves, but hopefully I’ll never need to use it anyway.”

“I think we’re far enough off grid, but hopefully you don’t. Just point and pull the trigger. You got this.”

He nudges my chin playfully, drawing me in closer until my headlamp bumps against his chest. Laughing, I pull back just enough to see his face. “Come on. I think the storm is over so maybe I’ll finally get some rest.”

And if not, it just so happens that I have a very tall, very strong man around who can find a few ways to put me to sleep.

I'm almost looking forward to it.

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I've always been a cautiously curious person. I'm nosey, but I know better than to ask questions about things I may not want answers to. I also acknowledge the fact that when I probe a little too much, people probe back. Usually that's a dealbreaker for me.

But as I watch him flip mindlessly through tv channels trying to find something worth watching, I have to admit to myself that I have questions.

What was he like as a child? Was his hair always this dark, this unruly? What prompted his tattoos? What's the story with his dad? Why doesn't he have friends? What did he do for a living before this, and was he happy?

A thousand more flood my mind until one finally tumbles out of my mouth. "What's your happiest memory?"

His finger freezes on the remote as his gaze flicks to mine. "Like ever?"

He turns the tv off completely and leans so his body faces me better, giving me a little more confidence.

"Yeah, I guess. I just... what makes you happy?"

He glances down at his hands for a moment before smiling softly. "When I was ten my mom took me on our first vacation. We were broke as hell but we drove up the pacific coast highway and visited a bunch of beaches. Slept in the car and survived on gas station food. It wasn't perfect, but it was probably my first memory of her smiling. At the end of it she told me I wouldn't ever see my dad again, and I could

tell she was so fucking nervous, but I've never felt more relieved. We pulled up a map and chose to start over again in Blackridge."

Curiosity is a rabbit hole. I can picture it, him as a little boy, just happy to be along for the ride. In awe of how big the world is. But am I ready to know what sort of horrible things would make a ten year old boy relieved to never see his dad again? "She sounds like a great mom."

"She was. What about your parents? You guys close?"

He pats the spot closest to him like he wants me closer during this conversation, like that doesn't make it worse. Like it doesn't make us both more vulnerable.

But like a moth to a flame, I move next to him anyway. "We weren't when I was younger, but now that I'm older, things are different. I love my parents and I know they'd do anything for me."

"I'm glad things are different now. Were you and your sister always close?"

I sit next to him and lean back against his chest, watching his fingers as they ghost slowly on mine, grounding me.

"Yep. Always. I don't know what I'd do without her," I admit. "I haven't always had a lot of friends. Have... you?"

"Yes and no," he admits with a sigh. "In high school I had a lot of friends, but they weren't anything real. Outside of girls and sports, we didn't even really have things in common or things to talk about, so we'd just drink and stick to those two topics. Even then it was boring for me, but I didn't realize I needed more from people until I was in my twenties. Most of them had faded away by that point, but I had one dude I considered my best friend until my mom died. I get it, I wasn't fun to be around, but

he went off on me one night when he thought I was black-out drunk and we were both surprised I remembered every word he said to me. There wasn't really any going back from that, and I wasn't in a good headspace to care. I just ditched my phone and never talked to anyone again. That was less than a year ago, but I still feel the same. I don't have it in me to care. I don't know what that says about me."

That's heavy. I never really had best friends to lose, so I can't say I understand how that feels, but I can guess. "I don't think it says anything about you. People can be selfish to a catastrophic degree, and when everyone around you disappoints you, it can be hard to care." That much, I do understand. "I'm sorry that this world has been so cruel to you."

"The world is cruel to a lot of people, Roo. Most have it worse than me, but I appreciate you saying that all the same. I thought I was done with humans as a whole, but you proved me wrong. I'm not done with them all, I'm just done with the ones that aren't willing to meet me halfway. So was Ryan your only ex? I can't remember if I ever asked that."

Chuckling, I shake my head. "No, but he was the best and the worst all at once. The rest... just faded."

His fingers freeze. "The best?"

Is that jealousy, Killian?

"Of my ex -boyfriends, yes," I say firmly. "He was the only one who convinced me marriage wasn't a terrible idea, anyway."

He's quiet a moment before his hand resumes its gentle caress. "Maybe I shot the wrong person."

Despite the butterflies that gives me, he's wrong. "You shot the right person. Ryan isn't worth either one of us spending the rest of our lives in prison. His life isn't even worth the cost of the bullet."

His body relaxes a little further. "Would be nice if he no longer existed, but you're probably right. It'd still be nice if I got to kick his ass one day for what he did."

Leaning closer, I kiss his cheek. "He hurt me in ways I never thought I'd recover from, but here I am, recovering."

The smile that takes over his face is mesmerizing. "Yeah... me too. My ex turned me off from dating altogether, but the more time that passes with us here shows me it doesn't have to be so... hot and cold."

And this is why curiosity is dangerous. We're not dating. Hell, I'm technically still his prisoner, and here he is talking like we met at a bar. "What were you scared of when you were little?"

Humming, he contemplates that response for a moment before chuckling. "When I was a kid, I was scared of cats. My mom and I got one once we got settled, but before we moved to Idaho I thought they were evil because there was one that used to sit outside my window and stare inside at night."

"Maybe he just wanted a friend."

"Yeah, I learned that. I thought he was there to eat my eyeballs because that's what my dad said, but one night I shared my dinner with it. I don't actually know if it was a girl or a boy cat so I just named it Catty. Our family cat later was Pikachu because I honestly thought that damn Pokémon was a cat for hella long, but after I realized he was a mouse I felt stupid as hell. Oh, I was also scared of grasshoppers," he says with a laugh. "They're fucking creepy. What about you?"

“Grasshoppers?” It takes me a second to recover from that, but when I do, I don’t know what to tell him. “I was scared of everything. Violet was always the brave one, not me. I was scared of animals, shadows, fire, water, anything that could kill me, gross me out, or hurt me. She used to get so mad at me for it.”

“That’s honestly cute as hell.” He’s laughing at me, but I can tell he means it. “How about your favorite memory? I shared mine.”

That’s a tough one for me. I’ve been very lucky, very privileged in my life up until recently. I’ve had a lot of good memories. “Probably when my niece was born. Violet was a hellion during birth, but seeing the joy on her face when she held her baby girl for the first time... knowing I had someone in this world to protect and love? It changed me. It felt like the world got a lot bigger and smaller all at once, but it suddenly had meaning.”

“That’s beautiful. I wish I could know how it feels to be an uncle one day. Do you want kids?”

“I did, once.” It’s harder to look at him now, but I do it anyway. “But Ryan didn’t want kids, and now... I’m older, and life is complicated. I’m not sure anymore. What about you?”

“I used to think no because I didn’t want to be a dad like mine, but now I don’t know. The fact that I would leave nothing behind in the world crossed my mind when I thought I might be caught and shot by police, and I guess I didn’t like that. Is that a dumb reason? It feels dumb. The world is fucked up, why bring someone into this just because you want to create a human that will always be a piece of you?”

It’s a good question, one I’ve thought about myself. “Why do humans do anything? To leave the world better than we found it. For some people, that means searching for cures to diseases or trying to save the planet. For others, it’s space exploration,

creating better infrastructure, becoming a teacher. You chose to strike down an evil man, and some people choose to have children in hopes that one day, they'll be the ones changing the world. I don't think it's selfish at all. I think it's survival. We want to be remembered."

He nods his head for a few seconds, staring straight ahead like he's lost in thought. "So if my nightmares come true, do you promise to remember me?"

Fuck. I didn't expect this conversation to make me cry, but my eyes fill with tears anyway. No one should ever have to ask that question. I'd like to tell him it won't happen, that he'll be fine. That isn't what he needs to hear right now. "Yes, Killian Rhys Blake. I'll remember you. And I'll make sure the world knows why."

He squeezes me a little tighter after that, but immediately tries to lighten the mood. "Sweet. Let them know I was a good father to Gus."

I will, but something tells me his story isn't over yet. No one knows it was him, and once the story fades from the headlines, he'll be free to go have an army of children to remember him by.

And if not... I'll make the world remember.

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 2:04 am

Killian

I definitely wasn't inexperienced when I met Joey. I won't claim to be, but not one person before her made me feel like this — made me crave them in any capacity. I wouldn't say I didn't feel anything, but it was never how I expected it to feel. I thought I'd meet a girl and get butterflies, slowly fall for them as I learned more about their personality, and instead it was always the opposite. The more time we spent together the less I cared, and I had begun wondering if there was something wrong with me. Was I capable of the emotions portrayed in songs? Or was I... defective?

I find now that I was always able to feel what should be felt when you begin dating someone, I just wasn't with the right woman.

I'm also learning that finding the one for you doesn't automatically make you the one for them. I want to be, but after what she's been through and what I've done to her, I don't know I can ever deserve it.

She's offered me her body and nothing more, but each and every time I slide inside of her, I feel myself take a little more of her. The wall she built up between us is thinning, cracking and crumbling brick by brick with each shared kiss, and I honestly don't know if either of us can fight it at this point. I can't fight anything when it comes to her.

Even now she consumes me as she sleeps.

Each deep breath she takes draws me in more, her beautiful, relaxed expression in the

moonlight making me crave her so much I don't think I can wait until the morning to have her.

It's become a delicious routine to make her come every night before bed without expecting anything in return, and usually it makes me feral for her when the sun rises, but the hunger I feel tonight is different. It's probably because she told me she was ovulating earlier, but I swear I can physically feel her body sending mine signals.

It's a good thing she's on birth control, because even without my condition, I feel like I'd truly breed her without any thought of consequence. Who even am I anymore?

I'm hanging on by a thread, my hands twitching desperately as I hold myself back from touching, but when she rolls an inch to the side and lets out the tiniest moan I've ever heard, that thread snaps.

I don't need to wake her. I can just take what I need without bothering her at all, right? She's made it clear I can have her whenever I want to, so that applies to times she's unconscious... right?

Fuck it.

She can yell at me tomorrow.

Her brows wrinkle slightly at my first touch, her breathing losing rhythm for a brief moment before she's falling right back to sleep. She seems to feel safe and secure here with me, like she's allowed to sleep so peacefully because I'm not a monster to fear in her story.

And she should.

I'd never do anything to hurt her at this point and she knows it, but that doesn't mean

I won't use her body like a sex doll and fill her up with my cum her without permission.

Deep down, I know she'll love it.

She's been sleeping naked the last week and letting me clean her up after those orgasms so she doesn't have to get out of bed. It's been torture, but right now I've never been more thankful. I can still smell her arousal, still feel it as my fingers slide along her center, and when I touch her clit and make her hum I have to pause again.

I don't want her awake yet. I don't want her to wake up until I'm balls deep inside of her, so I find the last bit of patience I have and slowly maneuver myself between her legs. Gently, I slide her legs up one by one, bending them so there's enough room for me. My cock is aching by the time I have her right where I need her.

"Fuck, baby. You turn me into an animal," I whisper, stroking myself once... twice... three times before ghosting the head over her wet pussy. "An animal addicted to the scent of you, to the sounds you make as you fall apart for me, and the way your cunt squeezes every drop out of my balls."

I inch my way inside, my jaw dropping as she naturally clenches around my crown. It feels so good I forget she's sleeping and push in further a little faster than I intended, eliciting a whimper from her parted lips. "You feel me, Roo? Feel me taking advantage of your vulnerable body?" I'm still whispering, but it's coming out much more growly than I meant it to. "Yeah, you feel me. You just know taking it is all you can do."

With my next thrust I bottom out, grunting in satisfaction when I immediately give in and begin truly fucking her. I smile down at her when her eyes fly open in shock, my hand flying up to cover her mouth even though we both know she isn't going to tell me to stop. "Be a good girl and listen to me closely. The only word I want leaving

your beautiful lips is my name.” There’s one word she could say to end all of it, but that goes without saying. “You’re sleeping, and my name is the only word you know. Understand?”

She nods with a whimper, her pupils expanding further in the dark before her eyes close altogether.

Fuck, her pussy is strangling me.

There’s nothing but pure devotion on her face as she surrenders to me, nothing about her changing as I lower my hand away. “There’s my girl. Your body was begging for this.”

I snap my hips hard, watching her tits bounce and her breath hitch as she whispers my name.

“Killian.”

It sounds like a plea, like a prayer.

One I need to hear more of, so I sit up a little more and reach down to pinch her clit. “Say it again.”

Her eyes flutter, but don’t quite open. “Killian.”

God, that might be my favorite sound. It’s one thing that’s solely for me and me alone, holding all the promises we’re too scared to freely give, and I don’t know how I went so long without it.

“Make me feel like a fucking fiend, woman. Fuck!”

I lose all sense of everything that isn't her in this moment, dropping down again so I can leave claiming marks on her throat as I wreck her pussy like it's the last time I'll ever have her.

She breaks just enough that her fingernails dig into my back and her legs wrap around my ass. She's definitely not asleep anymore, or even faking it, but it's still only my name dripping from her lips.

The way her body molds into mine is indescribable. Better than anything I've ever felt before, and when she comes from this alone, I feel my resolve snap further.

I'm fucking her so hard now the bed slams into the wall, creaking under us like the frame itself is about to give out. Good. Let it. Let her scream while it happens.

Gripping the headboard with one hand, I lose myself to the chase, to the fact that this gorgeous woman is mine whenever and however I want her. The power she gives me spurs me on until I hear it — the first splinters of wood cracking.

I don't stop. Just like our sanity, it can fall apart and stay that way, because if this is how it feels to lose yourself in someone else, I never want to be found. "Never want to fucking stop."

I nearly slip out of her when it finally cracks and we tumble to the ground, but her grip on me is strong. The way she screams my name in exhilaration has my cock pulsing and desperate for release, and when she clamps down on me I'm a goner. The growl I release as I come is borderline animalistic, as is the desperation to ensure every single drop of my cum stays inside her beautiful body.

"Oh my god," she whispers finally, after our breathing settles and reality sets in again. "You broke the bed."

“I think that was a collective effort,” I respond with a sated smile.

It’s past two AM and now we have to figure out where we’re going to sleep for the rest of the night, but surprisingly she doesn’t seem annoyed with me.

I guess that means I did my job well.

But as we settle into my bed and she curls against my chest, she throws me a curveball. “Do you think you’ll get sick of this?”

“I mean eventually we’ll run out of beds to break,” I joke, regretting it instantly, because for the first time she’s allowing me to get a glimpse inside of her mind while she’s feeling raw, and it isn’t a time for me to cheapen it. “No,” I try again. “I don’t think I will. You?”

“I don’t know,” she says honestly. “It’s good. Great, really. But we keep one-upping ourselves with the sex. We went from fighting it and teasing each other to fucking like rabbits, then escalated to you using me like a doll. Even that... it started with you just taking me on the couch or while I was cooking, now when I’m asleep. It seems to keep getting better and... kinkier, but what happens when you can’t top yourself again? When the novelty wears off and it’s not exciting anymore?”

Shit.

I’ve been so focused on how good everything feels and how nothing has ever compared that I didn’t even think about the fact that she might get bored after a while. What happens when she’s over it... over me?

We’re already to the point where I trust her implicitly with my secrets, but that doesn’t mean she will want to stay here forever. We’re hiding from reality, frozen in time, and one day she will want to move forward again. I have no one, and she has

her whole family to return to. It's impossible to keep her distracted with good sex forever. "I... don't know." I know it isn't enough, but what else is there to say? "Will you do me a favor? If that day comes, will you tell me?"

"Huh?" She sits up a little, long hair falling over her shoulder. "Of course I will, but I'm not the one I'm worried about."

I bite back the argument that I responded with the fact that I don't think I'll get sick of this and she's the one that said she doesn't know, and take a deep breath. She isn't trying to argue with me like her fears are the only ones that matter, so I can't take it that way. She's just expressing her thoughts, and she has every right to. "Then I promise to tell you too. But like I said, I don't see that happening. Even when we do have what others would consider vanilla sex, I'm far from bored, Roo. I just lose control sometimes. I can't get enough of you."

She nods, glancing down at my lips. "Okay. Thank you."

"Did it ever feel like this for you? With... other... people?"

The question alone has jealousy licking its way along my skin to the point that I'm clinging to her tighter, but I have to know. I just wish there was a way to ask without my damn brain picturing another man's hands on her.

"Do you think I've ever asked another man if he thought he'd get bored of me?"

I don't, but is that because she didn't fear it or because she didn't care? "No."

"Then that should answer your question, but I'll do it anyway. No, it's never felt like this. Not even close."

"I feel the same," I admit. "I honestly didn't think I was capable of wanting someone

this much this often. And it's not even just the sex, Joey. I just like being with you and hearing your voice."

She settles back down against my chest, silent for so long, I think she's fallen asleep. "I told you this would get complicated."

She did.

Too bad I don't care. Even if I fall flat on my face in a prison cell in the end, this time with her is worth it. I'll take complicated after the months of emptiness that came before her. I finally don't feel alone.

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 2:04 am

I let him too far under my skin and I know it. I feel it every time he touches me, every time he looks at me. But how can I tell him to back off just a little when he's looking at me like he's dying?

"You're fine," I tease gently. "It's probably just a head cold."

"It's not just in my head though," he grumbles, his voice cracking and deep. "My chest hurts, Roo."

He rubs at it dramatically and coughs, like a sick, dying little Victorian child.

It's kind of cute.

"I'm sorry. We didn't think to get anything but Advil." Scooting closer, I loop his legs over my lap. "Do you want me to go get you something?"

"Don't leave me to die alone," he croaks, reaching out for my hand and dropping it like the last of his energy is gone. "Is this my karma for breaking your bed?"

It's been over a week and he's asked me that at least once a day. When his eggs didn't turn out right, when he realized it was pouring rain, when he stubbed his toe on the coffee table. Each time, I roll my eyes a little more. "Yes. The other ones weren't but this one is."

Like those times, he smiles proudly. I think he just likes bringing it up. "Fuck." He coughs again, his smile gone instantly. "Where'd I even get this? We hardly go anywhere."

“You went outside even though it was raining. The Washington air said no.” Rubbing his leg, I smile gently at him. “What can I do?”

“I like what you’re doing now.” His eyes flutter closed after a snuffle. “Also a blow job.”

“And what if I don’t want your germs?” I laugh. “You can keep those. Who will take care of you if I get sick too?”

“Does that mean no kisses either?” Especially those, but the way he pouts has me hesitating before outright denying him. This man has killed before, and yet he’s laying here like a giant baby. “This is hell.”

No, Hell is taking care of someone with man flu, but at least it’s amusing. “Just motivation for you to get better faster. I know you don’t want to be left alone, but you’re gonna need cough medicine if you’re ever going to sleep again.”

“I know.” He sighs. “I can’t go with you.”

This will be a first, and I know how monumental that is. Leaning over, I kiss his lips softly. “I’m not gonna run, Killer. Do you trust me?”

He nods without hesitation, reaching out to pull me in so I’m laying on his chest. “But I can’t protect you.”

“I know this is hard to believe since I walked right into a kidnapping situation after almost getting shot by my ex, but I’m actually okay,” I tease. “My resting bitch face usually keeps people away from me.”

“You’re so beautiful with all your faces,” he croaks. “I’d still hit on you.”

“Because you’re ridiculous,” I remind him. “But let me up so I can get back before dark. I hate this driveway at night.”

I hate everything at night, but I blame that on my past. I’m not exactly friends with the dark anymore.

“Take a gun. Just leave it in the glove compartment unless you need it, but I’ll feel better.”

He holds me a second longer before he releases his grip, but I learn quickly he only does that because of another coughing fit — this one worse than the last.

Okay, maybe this is a little more than a man flu.

“I’ll be back as soon as I can,” I promise, getting up to get my purse and the handgun I took from the safe before stepping toward the door. Glancing back, I see Killian staring at me with a frown that feels like he isn’t sure if he’ll ever see me again. “I’ll miss you.”

This is him letting me go, in his own way. Accepting that once I start my car and leave, I may never come back. He’s trusting me — to come back, not to call the cops if I do leave — and I’m not sure I deserve it. What have I done, really, but keep him at arm’s length?

“I’ll miss you too.”

It feels like the only truth I can give him as I walk out the door and close it behind me. This is freedom like I haven’t known it in months. It seems so silly, so inconsequential. I’m just running to the store as so many people do without thinking. Yet every step I take, every mile I drive reminds me that I have an option now when I didn’t before.

But do I really?

Ryan is still out there. The police still don't believe he's a danger to me. The cabin here in Windwinter is arguably the only place I'll ever truly be safe from him, even if there is a fugitive lying on the couch. Yet returning to the cabin means putting my life back in Killian's hands, a man who kidnapped me. A man who is currently the subject of a massive nationwide manhunt. A man who proved already that justice is more important to him than his own life.

Rock, meet hard place.

My mind seems to be somewhere else as I walk around the store throwing random things into the cart. It'll be moot if I decide not to go back, so I'm only half paying attention until it's time to check out.

I still haven't made up my mind, but standing here like an idiot isn't helping anyone. Deciding to just pay for the stuff and decide once I get to the end of the driveway, I finally look at what I actually picked up.

A heating pad, three different types of medicine, six cans of soup, immune support gummies, and I apparently went a little overboard in the candy aisle. I remember him saying he likes Hershey's Hugs, orange slices and peach rings, I just don't know what I was thinking with the marshmallow peanuts. I've only ever had them at the circus, but maybe that's fitting. My life is a bit of a circus right now.

Once she rings up all of that plus the Gatorade, thermometer, tissues, and barbecue chips, I load it all into my car and go right back to staring at my steering wheel. He'll love it all, I know that. He'll be grateful and attentive and doting the moment he's feeling better, and adorable until then.

But nothing will change. We'll still be in the same complicated situation. I'll go right

back to being a prisoner, wondering how long we can go on like this before the feds close in on him or my parents return from overseas. It's better to just leave now. I could drop off his care package and drive away again, maybe go to my sister's or start over somewhere new.

The pang of regret in my chest makes me pause.

Could I do that, really? Leave and never see him again? I'd miss him, even I have to admit that. I'd never see his eyes again, the cut of his jaw, the sprawling tattoos. The way his hair falls in his eyes or his shoulders shake when he laughs. I'd never see his mischievous smile or the devotion on his face when he has me right where he wants me.

I'd also never open up to anyone again. Being vulnerable with him has been hard, but I knew from the first time we had sex that if we weren't completely honest with each other, things would go south fast. So no matter how uncomfortable or embarrassing it was, I was honest about my feelings and what I needed.

And he listened.

I went from dreading spending time with him to loving every second. To being more at peace on the couch with him than I ever have been with anyone else. I care about his opinions, his interests, and he cares about mine.

Can I really walk away from that? From him?

Yes, I can. I know I can. But how long will it take before I regret it?

About thirty-seven seconds.

Grumbling to myself, I make the three-mile trek down the driveway and park my car,

knowing damned well I'm not leaving him, this cabin, or whatever fucked up future we may have in store for us. It doesn't matter. The end result is inconsequential in the face of the things I could experience along the way. All love ends in heartbreak or death, there's no secret third option. No one's story has a happy ending when the final chips fall.

So maybe I should just... fall.

My stomach is in nervous knots as I carry the bags to the door and make my way inside.

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 2:05 am

Killian

Joey's the best nurse I've ever had.

When I wake up to her checking my temperature, I swear my heart flutters at the sight of her. She came back. Somehow I knew she would. I know she feels what I feel, so I refuse to let my insecurities get the best of me here. I figured if she left I'd have to mend my heart, and if she turned me in I'd have to do the same... just in jail. But she told me she'd come back and I believed her.

And here she is.

Another cough rattles through my chest when she's done, a frown creasing her beautiful face as she shows me my 101.4 fever and removes the blankets.

Immediately I begin to shiver, my boxers not nearly enough to keep me warm, and when I notice I've been clutching her damn skunk to my chest, I find myself glad for the fever. At least she won't notice my blush.

"Can you stand up? You need to eat."

I mean to say no because I feel like I'm dying, but all that comes out is a pathetic groan. I really need to get it together or she'll never sleep with me again. I'll be a man baby in her mind forever.

Shivering, I drag myself out of bed and find the strength to stand. "I dunno if I can eat. My throat hurts."

“That’s why women invented soup,” she mumbles, smiling at me as she helps me toward the table. “You’ll be back in bed before you know it.”

Looking at all the things she got me has my chest hurting for an entirely different reason. This woman has to be the most amazing woman on the planet and somehow I was lucky enough to stumble across her in the most unconventional way imaginable. I’ve always believed in fate, but I never imagined it was on my side until now. “Thank you. Damn, Joey... you got all this for me.”

It takes everything not to pull her in and kiss her, especially when she wiggles in her seat with a smug smile. “I’m good at what I do.”

It only makes me like her more. “But you’ll still sing and dance horribly with me, right?”

“Is there any other way to do it?”

Her little smirk has me almost forgetting how sick I am. “No, there isn’t.” I want nothing more than to crazy dance with her without a care in the world, but unfortunately I think I’d faint. I can hardly breathe as is. “One day.”

“One day. In the meantime, you need rest... and a shower,” she laughs. “I’ll help you.”

I pick up the bowl and start drinking the broth, then force myself to eat some of the chicken and noodles. I’m not hungry, but I feel myself get a little more strength as I eat so I force as much of it down as I can. “You’ll help me in the shower?”

“Of course. We can’t exactly waltz you into a hospital if you fall and crack your head open, and I can see how unsteady you are.” She reaches over to squeeze my hand. “It’s okay to let someone else take care of you for once.”

I'm gonna need you to take care of my heart while you're at it, because by now it's left me entirely and is making its way to you. Unrequited.

I should protect myself, but I'm not strong enough to fight it. She's everything I didn't know I needed. "Okay. Thank you, Roo."

True to her word, she helps me shower when I'm done eating, then maneuvers me into sweatpants and a light tshirt before giving me medicine and laying me down with a heating pad and Gatorade next to the bed.

I feel more clingy than usual, so the second she stands up straighter, I reach out for her. "Don't go."

"Relax," she says softly. "I was going to grab the remote."

"Okay. Permission granted," I joke, but when she comes back from grabbing it, I can tell something is on her mind. Something more than my little man flu.

"What's wrong?" I hate the way my voice cracks with certain words, but I have to admit, it feels really good to be taken care of. "Talk to me. Pretend I'm not sick and needy and talk to me, baby."

She bites the inside of her cheek, stalling. "I want to tell Violet about you, but I understand why I can't. I just wish I could, that's all."

Oh.

Shit, I should have seen this coming. Of course she wants to tell her sister about me, and aside from the obvious reasons why I shouldn't be on board with this, I find myself actually considering it.

Her wanting to tell Violet is a good thing. If she didn't feel as off balance as I do she wouldn't care at all, but the fact that it's bothering her means she's falling too, even if she's a few feet behind. I can work with this.

“What do you think she'd say?”

“Knowing Vi? She'd cuss me out for having all the fun,” she admits. “We actually talked about you before you and I even met. We saw the manhunt on the news the night before I left San Francisco. She's a fan.”

A fan. She's shown me a few more things the last week, and I still don't know how to feel about it. My actions weren't as noble as people are making them seem, they were selfish. I wanted him to die and I killed him, making it hard to accept the praise I'm getting.

“So what would you say? The truth?”

“I'd like to. I've thought about it a lot and the truth would have to come out eventually, unless we go our separate ways at the end of the year. Is that your plan?”

“No.” There isn't even a hint of doubt in my voice, and I hope she hears it. “I don't plan on going anywhere, so if she can handle the truth, then tell her. I trust you.”

She leans in and kisses my lips softly. “Are you sure? I'll be gossiping about you.”

“All good things, right? Are you going to tell her about how I make your toes curl?”

Or will she tell her how I was so clueless I had to Google periods to be helpful during that time of the month?

“Among other things.” Cryptic little minx. “I just hate lying to her.”

“I’m sorry you’ve had to. I’ve trusted you for a while... I should have shown you before now.”

Reaching out, I slide my hand through her hair and hold back another cough. “You should get some rest. I’ll at least wait to tell her until you’re feeling better.”

I hum a response because it’s all I got. My body is exhausted just from taking a shower, and I feel so warm, comfortable and safe I don’t have it in me to stay awake anymore. I’ll let Joey take the reins for now.

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 2:05 am

The moment Killian pulls out of the driveway, I call my sister with knots in my stomach. I know she's working and I hate to bother her, but something tells me she'll want to hear this.

"You're terrible at calling me when you say you will," she says when she answers. "Is Windwinter in another dimension?"

Immediately, the tension in my shoulders loosens. This is my sister we're talking about, she'll be fine. It'll be fine. "It feels like that sometimes. I'm actually calling to spill some serious tea, so I need you to take a lunch break and go somewhere private."

"This is the call I've been needing." She sounds way too excited for someone who doesn't have a clue why I'm calling, and as I hear her lie to her boss about her husband needing to tell her about their kid's doctor's appointment, I relax a little further. "I'm going to my car, but you can get the tea flowing. What's his name? How big is his dick?"

Leave it to Violet to see right through me. "His name is Killian, and he's big enough that my organs know he's there," I laugh. "You're not gonna believe how I met him though. Do you have any guesses?"

"Uhh... you... saved him from being attacked by a bear? No, wait, that was my baby Emmett. This isn't Twilight. Oh, your car broke down and — bitch, just tell me. Is he hot? His name is hot."

Butterflies erupt in my stomach. "He's insanely hot. But Vi, before I tell you

anything else, I need you to promise me that this stays between us. You can't say a word, not even to Greg or mom or dad or anyone. Promise me."

"Before I agree, tell me one thing. Are you safe?"

Her big sister voice tells me that's her only true concern, and nothing else will really phase her.

"I'm safer now than I've ever been in my life."

Her breath of relief is so loud, I pull the phone from my ear. "Okay. I promise I won't say a word about your big-dicked man toy. Spill."

"Well..." My heart beats louder, harder. "This cabin wasn't empty when I got here. It was already occupied by a certain large, handsome fugitive who has been all over the news for weeks."

"What?!" she shrieks, then lowers her voice to a whisper. "Wait, fugitive on the news? The guy who killed that piece of shit politician?"

"Yes. I swear I would've told you sooner but I wanted to wait until I was sure I was no longer his prisoner anymore," I mutter. "And I'm not, so here we are. He's a thousand times hotter than the fan arts have guessed. I can't even describe it."

"Prisoner? Oh my god, this is why you've been so flaky? But if you were his prisoner, why were you able to talk to me at all? I mean you could have said snarglefuck at any moment and I'd have had the police out there so fast."

The fact that I completely forgot the safe word we created as children tells me I never really felt like I was in true danger here.

“It was touchy at first, but he’s not a bad man. He wasn’t planning on me being here, it just happened, and he had to react in the moment. I don’t think he would’ve truly stopped me if I tried to leave.”

“I know he’s not a bad man. He could have killed hella people on that street and chose to only kill the one that deserved it. He left potential witnesses alive, and that told me exactly the kind of man he is. I feel a little guilty now, I’ve been having wet dreams about your boyfriend, Joey. Half of the country has.”

“Don’t feel guilty. If you knew what he actually looks like, you’d cream sitting still. It’s almost not fair. He pointed a gun at me when we first met and I couldn’t see anything past his tattoos and bulge,” I admit, laying back on the couch and closing my eyes. “He’s a giver.”

“Shut up, I’m already in love.” Vi sighs. “Don’t shut up. Tell me more. Describe every detail. Which way does it curve?”

Her joking around is her way of telling me everything is okay, that she supports me and would take this to the grave if I asked her to, so I don’t hold anything back. The good, the bad, the confusing, I tell her all of it until my voice is hoarse and I’m afraid I’ve kept her well over a normal lunch break. “So, that’s it. I don’t know what’ll happen now, but I chose to come back and I don’t regret it.”

“Damn. How does a fugitive sound like a better boyfriend than all your others? Whatever, I’m happy for you because you sound happy and that is always what matters to me. I talked to mom and dad about it the other day, and they feel the same way we do about the shooter. I know you aren’t rushing to tell them of course, but if the day comes, I know they will support you too. Plus, we know he’ll protect you from that asshole if he ever had to.”

“Hence why I said I’m safer now than I’ve ever been. Killian won’t let anything

happen to me, I just have to hope he doesn't get fucking arrested. Either way, I'll have to tell mom and dad eventually because unless the coverage dies down, we'll never be able to leave this cabin."

She groans. "I want to meet him, but I get it. The news said they have a suspect in mind, but they aren't releasing his name due to lack of evidence. Hopefully they have it wrong."

Well, it didn't take long for the nerves to come back. "He's out there by himself right now, Vi."

"Where did he go?"

"I don't know. He said he needed to run some errands and he thought it would be a good time for me to call you, so I didn't go with him. Fuck, I can't do this forever." The tightness in my chest proves it. "How in the hell did I get here?"

Flashes of him pinned down getting handcuffed take over until I'm spiraling, but my sister manages to pull me back from the ledge. "Everything will be okay, he probably just..."

Whatever she's saying fades away as I hear my car pulling back in the drive. "He's back," I rush out, bolting off the couch to meet him at the door. I would've been worried no matter what, but something about Violet knowing makes it seem more real. This is my life now. He is my life now.

"Thank fuck. Don't let him go out alone anymore, you'll have a heart attack."

When I open the door for him, I see two filled bags in his hands before he's spinning around to hide them. "Don't look, woman. I have a surprise, but you have to go to the room for a bit."

“Oof, he even sounds hot,” she says, but she doesn’t know the half of it. She hasn’t heard him when he gets all growly and commanding, or when his voice is wrecked from sleep.

“What if I don’t want to?” I push. “I’m having a nice little conversation and I like it out here. Also, welcome back. I’m glad you didn’t get arrested.”

“Is that your sister still? Hi, Violet. Can you tell your sister to be a good girl for me or she won’t get her surprise?”

“Hi, Killer. I won’t tell her what to do, that’s your job.”

He can’t hear her, so he raises his eyebrows at me when I laugh.

“She said you’re gonna have to make me, but that won’t be necessary. I am a good girl and I like surprises.” Leaning up, I kiss him softly and make my way to the room, but curiosity gets the better of me. I try to sneak a peek.

“There’s a belt in here. Keep testing me, Roo.”

His voice is teasing, and so is my sister’s when she interrupts my response. “I think you’re going to get a spanking, and I’m going to be jealous.”

“I gotta go, Violet. I’m definitely not done pushing buttons, but I’ll send you a pic if he’ll let me and I’ll call you tomorrow. I promise.”

“You better, I want to know what this surprise is. Good luck. And I meant what I said, okay? I’m happy for you. I’ll always support you and be on your side.”

Smiling softly, I take a second to breathe. “I know. Thank you. I love you. Talk soon.”

Hanging up, I toss the satellite phone on the bed and cross my arms. “This is as far as I go.”

Killian takes up the door frame to block my view. “How did it go? You’re smiling.”

So is he, making me melt just a little. “She said she knew you were a good man because you could’ve hurt a lot of people that day and you took steps to make sure you didn’t. She also said she feels guilty because she’s been having wet dreams about the masked version of you all over the television, she’s jealous because you’re so amazing, and that she’s happy to hear me sound happy.”

He closes the distance between us and crashes his mouth into mine, lifting me up to straddle his waist. “I missed you. Do you feel better after telling her?”

He presses his forehead against mine like he didn’t just wake up an extremely horny beast, but I let him go for now. “Yes. Thank you for trusting us.”

“I trust you ,” he admits. “Only you. Now promise me you’ll be a good girl and not spoil my surprise. I’m going to set up a little more, but I think I should ask beforehand. Will you go on a date with me? In the kitchen.”

Is that what all this has been about? A date?

My stomach flips violently, startling me. We’ve had sex more times than I can count, I’ve told him my secrets and he’s told me his, yet this is the thing that makes me nervous? “Yes, Killian. I’ll go on a date with you in our kitchen.”

His smile is blinding. “Good. I know I can’t take you out the traditional way, but I got some stuff up my sleeve to make up for it. Plus, I’ll put out after.”

“Put out?” I gasp. “It’s only our first date. What kind of girl do you take me for?”

Chuckling, he sets me down and nudges my chin playfully with his forefinger. “I saw you checking me out, girl. It can be our little secret.”

He tosses me a wink before backing away, and for once, I don’t try to push it. I close my bedroom door and collapse back on my bed, grinning up at the ceiling.

I’ve got a date with a fugitive.

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Even when Killian lets me out of the room, he covers my eyes until we're in the kitchen. It's worth the wait. He's thrown a table cloth over the old faded wood, decorated with four black LED candles of all different heights, a cauldron in the center filled with ice and bottles of liquor, and the whole house smells amazing from whatever he's got in the oven.

I don't know what I expected, but it wasn't this.

"Killian, it's..." Perfect? Amazing? More than any man has ever done for me before?
"I love it."

"Yeah?" He sounds adorably excited about my response. "Awesome. It's not Halloween, so I didn't have as many options as I was hoping, but I did my best. You said you came here to be a bog witch, and instead you had to take care of my sick ass last week, so I wanted to make up for it. Chicken parm is in the oven, but for now I thought we could make some potions. You'll make mine and I'll make yours."

To be seen is to be loved.

Is that what this is?

Spinning, I meet his eyes and can't say anything at all for several heartbeats. "Thank you," I say quietly. "You..."

Words escape me, so I rock up on my toes to kiss him instead before turning back to the potions.

This will probably be hilarious.

Killian steps up to press his body against my back, his face dipping down so he can kiss along my neck slowly. “You’re welcome.”

His whisper travels down my spine and has me nearly demanding we skip to the end of the date where he puts out, but he steps away before I can. “Alright, so I wasn’t sure which alcohol was your favorite but I have more mixers in the fridge if your recipe calls for something you don’t see here. I wrote out a few recipes on these cards so mix them up and pick one without peeking and don’t tell me what it is until after. You’re welcome to tweak whatever you want to, I figured the recipes are just a good starting point for us since we’re brand new witches.”

“We?” I raise an eyebrow, chuckling as I grab the cards to mix them. “Mmhm. We.”

“If you’re a witch, I’m a witch,” he responds with a smirk. “And no, that isn’t at all a quote I took from The Notebook and made better. Don’t know what you mean.”

That’s exactly what he did, but I’d take Killian over Noah every day of the week. “I meant that only one of us is brand new and it’s not me,” I laugh, pulling a card and hiding it as I hold the rest out to him. “Pick your poison.”

“That’s fair, but if my potion comes out better, you’re going to be very embarrassed,” he teases, biting his lip as he slides his fingers along the cards before tugging one out.

The grin he has when he glances down at it should scare me, but I’m too happy to give a shit.

Glancing down, I see the “potion” I picked is called Black Widow, consisting of tequila, lime juice, agave, and blackberry juice. I’m amazed he put so much thought into these even if he probably got them off the internet.

Each time I glance up, I find myself staring at him. The way his hair falls over his forehead, the short stubble he's grown along his strong jaw, and the flirty smile he tosses me that could bring any woman to their knees. I still can't comprehend how someone like him ended up all alone in the world.

He's giving his potion more attention to detail than my fiancé ever gave anything involving me, and I'm having a little bit of a hard time with it.

Experience tells me not to trust this, but if I can't trust my eyes, my ears, the butterflies in my chest or my beating heart, what can I trust?

He's different. Killian's different. And even if it turns out that he's not... it still feels like the ride will be worth it.

When my drink is done, I wait for him to finish, watching him as he pours the red concoction into a sugar-rimmed glass. "Done. What you got for me over there?"

He nods down at mine and meets my gaze, making me blush.

What the hell is he doing to me?

Handing it over, I mumble, "It's called a Black Widow. I hope tequila treats you better than it treats me. What's mine?"

"Wait, you don't like tequila?" He looks worried as he gingerly hands his concoction over. "It's called Witch's Blood, and I tweaked it a little, but it has tequila too. I added the sugar because you were so sweet for me when I was sick."

Fucker. Grinning, I take it and bring it up to my lips, commenting, "I love tequila. It just makes me want to fuck," before taking a swig big enough that it puffs out my cheeks.

It's probably one of the best drinks I've ever had.

He stands there watching me as I lick my lips, then raises his eyebrow at me to drink some more before he lifts his glass to taste mine. When he does, he sniffs it first like he's judging it, then takes a sip with his pinky out, his lips smacking a few times before he drinks some more. "What kind of berry is this?"

He hums and takes an even bigger drink of it, making me grin.

"Blackberry. I don't want to know what's in mine, you're officially in charge of making them forever. I—"

The oven dings, interrupting him before his next sip. "Alright. I'll make you another one in a bit, but sit down so I can serve you like the gentleman I am."

He slaps my ass as he passes me, yet again making me want to skip dinner and get to dessert, but the food smells so good I sit down anyway.

The candles set a quiet kind of ambiance as I wait for him, still baffled by all the effort he put into this date.

When he returns, he sets a plate in front of me that smells so good my stomach rumbles. The chicken parmesan is coupled with some angel hair noodles and broccoli, and when he sits down to join me he looks more nervous than I've seen him in a while. "I don't know much about pasta, so I'm sorry those are from a box, but the chicken is my mom's recipe. If you hate it maybe just... pretend you don't for me?"

He chuckles to let me know he's joking, but if it tastes even half as good as it smells, it won't be a problem.

The first bite proves it, and I don't stop to touch the pasta until half my chicken is

gone. “This is amazing. Seriously.”

“So are you,” he says, eyes locked on me so intensely I blush. “What’s your love language, Joey?”

“I don’t know much about love languages, but I think mine is whatever this is,” I admit quietly.

“I don’t know much about it either, but I want to know you. All of you. If it’s acts of service, I’ll be sure to do stuff like this for you whenever possible, and if it’s quality time I’m definitely not going anywhere. I know I can’t offer you much beyond what we have here...”

He trails off and looks down at his plate like he’s choosing his next words carefully, but I think I know what he’s trying to get at.

I just don’t know if I’m ready.

“What about physical touch?” I tease. “You’re pretty good at that too.”

“That’s my specialty.” He’s smiling again, but I can see there’s still something on his mind. “It’s also my love language if you couldn’t tell.”

Yeah, that’s been pretty obvious. His mood plummets when he isn’t close to me, touching me, or holding me. I’m nervous for a whole new reason as I finish eating and down the rest of my drink, but I’m clearly not the only one — Killian is fidgety and almost buzzing as he stands up to take our plates to the sink.

“I’ll make more drinks. Can you pick some music for us?”

Nodding, I grab my laptop and go for a quiet, romantic playlist. If he went through all

this trouble for me, the least I can do is play along. He earned it.

It takes him a while to come back over, but it gives me an opportunity to watch him make our drinks and notice how much clumsier he is now. He was so self-assured the first time we made our potions, and when he walks back over with just one glass of pink liquid, I realize he was trying something new. “Try this one and then dance with me.”

“What’s in it?” I ask, taking a sip anyway before he can answer. It’s sweeter than the last one, raspberry flavored with a familiar bite. It’s definitely vodka. “I like this one.”

“Yeah? It’s a love potion.” He smiles widely, setting it aside to pull me in so his hands are resting on my lower back. “I like you. A lot.”

Fuck. My stomach flips as I reach up to wrap my arms around his neck. “Really? You’re good at hiding it,” I tease. “So good.”

“That’s crazy because I never once tried to hide it,” he admits. “You were right about some things, but I think I was too.” Don’t say what things you mean, Killian. Not right now. “I know we haven’t been tested much out there in the real world, but I feel like that will come in time. You told your sister about me, so I think that’s a step in the right direction. Why not make this official? Be my girlfriend, Joey. Be mine.”

He lifts my gaze to meet his, his thumb sliding along my jaw as he waits for my answer, and every stupid fear I’ve ever had crawls back into my throat and paralyzes me.

We were doing so well. I’m feeling way more than I ever thought I would, but it’s because there was no pressure. No expectations. I was just allowed to feel, to act, to touch, to be touched.

But there are always strings.

Dropping my gaze to his lips to avoid his eyes, I curl my fingers against the back of his neck. “If I let you off the hook that easy, you won’t have a reason to chase me anymore.”

The relief I feel when he chuckles has me melting into his chest as he takes the lead in our dance. “Too soon then, huh? Alright, bet. I’ll keep this energy until you believe it, Roo. As long as we can keep doing this in the meantime I won’t rush us.”

I’m letting Ryan win. I can feel it. This man in front of me is fighting for his life trying to respect me and love me and all I’m doing is letting that dickhead hold me back. I can admit that, even if it’s just to myself. But being self-aware doesn’t always mean I’m capable of changing. Burying my face in his neck, I whisper, “I’m falling for you, Killian. I am. I just... need to do it on my terms.”

His grip tightens around me. “Take all the time you need, baby. I’m not going anywhere.”

Literally and figuratively, it seems... but I’ll take it. He’s not pushing, not upset. It’s strange being near a man who doesn’t get angry with me for having feelings he doesn’t agree with.

God, it turns me on.

Kissing his neck, I bite his skin gently and then a little harder. I don’t want to wait anymore.

His body responds to me immediately, fingers curling into my skin as he bares his neck for more with a groan. “Keep doing that and I’m going to have to tie you up again, woman.”

“Oh, no,” I whisper sarcastically. “What a terrible thing that would be.”

Humming, he lifts me up by my thighs, navigating his way up the stairs to a room I didn’t know he stepped foot in. “Good thing I thought ahead.”

When he lays me down on the bed, I see more candles spread about the room and restraints already tied to each corner of the bed frame.

Denying him clearly hasn’t slowed him down.

With my bottom lip between my teeth, I spread my legs and reach down to rub my pussy over my clothes. “How long have you been planning this, Killer?”

Those blue eyes lock on my hand a second longer before they flick up to meet mine. “Remember when we went on that walk and I picked you a flower?”

“I do. It’s currently drying in the cellar.”

“Well, I’ve been planning this date since then.”

Killian climbs on the bed between my legs and leans down to kiss me, sending fire through my core and wetness between my thighs. This man is sinful, and he’s all mine.

Slowly, he lifts both of my hands above my head and slots our fingers, his tongue swiping against mine with a low moan. “You asked me if I’d ever get sick of this.” His lips trail down my neck to my collarbone, sliding my shirt off in the process. “The answer is not a fucking chance.”

I feel it, I do. The truth in those words, the truth in my heart. This isn’t something you get sick of. So as he undresses me completely and binds my hands to the headboard, I

let him. I choose to trust him, to give myself over to him, the captor who stole my heart.

He leaves my legs free to bend to his will, settling himself down there fully clothed like he plans to be there for a while. “Smell so good, Roo. Now it’s time for my dessert.”

That first swipe of his tongue makes me whimper, but it’s clear that he’s going to tease the shit out of me. This is just as much for him as it is for me, and something about that makes it hotter. So many men see women’s pleasure as a chore, something they’re obligated to do, not something to be savored. But Killian... Killian’s different.

“How could I ever tire of my favorite scent?” He licks again, even slower this time. “My favorite taste?”

Fuck. Shivering, I scoot lower to get closer to him. “You can’t blame a girl for worrying, you know. It’s rude.”

“I won’t. Tell me all your worries so I can ease your stress. It’s my job, baby. I’ll carry that weight.”

Both hands slide under to grip my ass as he dives in again, and suddenly, I can’t remember a single thing I’ve ever been worried about. This time, he isn’t teasing. He drags an orgasm out of me and leaves me shaking.

“So responsive.” He places a kiss directly on my center. “Give me more.”

When his fingers join in, he pulls two more from me that have me screaming his name and my eyes watering, then gently kisses his way back up my body.

Gripping the ropes binding me, I lift up just enough to watch him. “You’re still

clothed. Why are you still wearing clothes?"

With a smirk he tugs his shirt off and tosses it, my gaze roaming the gorgeous lines of his muscles down to the huge bulge in his jeans. "You want me naked?"

"I want you inside me, so yes," I rush out, wishing I could touch him. "Don't you want that too?"

"So bad, Joey." Killian reaches down to squeeze his raging hard cock, then undoes his button. "I always want to be inside you."

Anticipation makes me squirm as I dig crescent moons into my palms. "Kiss me," I whisper breathlessly. "Let me taste."

His zipper curls over the bulge before he stands to remove his pants and boxers in one go, and then he climbs back on top of me to comply.

My tongue sweeps into his mouth to chase the taste of myself, grinning against his lips as I feel his cock slide against my soaked pussy. "Don't do it," I whisper. "Don't fuck me."

"No?" He tilts his head challengingly and does it again, the head of his cock pressing against my swollen clit. "How are you gonna stop me?"

My stomach swoops as I squirm, trying to get my legs underneath him to push him off. "Like th-is."

God, he's so strong.

Those hands grip my legs and pin me down, a wicked smile flashing across his face a split second before he thrusts all the way into me in one solid, punishing thrust.

“You’re not going anywhere, woman.”

Like I’d ever want to. He could keep me tied to this bed for the rest of my life and I’d never complain, but it’s so much more fun when I do.

“You think you can stop me?” I ask, clenching hard as I tug on the ropes. “What are you gonna do about it?”

“Fuck,” he groans, cock throbbing inside of me so hard I know eating my pussy has him closer than he wants to be. “I’ll keep you tied up forever. Use you whenever I please.”

His hand wraps around my throat as he pulls almost all of the way out only to slam back in again.

“I’ll scream,” I threaten, tipping my head back as I temporarily lose myself to the pleasure. “So... loud.”

Killian smirks, fucking me slow and deep so every roll of his hips applies a teasing pressure on my clit. “No one can hear you,” he finally whispers, sending me over into yet another mind-blowing orgasm that tests his little theory.

I scream his name so loud I bet the birds outside can hear it. His fingers tighten when I clench around him, his mouth crashing into mine so abruptly he swallows his name down from the source.

Got him.

I bite his lip hard enough to make him pull back, then blurt, “Don’t come inside me, Killian. I can’t take it.”

“Joey!” His palm moves to clasp over my mouth, but I’ve already won. His hips are driving into me so hard it takes my breath away, and when he lifts my leg to get even deeper, I fall over the edge with him.

Killian slams as deep as he can with a groan, thrusting his way through such an intense orgasm, I feel him tremble. I’ll never get used to how much he comes, how full I feel when he does.

It’s addicting.

“All of it, baby. Give me all of it.”

“It’s all yours,” he whispers into my ear, his lips ghosting along my cheek until they meet mine, but this kiss is different from the others. “All of me is.”

Maybe I was wrong before. Maybe sex didn’t make things complicated, but rather un complicated things. Life is messy, especially ours. But this? This is simple. It’s easy.

It’s not complicated at all.

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The scent of burning chicken parm fills my nose even as Killian presses it against his pelvis, cock sheathed fully in my throat. It's my fault, I couldn't wait — he just looks so fucking good in grey sweatpants.

“Fucking love your mouth,” he groans, the pulsing against my tongue making me moan as I swallow down every single drop. “Were you craving my load, Roo?”

“Mmhm,” I hum, suckling the tip to make sure I've got it all. The food's ruined already, anyway.

His clueless ass looks toward the bedroom door, the smell hitting him a second later, and then he's pulling himself out of my mouth and rushing over to the kitchen. “Ah shit! It's smoking!”

The sight of him waddling with his dick out sends me into a fit of laughter, pure and raw and wonderful. I can't even pull myself together long enough to help him shut the oven off and pull our smoldering, crusty dinner out. He's on his own here.

My stomach hurts from laughing by the time he's done rinsing out the pan we absolutely have to throw away, and when he shoots a glare over at me, I nearly lose it again. “You having fun?”

Amusement dances in his eyes, making me swoon. “Yes, yes I am. Was the blow job worth it?”

That makes him outright smile. “Absolutely.” He closes the distance and gives me a kiss, then releases a sigh. “What do we eat now?”

Smirking, I slowly spread my legs. “I can give you something to eat.”

Biting his lip, Killian lifts me up onto the kitchen table and lays me back, my panties disappearing in a heartbeat. “Think about dinner while I eat my appetizer.”

He starts by placing a kiss directly on my clit, then laps at it with a groan. It makes it hard to think about anything, let alone dinner, especially when he refuses to let me come.

I’m shaking by the time he’s done teasing me, and no closer to coming up with something to eat. “We can make something else or go get takeout,” I offer, pulling him down to lick the taste of myself out of his mouth.

“Mmhm.” He nuzzles into my neck and inhales my scent. “We’ll be fine. They don’t know who I am, and if Idaho suspects me, that doesn’t mean Washington does. We can grab some food, then come home, and I’ll make you come until you can’t walk anymore.”

The prospect of going on a real date with him makes my chest flutter in the best way, so I squirm away from him to go get dressed. He joins me a moment later, tugging on some dark wash jeans and a navy blue hoodie that brings out his eyes.

God, he looks good like this.

“What are you craving, baby?”

Licking his lips, his eyes roam my frame in a way that tells me I’m what he truly craves, but he ultimately meets my gaze and makes it easy on me. “Is there a good place to get burritos around here?”

“Yep. I know just the place. Do you want to drive?”

“Yeah. Back when I was freelancing, I worked mostly from home. People would just give me control of their computers, so I hardly had to go out anywhere and I’d feel cooped up by the end of the week. Night drives were my favorite thing.”

Tossing him the keys, I sling my purse over my shoulders and head for the door. “Works for me. You can tell me more about your previous job on the way.”

“Nothing more to it.” He tosses his arm around my shoulder and walks me to my side of the car, continuing our conversation after he joins me inside. “People watch too much porn on their work computers, so I was basically their god. Fitting, right? You love to worship me.”

Chuckling, I shake my head. “You would compare freelance IT work with the best blow jobs you’ve ever had.”

“Nah,” he says with a laugh. “Not even close. Fuck that job.”

He reaches over to take my hand, bringing it to his lips as we travel down the drive.

He kisses it three times, and then holds it there like he doesn’t want to let it go, and I can’t stop myself from staring at the way our fingers slot together.

What am I scared of, really? What’s the harm in letting him make this official? I won’t feel any differently and it’ll make him happy. I don’t plan on leaving him, so what am I stalling?

Grinning, I decide to wait to tell him until we’re fed and back home, choosing to flip the script and kiss his hand this time. “I have a surprise for you later.”

He smirks over at me and pulls onto the main highway. “What kind of surprise?”

“The kind that doesn’t involve sex, but will definitely lead to it. It may even involve you worshipping me after,” I tease. “The good kind.”

“You know I love doing that.” His fingers curl into mine. “Don’t think I can go a day without it.”

I’m just about to tell him he doesn’t have to when flashing red and blue lights grab my attention. They’re everywhere — in the rearview, the side mirrors, casting a colorful glow across Killian’s face.

We’re getting pulled over.

“Killian, I— fuck,” I hiss. “What do we do?”

He’s not breathing at all as he stares into the rearview mirror, his grip on my hand so tight the blood flow slows. “Fuck, Joey. I don’t know.”

For a few tense seconds, I don’t think he’s going to pull over at all, and then he releases a deep breath and begins to slow.

“Okay, just act normal. Look at me, Killian.”

“Fuck. Fuck. Fuck,” he whispers, releasing my hand to put the car in park. “I don’t have my ID.”

He’s still not looking at me, so I reach over to touch his face softly and pull his attention to mine. The fear and defeat I see in his eyes breaks my heart.

“It’s okay. I love you, Killian. You’re just a guy taking his girlfriend on a date.”

“You love me?”

Tap. Tap. Tap.

The cop's flashlight pours in before we can say anything else, and Kill lowers the window with a forced smile. "Did we do something wrong, Officer?"

"I don't know, did you?"

Fucking cops. He leans in the window, blinding me for a second. "Nope, we sure didn't," I mutter. "Unless searching for and purchasing burritos is suddenly illegal." It comes out far more casually than I expected, like a joke. "We're just hungry, Officer. That's all."

"Uh huh." He looks back at Killian, then jerks his head toward his cruiser. "You've got a tail light out. You know about that?"

"No, we didn't. I'll change it first thing in the morning." He's trying to pretend like he's unbothered, but I can clearly see how rigid he is. "Thanks for letting us know."

He reaches for the button to raise the window, but the officer speaks before he can. "I'll need to see your license, registration, and proof of insurance."

"Over a taillight?"

"I don't know how you do things in your line of work, but we document everything in mine. Even taillights. We won't keep you long."

We, meaning he's got a partner back there in that cruiser probably already looking up my license plate. Fuck. "No problem," I cut in, grabbing the registration from the glove box and my license from my purse. "It's my car, sir. My insurance cards are tucked inside the registration."

“Thank you, ma’am. Still need that ID though, sir.”

He takes the papers from my hands and flashes Killian’s face again, making him blink and turn away. “I didn’t bring my wallet.”

“So you’re going to dinner without your wallet? Are you expecting the pretty lady to pay?”

That makes Killian frown, but a response dies on his tongue.

“These are modern times,” I remind him. “I’m allowed to treat him every once in a while.”

He seems to soften at the sight of my smile, and returns one of his own. “My apologies. Sir, if you’ll just give me your name and date of birth, we can look up your license and get you on your way.”

Killian is quiet a little too long not to seem suspicious, his fingers flexing on the steering wheel before he clears his throat and says his name.

“And your birthdate?”

“May 4th.” I can’t even hear the words as he says the year, all I hear is the defeat in his tone, and the breath he exhales as the cop asks us to wait here before walking away. “I’m fucked.”

“We don’t know that,” I say quietly. “Your license is valid, right? We don’t know for sure that you’re the suspect they have in mind. Even still, they clearly don’t have enough to arrest you or they’d have been blasting your name and photo everywhere. Just breathe, baby. We’re gonna be fine.”

He meets my gaze and allows me to comfort him, nodding as he leans in for a slow kiss that feels too much like a goodbye. “I love you too, Joey. I’ve been falling this whole time just hoping you’d join me. Thank you for keeping me grounded here.”

This isn’t how I wanted to tell him. Hell, it’s not how I wanted to admit it to myself. But with every step that officer takes toward us, I feel it in my bones. I love this man.

“Step out of the car,” the officer demands. “Both of you. Hands where I can see them.”

So they do know, then. He was the suspect. My heart drops to my stomach as I whisper to Killian not to resist, then get out the passenger side and nearly run into the cop’s partner. “I don’t have a weapon.”

“I’m going to be checking anyway,” he clips, turning me around so my hands are on the car, but from this angle I get to see just how rough the other officer is with Killian.

Apparently he was too slow to get out of the car as commanded, giving the cop an excuse to slam him down over the hood and handcuff him immediately. “I’m not resisting,” he grunts, but the officer doesn’t seem to believe him.

“We didn’t do anything wrong!” I yell, jerking just enough to piss the cop behind me off. “Why are you arresting us?”

“You said this was your boyfriend?” he asks, grabbing my hands to handcuff them behind my back, and Killian looks up to meet my gaze as the cop behind him reads him his rights. “I’m sorry,” he mouths silently, devastation written across his face.

White-hot fury races through me. He’s guilty and I know that, but it doesn’t matter to me. Lawson was worse. Cops like this ignore bad people all the time, yet it’s my

Killian they choose to go after.

If Lawson would've been poor, this wouldn't be happening.

“Fuck you both,” I gasp, wincing as the metal cuts into my wrist. “You’re making a huge mistake.”

“We’ll see about that.”

I can barely breathe as they shove us both into the back seat of their squad car, and the force with which they slam the doors feels a little too pointed — like they’re shutting the door on Killian’s life.

It’s a shame they don’t know who they’re messing with.

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Glaring at the officer in front of me, I drop my eyes to the chain securing my cuffs to the bar on the table. “Is this necessary? Are you scared of a little girl?”

“We’ve seen some crazy perps of all genders and sizes here, Miss Moran. Now I’ll ask again, how long have you been dating Killian Blake?”

“Long enough. Do you have a wife, Officer—” my eyes drop to his nametag — “McKendrick?”

He clears his throat, setting his pen down. “Yes, I do. I’d like to stay on topic. How long is long enough?”

“How long have you been married?”

“Ma’am. Why are you avoiding the questions? Is it because you know your boyfriend is a murderer?” Immediately his expression changes like he wasn’t supposed to say that, and all my respect for him vanishes.

What a putz.

“Killian’s not a murderer. Are you?”

“I’m a man of the law, he is not. Do you not understand how serious this is? You will never see your boyfriend again unless you start answering my questions.”

My heart beats harder in my chest. The thought of never seeing him again hurts in ways I never expected, and now it’s a real possibility. “I don’t know exactly how

long. A... a few months, I guess. But we've been together every waking moment, and I can assure you, he's no killer."

The officer grabs his pen and begins taking notes. "A few months. And how did you meet?"

Fuck. We never talked about this, there's no way our stories will match. I can't exactly tell the truth.

"To explain that, I need to ask you a question first. Did you read my file or whatever? Do you know the shit that happened with my ex fiance?"

"No, we don't have any files on you, miss. Enlighten me."

He interlocks his fingers and raises an eyebrow, pissing me off further. "You ran a search on my name, did you not? Whatever. My ex has been stalking me and a few months ago, he broke into my house and tried to kill me. The cops in my hometown did nothing about it, so I came to Windwinter to get away from him. I was staying in my parents' cabin."

"Okay, and where along the way did you meet Mr. Blake? Was it after April 28th?"

The day Killian shot Jack Lawson.

"I don't know," I say firmly. "That's why I was hoping you read the police report I filed. I came to Windwinter two days after that, and met Killian a couple days later."

"What station did you file this report with?"

He knocks twice on the door when I tell him, leaving me alone for a few long moments, and then sits back in his chair with a sigh. "We'll find out those dates soon

enough. Now tell me how you two met. Your boyfriend seems to have forgotten how to talk, and you're stringing me along. I want some answers."

Good boy, Killian. Don't tell them a fucking thing.

I wouldn't either, but I know I'll be more help to him outside of this police station.

"He stumbled up to my front door two days after I arrived. He asked me if he could use a phone, but I didn't have a cell because I was there hiding from my psycho ex. He looked hungry, so I invited him in for dinner. He told me he lost his mom recently and they used to love to hike together, so he's just been hiking and trying to remember her. I felt bad for him, so I let him stay the night, then two nights, and things just... happened from there."

The look he gives makes me want to jump across this table and strangle him. "You mean to tell me you went there to escape your abusive partner, only to invite a strange man you've never met into your safe space two days later?"

"Yep. I thought maybe if this one actually killed me, you guys would fucking pay attention." I attempt to hold up a hand as a forced apology, but the cuffs cut into my wrist. "The funny thing about being abused, Officer McKendrick, is that you become hyperaware of the people around you. Their ticks, their body language, the way they move. I may not be the fastest learner in the world, but I do learn. And something else you may not have considered — women and men are different. When a woman hurts a man, they take it as an excuse to hate all women for the rest of their lives. They use it as an excuse to belittle, abuse, rape, attack, murder. Women on the other hand, our empathy for others doesn't magically disappear just because someone hurt us."

Shaking his head, the officer takes a few more notes and moves on. "Alright. We're not touching on this whole men versus women thing. So you read his body language and felt like you weren't in danger? Is that correct?"

Jesus Christ on a cracker, I'm suddenly glad he handcuffed me. I'd be in jail faster than Killian if he hadn't.

"Something like that. How'd you meet your wife? Buy her at an auction, perhaps?"

"Now you listen to me, little girl. You need to watch your m—"

The door opens to cut him off, a woman my age with a blonde bob-cut joining us with a notepad in her hands, and Officer McKendrick straightens in his seat. "Turns out they did have records, sir. They just aren't in our state's database. Here's those dates you asked about."

He doesn't notice me flip him off with both hands since the notepad blocks his line of sight, but I can see it on his face when he realizes I can't give Killian an alibi.

The dickhead smiles.

"I see. Thank you, Officer Wallace. Any luck in the other room?"

She shakes her head, filling me with joy. "He still hasn't said a word."

"Because he didn't do anything wrong," I snap. "It's my car, and it was just a burnt out taillight. Can someone explain to me why that means we need to be interrogated?"

"Have you watched the news at all?" he asks, waving a hand to dismiss the other officer. "Have you heard about what happened to Senator Jack Lawson?"

Oh, you mean that he got what he deserved?

I have to be very, very careful about what I say here. "I think I saw that he was shot,

but I don't exactly sit around my cabin and watch the news. What does that have to do with anything?"

"Of course you don't. Instead you find strange men and invite them into your bed." I want to kill him. "About half a year before the senator was murdered in cold blood, he was in a car accident with Killian and his mother, Lyra Blake. Has your boyfriend told you about that?"

"Yes, he has," I admit, knowing lying will only make it look more suspicious. "He told me a drunk driver killed his mother. He didn't specify his profession."

"If that's the case I'm sure he also didn't tell you about how he threatened the Senator after the fact inside of a grocery store? Screamed at him in front of a dozen witnesses about how one day his karma would come back?" He chuckles at whatever he sees on my face. "Do yourself a favor, sweetheart. Tell me everything you know about the murder and you'll be free to go. Don't go down for someone like him."

"You'll never be able to prove I had anything to do with it, because I didn't, so I won't be going down for anything. I don't know where Killian was that night but I can promise you he wasn't out committing murder. I know nothing about anything."

"So much faith in a man you barely know. Answer this for me, does he own a gun?"

He leans over like he's watching me closely, but I don't let a thing show on my face. And I've watched enough Bones to know how to lie.

Thanks, Sweets.

Exhaling, I relax my posture, leaning closer to him with my eyes locked on his. "If he owns one, I've never seen it. My dad owns several which are at the cabin. All perfectly legal."

“Any chance you’ll let us look around that cabin nicely?”

The stale coffee in his breath burns my nose hairs as he leans in even further, but again, I don’t flinch.

“Let me see.” I glance down, drawing attention to the blood trickling down my wrist. Did I do it on purpose? Yes. Will I tell him that? Absolutely the fuck not. “No, I don’t think I owe you anything. You can get a warrant. In the meantime, I’m free to go, right?”

Killian

When we were handcuffed in the cruiser together, I had the comfort of her arm against mine, but now that she’s in a different room I find it hard to keep my shit together.

We just admitted we’re in love, and now we’re being questioned by police. That isn’t how this night was supposed to go. Fuck.

They leave me in the room for a while, ensuring I’m nice and uncomfortable and worried about my girl, and I have to admit they succeed. I feel like shit.

The officer who walks in clocks it immediately. “Mr. Blake. You look tired. Can I get you some water?”

Even drinking water sounds like a chore, but I might look guilty if I deny it. Or is it worse if I take it? If I pretend I’m unbothered I’ll come across as cold. If I act emotional they’ll think it’s an act. I’m damned if I do and damned if I don’t.

So I just sit here and keep my mouth shut.

She peeks her head out the door and yells for some water, then sits across from me. “I’m Officer Meril. Can you state your name for the record please?”

I’ve already told them my damn name. “Killian Blake. And I have nothing else to say.”

“I understand. You’ve been through a lot, I’m sure. I’m just here to help. Can you tell me what your friend’s name is?”

I shake my head no and drop my gaze. It’s obvious she’s playing good cop here, and I really should work with her, but I’ve seen enough tv to know most convictions happen because people can’t keep their mouths shut. “She already gave her name.”

“How did you meet her?”

That’s not something we planned out ahead of time, so I drop my gaze to my hands and go completely mute.

An investigator enters the room to join us with my glass of water, setting it in front of me before he takes a seat. “How is it going in here, Officer Meril?”

“He’s suddenly forgotten how to speak. I was just about to explain to him that cooperating with us is the best way to ensure he ever sees his girlfriend again.”

That gets my attention more than it should, especially because I know how cops work with their empty promises and fake deals. Unless there’s a legal paper to sign, they can say anything to get me to cooperate and then back out the second I give them what they want. I’m not falling for it.

Still, they have me worried for Joey. Not about the fact that she'll tell them anything against me — I know she won't — but the fact that she'll make them feel small and insignificant if they back her into a corner. Cops don't like dealing with people smarter than them, and I don't want her getting in trouble for me. "Can I see her right now?"

"She's busy," Meril says calmly. "Let's cut to the chase, Mr. Blake. We know who you are and we know what you did. The only thing we're trying to figure out now is how complicit Miss Moran was with your crimes. If you care about her the way you think you do, you'll answer our questions."

Joey knows how I feel about her. I have nothing to prove to these clowns.

I lean forward so they both can see how serious I am. "I have nothing to say to you, so throw me in a cell if you're not done chasing your tails. We did nothing wrong."

"If you say so." She stands, nodding to the silent investigator next to her. "Maybe a few nights in a cell will loosen your tongue."

Not likely.

If I've learned anything about myself after I took matters into my own hands, it's that I can survive just fine in uncomfortable settings. Before I made it to the cabin I slept in stolen cars, rest stop bathrooms, the woods, anywhere I could as I made my way to Washington. A cold cell isn't going to be a problem. I won't give them ammunition to use against me, and I damn sure won't say anything that might get my girl in any more trouble than I already have.

It's my fault she's in here at all, I won't be the reason they make her stay. Just thinking about her makes my chest tighten. Before her, I knew levels of discomfort I didn't know existed, and now I know levels of peace just the same.

But now I may never hold her and feel those things again.

I thought we'd have more time. That I'd have more time to win her heart and hold it in my hands, not glimpse at it through a glass. But now I've traded that glass for metal bars, and I have no one to blame but myself.

Nothing in this world is free... not even revenge.

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Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 2:05 am

That bastard leaves me cuffed as he marches me out of the room. I'm tempted to kick him, spit on him, or do anything to show him how little respect I have for him — but a door down the hall opens and steals my attention.

“Killian!”

His gaze snaps over to mine, those tortured blue eyes scanning my frame like he has to make sure no one's hurt me and then he tugs his way closer. “Roo! Are you okay?”

We make it inches away from each other before we're both yanked back in opposite directions.

Fuck. Panic races through me as that fucking asshole tugs me further away. Struggling against his grip, I yell, “Don't say a word, baby! I'll get you a lawyer, I promise!”

I see relief flash across his face when he realizes I haven't given up on him, regardless of the fact that he's being pushed against the wall.

It's almost like they're trying to give us more time, like they're hoping we'll slip. But when Killian silently nods I know we're on the same wavelength. They will not win. “I love you.”

“Say your goodbyes, Miss Moran,” Officer McKendrick says in a low, mocking tone so only I hear. “Pretty faces like that don't last long where he's going.”

“I love you, Killian.” Turning to Officer Fuckwit, I smirk. “Sounds like you're

jealous, baby girl. How long has it been since someone actually desired you?”

“Watch your mouth,” he hisses, straightening when Officer Wallace moves over to see if he needs help.

“I can escort her out,” she offers, but I stop paying them any mind and stare at the man I’ve fallen for despite being convinced I could never love again. I drink in his gorgeous face, the way he’s holding his chin high regardless of the fact that his entire world is imploding, and I swear I fall even harder.

The officer yanks his arms to try and get him walking again, muttering something I can’t hear when Killian continues staring at me like I’m the only person who exists.

He’s too far away to hear me now, so I hold his gaze as long as I can then turn away.

I’ve got fucking work to do.

My first stop is to buy a new cell phone. I barely make it out of the store before I call my parents, and after a very awkward but honest conversation, they assure me they’ve got my back and they’ll do what they can for Killian. My second call is to one of our family lawyers, who directs me to a contact of hers named Donna Steel. Apparently, Miss Steel is exactly the kind of lawyer someone like Killian needs — she understands the flaws in our legal system, the need to go around them, and she’s already had two not-guilty verdicts returned for vigilante killers.

I never really thought about it, but I guess that’s what he is. A vigilante. I always assumed vigilantes were serial killers who operated in the shadows and made it their life’s mission to take out bad people, not one-off crimes of passion. But when you’re taking the law into your own hands because the law failed you, I guess it doesn’t

really matter.

Donna, however, is a little harder to sell than my parents or our family lawyer. She asks me a million questions and demands the truth so she knows what she's getting into, but I can't help but feel like I'd be doing something wrong by admitting to her that he's guilty. I'm back at the cabin halfway through a bottle of wine before I finally get to the end of my little speech — one where I tell her the kind of man Killian truly is, and the secrets Jack Lawson kept from the public. I never outright admit that Killian did it. I won't do that to him, not when I don't know this woman personally. But I do let her know that Killian is a good man, one who loved his mother and respects me, one who would go to the ends of the earth to protect the people he cares about.

It seems to be enough.

She agrees to meet with him at least, so for now, that's going to have to be good enough.

My fingers are shaking as I disconnect the call and dial my sister.

“Hey,” I say softly. “It's Joey, I finally got an actual cell phone again. Is this a good time?”

I can hear Noah, her one-year-old, crying in the background. “Noah's sick, so I'm home with him. What's up? Why the sudden change?”

“Killian got caught.”

Her silence only makes this harder for me, so I speed-run through the story of how I let this happen.

“Fuck,” she whispers. “They let you go, though? Is he okay? Where is he?”

“He’s still at the police station for now, but it’s only a matter of hours before they officially press charges and move him to the county jail. I talked to a lawyer a little bit ago who warned me he’ll probably be extradited back to Blackridge since that’s where his charges are, so that’s why I’m calling. Can you find me some place to stay out there? I don’t want to book a hotel unless I have to, so maybe something like an AirBnB. I need to find one I can rent out at least for the next few months.”

She doesn’t ask me why I can’t do it myself, she knows. I have to work on helping Donna — or another lawyer if she meets with Killian and changes her mind — mount some sort of a reasonable defense. She just agrees. “Yes, I’ll find you a place and get it booked for at least the next six months, just in case. Hopefully he’ll be free long before then.”

And if he’s not, I might be taking up permanent residence in Idaho of all places. I never saw that coming, but I do know one thing for sure. I’m not giving up on him.

Not now, not ever.

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 2:05 am

Waking up alone is harder than I thought it would be. I wasn't expecting to sleep at all, but I passed out on top of my laptop and the notes I've been taking trying to piece together the timeline from the moment of the crash that killed Killian's mom to the moment Lawson was pronounced dead at the scene. There are still a lot of gaps from what I can see through blurry eyes, but I'm getting there.

Breakfast is a lonely affair that consists of popcorn and day-old coffee I never bothered to dump from the pot. I feel stuck, like this has all been some crazy bad dream I'll wake from at any second. I know it's not. I know I need to get my ass in gear, make preparations, go see about bail or if charges have even been filed. Just because they think he did it doesn't mean they have enough evidence to arrest him, and I also need to make sure Donna came to see him. If she's not going to help him, I need to find someone who will.

I shower quickly and throw all of our laundry into the washer, then grab every suitcase we've got. If they do let him go, we need to leave Windwinter for a while. If they don't... well, Violet worked overtime last night finding me a place to stay in Blackridge. I need to be prepared for anything.

But I can't bring myself to pack his hoodies or his sweatpants, his toothbrush or his shampoo until I know for sure what's going on, so I drive back over to the police station and give myself a few moments in the parking lot to just breathe. I can't go in there half-cocked. I can't go in there disrespecting them like I did yesterday. I should apologize for that, stay calm, and then demand answers.

Easier said than done.

Every step I take toward the front door feels harder than the last until I'm standing at the front desk. "I'm here to find out what's going on with Killian Blake. He was detained yesterday after a traffic stop where he refused to provide identification." Screw the apology. They should be happy I didn't bring a blowtorch.

The lady behind the counter looks me up and down, probably recognizing me from my outburst yesterday. "He's currently in interrogation. You'll have to come back later."

Irritation spikes its way up my spine. "Has he been charged with a crime? Has bail been set? How long will he be in there?"

So much for being calm.

"What exactly is your relationship to Mr. Blake?" she asks, setting her reading glasses down in front of her and folding her hands like a cartoon villain. "You're just his girlfriend, right? Not his wife, or sister, or mother? You're not actually related to him at all?"

"No, I'm not related to him. What does that matter? I just want to know when I can bring him home, that's all. He has no living relatives. Please, ma'am."

Her face softens. "Yes, I believe charges have been filed. He's being moved to the county jail in a few hours, so maybe you'll have better luck there. I'd wait at least 48 hours before trying to visit him, though."

I don't want to wait that long, but I'm assuming it'll take a bit for him to be seen by a judge about bail. Fucking hell. Forcing a grateful smile, I look around for the prick who manhandled me yesterday as I massage the shallow cuts on my wrist, then head back to my car and go home.

I run on autopilot finishing the laundry and packing our things. I nearly forget to eat dinner altogether until my mom calls to check on me and asks me if I've eaten, so I force down a couple of pieces of frozen pizza and turn on the news. By now, word has spread. His face is everywhere. It's no longer some masked stranger with startling blue eyes, it's Killian on my screen. As a teenager, as an adult. They even have a baby picture of him already. If we get through this, I'll have to let him know how much cuter he looked with chubby cheeks.

It unfortunately doesn't matter how cute he was or how hot he is now. People will judge him anyway, listening to the way these newscasters are painting him. "Unhinged," they're saying. "Broken from grief due to the tragic loss of his mother." "A senseless killer trying to take matters into his own hands."

They're half right. And things will only get worse from here, I know that. People who think they know him will crawl out of the woodwork looking for a little bit of fame or a quick payday and the truth will get lost in the shuffle. Killian will get lost in the shuffle.

And I'm the only one who can stop it.

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“Did you talk to him?” I demand, pacing outside the county jail three days later. “You’re taking his case, right?”

Donna’s voice drops, clearly annoyed with me already. I’ve called her half a dozen times. “Yes, Miss Moran. I spoke to him earlier today and have decided to represent him. You weren’t kidding about his charm, you know that?”

I’ll kill her.

“I know,” I force out. “Thank you. Can you tell me why they won’t let me see him? They keep telling me I’m not on the list but won’t tell me how to get on the list. Is it something you have to do, or maybe Killian?”

“They won’t allow him to have visitors right now due to the nature of his charges. I’m sorry, Joey. I know that’s tough, but you have to trust he’s okay.”

“And what about bail?” I press. “He was represented by some public defender and they denied bail. Is there anything we can do about it?”

The brief moment of silence that follows tells me the answer before she says it. “No. Under normal circumstances the answer would be yes, but I know this system. My focus needs to be on the upcoming trial, so Killian asked me not to waste time fighting the bail decision. I have to respect his wishes, and I also happen to agree with him.”

It hurts to know they’re right. I’m tempted to hire five more lawyers to do the shit like this, but there’s no guarantee it’ll work anyway. “Okay,” I say softly. “What can

I do?”

“I’d say nothing, but I already know enough about you to know you’ll do something anyway, so stay on top of the media. Find out what they’re saying, and do whatever you can to stall any misinformation. Do not outright lie for him on camera, do you hear me? Do not do that. But if someone comes out and says he’s crazy, find two people who say he isn’t. If they say his favorite color is red, find evidence his favorite color is yellow. If they say he hates dogs, find a home video of him playing with a basket of puppies. It’s important that we don’t let the media crucify him before he ever has a shot at a fair trial.”

I can do that. I was already planning on it. “Is it illegal to cast a spell on a judge?” I muse, but her barked laughter brings a smile to my face.

“They can’t prove what they don’t know, Miss Moran. Hang in there. I’ll call you when I have an update.”

The line goes dead. She knows what she’s doing, and she knows what the real end goal is — Killian free, not just out on bail. So I have to wait a little longer to see him again, it sucks but it’s necessary.

It’ll be over soon.

In the meantime, I do what she suggested and head home to find out what’s going on in the news. Social media has been overtaken with thirst traps again but this time they’ve got my boyfriend’s face, his tattooed body, videos of him smiling, laughing. The comments make me boil with jealousy that I have to shove down. This is good, even if I hate it. If they want him, they can’t hate him. And it’s clear right now from the anti-Killian posts that the ones who don’t love him are just mad they’re not him.

The news, however, that’s a different story. I watch day-old interviews with his first

high school girlfriend who says she doesn't think he did it but refuses to comment further, friends from back then who can't seem to decide if he was a loner with a short temper who would go from laughing to hitting people in a heartbeat or a generally happy guy who was always quick to help a stranger. There's even a blip of someone suggesting they think he hurt a cat when he was younger, but I remember that story. He told me all about it. His family cat climbed a tree and wouldn't come down, so he climbed up there after it. A squirrel on a nearby branch spooked the cat and she got cut on the bark. He didn't hurt her, it devastated him that he couldn't get to her fast enough.

I really hate people.

But those day-old interviews are nothing compared to the one they show next.

“Speaking out for the first time is Krystal Thomas, long-time girlfriend of Killian Rhys Blake, the suspect in the brutal murder of Idaho Senator Jack Lawson. Krystal, you recently shared a letter you received from Blake on social media. Can you tell us a little about that?”

She makes an annoyed scoff and flips her dark hair over her shoulder. “I was hoping we wouldn't go into that, I only gave it to the police to prove he's a psycho and provide a handwriting sample. See, Killian puts a little loop when he connects his K's, just like that Karma thing they found at the scene.”

She clears her throat as a copy of the letter plasters itself on the screen, and that dirty bitch reads it aloud, each word pissing me off a little more.

Krystal,

I know this isn't the letter you hoped for when you asked me to communicate this way, but I can't do this. Finding common ground has been impossible and it's

obvious neither of us are having fun anymore. I'm done with the games and all the drama you hide behind while pretending you're innocent. Why put off the inevitable? We're two different people going in two different directions, and you can have all the fun you want going backwards by yourself. I'm moving forward. Have fun torturing the next dude.

Killian

"Bold words from a bold man," the interviewer says. "Was he always this... over the top?"

"Yes and no," she admits. "He was either too much or nothing at all, hot and cold to the point I got whiplash and never knew which version of him I'd get. The whole reason I wanted him to write me a letter at all was because I could not get him to communicate. He was always reading some weird book twenty-seven year old guys shouldn't be into and angry about the state of the world. Like how are you so concerned about the government and not the woman standing in front of you? Priorities, much?"

The Killian I know is an excellent communicator and he wouldn't have taken his attention off me if the government threatened to maim him, but she's got me on the books. He always has had a taste for literary revolution.

I hate her already.

"It seems like he only had one thing on his mind," the interviewer agrees. "Did you... love him?"

"Of course I did. I mean, have you seen him?" She laughs, soaking up the spotlight they're giving her. "I just didn't care for all that came with him. That's why I denied his proposals. He asked me to marry him like a hundred times, and I knew I couldn't.

Not until I trained him, and he was untrainable.”

The remote slams against the wall before I even realize I threw it. What a load of shit. I know Killian, and everything that just came out of her mouth is a lie. “God, I hate people,” I hiss, stomping over to snatch the remote and turn it off, but the interviewer piques my curiosity.

“What made him so untrainable?”

“Well, communication for one. It was like trying to get a toddler to express themselves — he just didn’t care. He never wanted to have sex or be intimate in any way, which is a huge red flag. I know he never cheated on me of course, but he was so wrapped up in his head I had to beg him to touch me. He used to pull away from kissing me and complain if I touched him too much. Touch wasn’t his thing, and if I pushed too much, he’d disappear at night and go on these long drives. Common ground my ass, he never once met me halfway. He was probably already plotting to kill someone, but I guess that car accident years later is what set him off. I had already cut ties with him by then, especially because I was pregnant with his child and knew he wouldn’t be a good dad.”

My knuckle pops from squeezing the remote so tightly. “Pregnant my ass, you lying little shit. You clearly know nothing about him.”

Rage has me turning the tv off and pacing the living room, ready to scream at the top of my lungs until they pop.

She needs to feel special so she went on tv and lied about Killian, painting him out to be a freak when in reality, he probably just didn’t like her all that much. Physical touch is his love language, and he’d be the best dad I’ve ever met.

How dare she? And what’ll happen now when he’s tried in the court of public

opinion?

I know I have to do something to counter her bullshit just like Donna said, but I've been deliberately trying to stay off the radar. I still have Ryan to contend with and I'm of more use in the shadows here.

I just wish I could make the world see the truth.

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 2:05 am

“Joey, breathe,” my mom begs, interrupting a run-on sentence that might’ve broken a world record. “You say you trust him, right? Would you want him getting upset over things from your past?”

No, but this is different. “I do trust him. I do. But he made it seem like he never really loved anyone, and he certainly never mentioned babies or proposals, so I don’t think it’s the same thing as getting angry with him for something from his past. I’m mad about a lie in the present.”

“But you just said you trust him. If you do, then you should believe his side of things and not hers. It sounds like she’s just trying to make herself out to be more special to him than she really was. People do that sort of thing all the time, particularly in high profile cases. You’ve watched enough true crime to know that.”

“Yes, but—”

“When she was talking, did you believe her? Did it seem like she was telling the truth?”

“No, but—”

“And when Killian told you about her, about his past, did it seem like he was telling the truth?”

Damn, she’s got me.

“Yes,” I mutter.

“Then stop. This is exactly what interviews like that are designed to do. They want Killian isolated from the few people who care about him. Don’t let them win.”

“I won’t. I’m sorry. I knew it was all fake, but...”

“But this is a really stressful situation and every emotion you have feels like it's kicked into overdrive?”

I exhale hard, letting my shoulders relax. “Yes. Exactly that.”

“If you’re really worried about it, talk to him. Ask him directly about the things she said and just clear the air. The next few months will be hard enough for the two of you without resentment building over things that are likely not even true.”

This is why I love my mom. We may not talk all the time, but she always makes me feel better. “I can’t talk to him right now, they won’t let me see him and they won’t let him make phone calls. Donna said his extradition is scheduled for next Tuesday so maybe I’ll have better luck in Blackridge.”

She hums, thinking for a moment. “So write him a letter. They can’t stop him from receiving letters.”

They can do whatever they want, but I see her point. Even if it never gets to him, I might feel better after getting it all out. “Okay, I will. Thanks, Mom.”

“You’re welcome. We have a few things to wrap up over here but Violet sent us the address of the place you’ll be staying in Blackridge. Your father and I will be there as soon as we can to help you navigate all of this. I love you, Joey. Everything is going to be okay.”

It’s a little hard to believe that right now, but I have to. “I love you too. See you

soon.”

Hanging up, I grab a piece of paper and a pen and sit down to write Killian a letter. Part of me hopes that he'll never see it, but if he does, hopefully he'll understand that he did this to me. I went from never wanting another boyfriend to being pissed off that he even gazed upon other women before me, so this is his fault, really. Not mine.

Killian,

I hope jail hasn't ruined your spark yet, though I have to admit mine's been a little put out. Did you know your ex Krystal is running around telling people you proposed multiple times and knocked her up? Yeah, that's a thing that's happening.

I'd like to think I know you well enough to know that none of that is real, but if it is, I hope you slip in the shower every time you step foot in one. I hope your pillow is made out of graphite and your toilet doesn't flush quite right.

Now, I don't ever want to hear her name again, so hush.

Things here have been fine, but the cabin is really empty without you and I have way too much food here now. It's also weird that my panties are no longer going missing.

I just think it's funny that you got all pissy with me about my exes and you failed to mention you were going to marry one of yours and start a family, but maybe you hate me because I don't have a nose stud. Is that it? Do I need to get my nose pierced for you?

Fuck that. Ugh.

Alright, fine. I love you and I'm very irritated that they won't let me see you, but I think I'm wearing them down. They have to let me in eventually, and if they don't,

I'll figure out a way to repel in or something.

That shit better not have been true, love you,

Roo

Wincing, I read it back and then convince myself to stuff it in an envelope and give it to Donna, anyway. She's our best option for communication without it being screened by the prison. It feels juvenile and I know that, but at the same time, maybe we both need something silly to distract us from what's coming.

I know I do.

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The place Violet picked out is even nicer than it looked in the photos, but it feels empty without Killian. I unpack his things and stock the kitchen, take a shower, and set up my laptop before truly letting myself take the place in.

It's two stories with a big front porch, an oak tree in the backyard, and four bedrooms. The kitchen is twice the size of the one at the cabin and there are two separate living rooms, both with huge tvs and sectional couches. I'll be comfortable here for sure, but I can't shake the feeling that Violet only picked a place so large because she knew my entire family would soon be staying with me.

Good. We need all the support we can get right now.

I spend a good hour pacing the family room as I wait to hear from Donna. It's only half past two and she's not supposed to call until after three when her meeting with Killian is over, so my heart drops out of my ass when my phone rings a half hour early.

"Donna? What is it? Is he okay?" I demand. She never calls during meetings with him. "Say something!"

"It's me, Roo. Everything is alright." He chuckles lightly at the panic in my voice, surely because he's just happy to hear I still care. "Did you have to curse my pillow? That was too far."

What the hell is he talking about?

Oh, the letter.

Krystal.

Pouting, I mutter, “Yes, I did.”

“Fuck, I miss you. The jealousy was cute by the way, but I think deep down you know she was lying. I never once touched her without a condom, and I damn sure never proposed. I didn’t even really talk to her, let alone think about marrying her. I was bored and in the process of leaving a bullshit company to go freelance, and she was easy. I’m not proud of it.”

I did know, but even if I didn’t, I’d believe him now.

“I almost didn’t send it,” I admit. “But I wasn’t kidding, I don’t want to talk about her. Are you okay? What’s going on in there?”

“I know, but I needed to say it anyway. I’m okay, love. I’ll tell you all about it in here, but you first. How are you doing? Has your sister come to stay with you so you’re not alone?”

“Not yet. I just got here yesterday, so I’m okay. She’s been calling ten times a day though, so have my parents. They’re all behind you, Killer. All of us are.”

Silence hangs in the air a moment before he breathes. “Thank you. I’m glad they’re there for you since I can’t be. How much water have you had today?”

I glance over at my still-full cup and blush. “Not enough. Are they feeding you okay?”

“Not really,” he admits. “Everything tastes like box, and sometimes they shove it in the cell so hard shit falls on the floor. They really don’t like me here, but I know this is temporary. I won’t be in solitary forever.”

Anger boils just under the surface, but I know that isn't what he needs to hear right now. "You're right, you won't be. We'll get you out."

"Two minutes," Donna cuts in. "Any longer and it'll be suspicious."

"Damnit," he hisses. "And what about the media? They don't let me see shit, but they're leaving you alone, right? They don't know about the cabin?"

"No one came to the cabin, but the media has been emailing me and calling me nonstop. I've been trying to keep my face out of it for now, but you know me. I don't bottle things up very well."

I hope he can hear the smile in my voice, because I can hear it in his when he responds. "Yeah, I love that about you. Whatever you say or do I support you, just don't believe everything they say about me. Steel showed me a couple of the interviews and it's a bunch of bullshit. I promise I haven't lied to you about anything, okay?"

Donna says something else to elicit another stream of cuss words from Killian, but I don't have to have heard her clearly to know our time is almost up.

"Will you write to me again? I want to hear more of your favorite memories... or even memories that aren't your favorite. I just want more of you."

My chest tightens as I clutch the phone a little tighter. "I will. I love you."

"Love you, too. Thank you for everything, and for being who you are. Our time in the cabin is what sustains me now."

"Not me. The thought of all the time we have yet to come is what's keeping me going. Be careful, Killian. Keep your head up."

I hang up before Donna can smack him for stalling, feeling a little like I just stabbed us both.

I need to see him.

Soon.

My phone rings again two hours later, and I'm surprised to see it's Donna again.

"He's going crazy without being able to see you," she admits. "I think it's affecting him more than he's letting on."

It makes my chest tighten, but I'm not surprised to hear it. "I'm not going anywhere, so if you called to tell me that to make sure I don't leave him, you didn't have to."

"It's not that, though it's good to hear. I'm calling because it's getting harder to get real answers out of him. He's unfocused and jittery. I don't think he'll be of any use to me until he sees you."

My poor baby. "What can I do? He's in solitary, they're not letting anyone anywhere near him."

"Not officially, no. But money talks, Joey. You know that."

Her words are so pointed that I know she only means one thing — she wants to bribe my way into the prison. Butterflies scatter in my stomach. "I've got a lot of it, and I desperately want to see him. Just tell me how much."

She hesitates like she knows this is a terrible idea, then says quietly, "Tonight, one

am. Bring two envelopes filled with cash with you, wear something black, and meet me at the corner of Halifax and Second. Don't tell anyone."

"How much?" I repeat.

"How much is their silence worth to you?"

Got it. "I'll meet you there. Thank you, Donna. Seriously."

"Don't thank me yet. You won't like what happens if you get caught."

I don't care. They could lock me up for a hundred years and it would still be worth it. He needs me, and I need him, no matter the cost. "I'll be there."

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My heart beats loudly in my chest as I wait, tugging the blanket I used to hide my face closer. I can hear the distant drip of water slapping off the floor from a leaky pipe, the far-off murmurs of prisoners too cooped up to be silent, and the rush of my own blood through my head.

If we get caught, we're fucked.

But I trust Miss Steel, and I trust the power of money. There are no guards in sight. No one to tell me no or pull me backward as I see shadows approaching. Even from here, I recognize Killian when I see him.

Broad shoulders, head held high, confident steps. This place hasn't taken a thing from him.

The man escorting him turns and walks away when Killian is halfway to me, and only then do I reach up to lower the blanket.

"Roo?" he whispers loudly, a smile overtaking his face that's so distracting I almost miss the relief I see there.

He looks tired with dark circles under his eyes that weren't there before and a five o'clock shadow that makes me want to jump him, but I refrain as he jogs over and grips my face with his handcuffed hands. "You're here. How?"

His mouth crashes to mine before I can even attempt to respond, and I don't pull back until my knees are weak.

“We don’t have a lot of time,” I whisper, throwing my arms around his neck. “Donna paid the guards but you’ll have to be back in your cell by next count. Are you okay? Are they hurting you?”

He exhales a small laugh and kisses me again, showing me just how much he missed me more than any words could. “I’m okay, baby. Especially now. Fuck, you smell like home.”

He buries his face into my neck and inhales so deeply I know he’s trying to memorize it, so I don’t push him. “We’re gonna be fine, okay? You’ll be back home soon. Donna is trying to get your trial sped up or at least get the judge to change her mind about bail.”

He nods, a shaky breath leaving him before he pulls back to look at me again. “I’m sorry you fell for me only for me to break your heart. When I get out I promise to spend the rest of our lives making up for it and staying so close to your side you get sick of me.” He forces a laugh. “Steel seems really confident that I’ll be a free man when it’s all said and done. Just please... don’t give up on me.”

“Does it seem like I’m giving up? I know who you are, and what you did. And that’s half the reason I fell in love with you in the first place.”

His shoulders relax, his chin dipping slightly in agreement. “So is this a good time for me to say I told you so about the whole falling in love thing?”

Grinning, he backs me against the wall step by step until the blanket falls to my feet and I feel the cold concrete behind me.

“No. I told you sex would complicate things, and here we are. That blowjob caused us to burn dinner and then you got caught.” Smirking, I grip his chin and pull him down into a messy kiss, whispering, “I didn’t even get to come,” against his lips.

Killian grunts into a heated kiss, then nips my bottom lip playfully as he drops to his knees. “It’s been killing me that I didn’t get to make you come before all this. How long have you been wearing these panties, love?”

“Long enough to make you happy.” I lift my plain black dress up just enough to give him a glimpse, biting back a moan at the noise he makes when he leans in to rub his face against my pussy. “Goddamnit, Joey. How am I supposed to survive without having you every single day?”

He tugs my panties down and helps me out of them one foot at a time, stuffing them into the pocket of his navy blue prison pants so quickly I know I’ll never see them again. “Drape your leg over my shoulder.”

Fuck, this isn’t why I came here.

Okay, maybe a little. He looks so sinfully hot down there with his cuffed hands and scruffy face that every illicit fantasy I’ve ever had comes to mind, and I brace myself against the wall as I give him what he wants.

I can’t take my eyes off him as he leans in and laps my wetness like he’s dehydrated and just as desperate as I am.

After that first swipe of his tongue all gentleness ceases, his teeth grazing my pussy before he sucks my clit into his mouth with a groan and reaches up to cup my ass with his cuffed hands.

It’s a struggle to keep my eyes open and my voice down as he takes me apart, makes my legs shake and my fingers curl in his hair.

One orgasm isn’t enough for him.

Two isn't enough.

The third takes us both by surprise, and the animalistic noise he releases as I nearly fall over makes it sound like he might've come, too.

"Get up," I whisper. "I need you."

"Okay." I feel his heavy breaths against my swollen clit, twitching when he places another kiss there and slowly gets to his feet. "Give me a sec," he pants. "I'm about to blow."

My fingers work overtime shoving his prison sweats down, seeing his shiny, wet cock spring up. My mouth waters with need as I drop down and lick him clean, relishing every desperate grunt that comes out of him and every needy twitch of his hips.

When I suck him in fully, I feel him stumble and brace against the wall, his cock pulsing on my tongue. "Joey. Baby. Fuck."

When his legs begin to shake I know he's about to get what he needs, so I tell my angry, throbbing clit to quit being selfish and bury his cock in my throat.

Killian mumbles out an apology a second before he releases straight down my throat, a groan echoing around us that has me worried, but Killian is too far gone to care. He pulls back to squeeze the base like he wants to hold off, but it's too late. Multiple streaks of cum shoot out onto my face, my chin, my neck, even my dress before he's pushing back inside my mouth to feed me more.

God, he calls this a disorder, I call it heaven.

It flips something inside me, something dirty and debased. I don't care where we are,

what he's done, or what I'll look like when I leave.

I keep sucking until I've stolen every drop from him, then look up to meet his eyes.
"More."

Drawing him back in, I play with his balls and lick his cock until he's rock hard again, and when he fists his hand in my hair and tugs, I know that was just the appetizer. "Been too long. Give me that pussy."

My legs feel like jelly as I stand up, but Killian doesn't give me a moment to breathe. He spins me around, bending me over until I'm forced to brace myself against the wall, and swings his cuffed hands in front of my face.

The chill I get as the short, freezing cold chain connecting his cuffs bites my throat makes my thighs slip together. "Pull your dress up or I'll rip it off you," he growls, telling me he wants to play.

Oh, I'll play.

"No." Yet even as the word leaves my lips, I flip the fabric up to expose my ass.
"Killian, not here. You've already made such a mess of me."

"And what a beautiful mess you make," he whispers into my ear. "Now get my cock inside that cunt before I lose my mind."

Without waiting I feel him rut between my cheeks, the head of his cock searching for me desperately. It takes two tries to give us both what we need because I'm so fucking wet, but the moment the head of his cock is inside me, we groan in unison, relief coursing through our bodies like more than just our minds were craving this.
"So tight. Have any of your toys had you?"

He sinks in further, making it hard to speak.

“N-No,” I admit. “I don’t want anything or anyone but you.”

“Fuck, I love you.” Kill slams all the way inside, the handcuffs digging into my throat as he pulls me closer, and my eyes flutter closed. “You’re all I need.”

I stop myself from asking him if he’s made any ‘friends’ in prison. I don’t want to know, not right now. And I trust him, anyway. I do.

But the answer becomes clear anyway as he fucks me like he hates me, like a starved man afraid he’ll never see another woman again.

Killian is mine, all mine.

“Do you know how hard I wake up every morning?” He slows to a grind, then pulls back to slam in again. “Hard for you and only you. You’re all I see. All I crave, and you own my mind, body and soul.”

The growl in his voice and the words he’s saying have me so close it’s a struggle to stand up, but I’m speared on that thick cock and trapped behind those cuffs. He has me right where he wants me, just like he has since the day we met.

“Have you come for me, Killian? Thinking about me, wishing your hand was my pussy, my throat, my ass?”

“No,” he admits breathlessly. “I tried once and couldn’t get there without you. I don’t want to come unless it’s with you. Everything good in my life is tied to you and I don’t want it any other way. You own me just as much as I own you.”

For a moment, he stops, leaving us strung out on the edge as those words hang

between us. We were happy where we were, holed up at the edge of the world. And while the more rational part of me knows he's guilty, no part of me believes he deserves this. The justice system failed, not Killian. Yet here we are, bribing and scheming our way toward stolen moments in some dusty, forgotten hallway, deep in the bowels of a federal prison.

He didn't hurt anyone who didn't deserve it. And if they don't find a jury who understands that, I may have to hurt everyone.

"Don't come inside me," I whisper, reaching down to rub my clit as the chain tightens around my neck like a noose.

"What?" His cock throbs in protest, making him immediately fuck me harder than he was before. "Your cunt is begging for my cum."

"S-Sorry," I grunt, bracing myself as his thrusts become almost violent. "What I should've said is don't just come inside me. Cover me, baby. Give me something to take home."

The next orgasm that hits me has a scream dying in my throat, the chains tightening to the point I can't inhale my next breath.

Feeling him fall apart behind me is everything. He moans my name as he begins to come, thrusting his way deeper through the throes of his orgasm, and then he releases me and pulls out.

But he's far from done.

I feel him stroke himself to completion, feel each rope of cum as it paints my ass, thighs and wrecked pussy, shooting up my back and dripping down.

I think he's done until I feel the chain slap against my thigh and two thick fingers push cum into my ass.

"Breathe, love. I'm not done marking what's mine."

He fingers a little more inside and then rubs his cum into my skin, using gentle, almost soothing circles. There won't be any part of me unaffected by him.

Maybe there already wasn't.

"I'll get you out, Killian. I promise. I don't care if my entire family goes bankrupt hiring lawyers and paying for appeals if we lose the trial, I'll get you out. Do you trust me?"

Killian turns me around to face him, his eyes locking with mine before he responds. "I trust you. I don't want to make your lives harder or cause your family to go bankrupt, but I believe you when you say it. You're so fierce about the things you love, and I won't ever deny I'm lucky to be one of those things. If anyone can find a way, it's you."

I hope I can prove worthy of his trust, but before I can say anything else, the guard who brought him here bangs on a pipe down the hall. "Our time is up for now, but I'll be back. Don't lose hope, okay? Promise me. Promise me you won't lose hope."

"Wait," he rushes out, grabbing my face so he can press his forehead to mine and drink me in one last time. "I love you, Roo. I promise I won't lose hope."

"I love you too. Now go, don't get in trouble for this." One more kiss later, I gently shove him away from me, knowing he'll never go on his own.

I watch him until he's out of sight, then grab the discarded blanket and force myself

to head the opposite direction.

Donna meets me at the back door where she let me in, screwing up her nose when she takes in the sight of me. “What the fuck happened to you?” she hisses, but all I can do is smirk.

“Yeah. What the fuck indeed.”

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Killian

Killian,

I think I'll die still covered in your cum, you know that? I'm not mad about it, I just thought you'd like to know that you bleached my little black dress. There are now discolored spots marking every inch of fabric you covered, and I can't bring myself to throw it out. It's funny, but also makes me miss you like crazy. That wasn't enough time. I'm hoping Donna can work some magic again, but I don't want to pester her too much about it when she's busy mounting your defense.

She tells me things are looking good, so I've just been keeping busy. The AirBnB I'm staying at isn't far from the prison and my parents are supposed to join me soon, so I won't be alone for long. They said they have some people they can talk to in the media that can help me tell the truth about who Lawson really was, so hang tight and try not to watch the news for the next few weeks unless you're prepared to watch me lose my shit on camera.

You asked me about a favorite memory and all I can think about is the time Violet dragged me on a roller coaster when I was eight. It was terrifying, exhilarating, and completely unexpected. I screamed like a baby and begged them to stop it the second they released the brake, had a panic attack for 90% of it, and then begged to ride again once we were done. I think I've been thinking about that moment a lot because that's how my relationship with you has been. I was terrified and resistant, but once I let go... well, you know the rest.

Your turn.

I love you, Killian. Don't forget that while you're in there, or once you get out and see all the people thirsting over you. You're mine, and I'm yours.

So yes, you told me so,

Roo

I think I've read her letter five times in just as many minutes. I'm still not able to make phone calls, but I'm thankful Steel makes communicating with my girl possible at all. I miss her so much it affects me physically, so any piece of her I can have right now, I'll take. I wish we had more time to share these stories in person, but I'm happy we at least have this. Her letter has me daydreaming about that brief visit we had, and I swear I still feel her clenching around me. Fuck, I can't think about that right now.

My cellmate Taylor is in the corner scribbling around on some paper without paying me any mind, and based on the thick stack next to him, I'd guess he's nearing the end of his book. When we met, he immediately launched into a speech about relationships in prison and how he thinks his novel will go far, then offered me a stale cookie in exchange for my promise that I'll proofread it. He seems like a good dude, keeps mostly to himself, and showed me all the good hiding places to put my letters and shit I don't want guards to see. Things could be worse.

Life feels different now that I'm out of solitary, but I still haven't found my footing. People are either falsely praising me or avoiding my gaze entirely, but I have to admit it's nice not having to be afraid. I don't trust anyone here, but I also don't feel like anyone wants to hurt me so that has to be enough for now.

"Hey, Tay. I don't mean to interrupt your flow, but can I borrow a piece of paper and a pencil?"

He looks over at me as he pulls out a fresh sheet. "Not really borrowing paper when

you can't return it," he jokes.

"Yeah, but I'll return the pencil."

"True that. Plus, I don't need you to return the paper because I'm almost done." He seems genuinely excited about that, and I offer him a smile.

"Good shit. How long have you been working on it?"

"I started about a year after I got in. I was lost for a while like most of us, but once I found something to write about, things got easier. Next month is six years inside, so I'd say this book took me about five. It's hard when people in prison don't really want to open up about their relationships, but I've got some good material. Have you heard about Lock & Key?"

I shake my head. "Not at all. What is it?"

"Pen pal dating app for prisoners. I've known a few guys who found their soulmate on that app, and they're usually more open to talk about it than the ones that find love behind bars."

It makes me wonder why he cares at all, but maybe it's just to pass the time. "And what about you?"

Taylor huffs, rubbing a hand over his buzzed hair. "I don't understand it to be honest. People link themselves to another person regardless of all the negative side effects that come with it. I used to believe I was ace, but now I know I'm aromantic. Have you heard of it?"

"Yeah. You don't feel romantic feelings toward others, right?"

He stands up to pop his back and moves to lean against the doorway of our cell. “Pretty much.”

“I thought I was the same, honestly. Not in the sense that I put a label on it or tried to define it, but I didn’t think I loved the same as others until I met Joey.”

“Are you about to tell me that I just haven’t found the one?”

Chuckling, I shake my head. “Not at all, Tay. I think you know yourself well enough to know what’s going on inside your mind and heart. I was just sharing my experience with similar feelings, but even then I knew I was looking for something. I just didn’t know if I’d find it.”

His pale green eyes drop to the letter in my hands. “That from her?”

“Yeah,” I say with a soft smile. “And no, you can’t read it. You got enough material for your book.”

“Always open to more,” he replies, but I can tell he won’t push. “You said you guys only had a few months together? Were you still in that honeymoon stage?”

I nod, my gaze dropping to the letter before I tuck it under my mattress and follow him out of our cell to avoid getting emotional.

It’s rec time, which means it’s loud as fuck as we pass cards and dice games, making our way to where we can buy snacks and shit with our commissary. Joey makes sure I stay fed, but when I ask how much is on my books, my jaw drops at the number. It feels fucking unnecessary. “Are you sure?” I whisper sharply, glancing at Taylor in confusion and his face matches mine.

“I didn’t even know you could have over a thousand,” he admits.

“Is it all from my girlfriend?”

It takes her a moment to look into it further, giving me a long enough time to zone out on all the fingerprints staining the plexiglass. “It’s from varying sources,” she responds. “Josephine Moran put a thousand, but the rest are from your peers. It seems someone released your information.”

Holy shit.

Taylor repeats my thoughts aloud. “Holy shit. You can buy your own paper now.”

“I can probably buy all the paper,” I mutter, then wave a hand. “Pick whatever you want, Tay. My treat.”

He only hesitates a second before picking out multiple snacks and a new pack of pencils, then opens up a cinnamon roll a little too excitedly as I pay for all our shit. I get extra of everything sweet and set it out in the rec room, then take a seat to watch the tv.

Whoever was sitting here before me was watching the news, and as I expected they’re going over my case and the mountain of evidence the prosecution is claiming to have. They’re on the right track, yet none of their proof carries any weight. Yeah, that’s my handwriting, but I’m not the only person that curls their K’s in that fashion. Yeah, that coke bottle was mine, but I purposely put his fingerprints on it and they’ll never find mine. I wanted them to come to the conclusion that the bastard brought it upon himself, but unfortunately they’re too stupid to see it. They’re looking at my case through a foggy magnifying glass, and they aren’t even thinking about taking a step back. Everyone can clearly see I did it — and why I did, but with how they’re going about it they’ll never prove it.

I zone out slightly as they drone on about the way I cut everyone off months before

the murder, painting me out as a textbook weirdo that lost his shit, but I don't care. If anyone out there is watching this and believing their every word, I don't care how they view me. I only care how she views me.

“Oh shit, Killer. Look.”

My gaze snaps up to the tv in time to see her face, my eyes widening as I stand up like I might be able to actually climb through the screen and kiss her. She looks so beautiful I feel my feet moving closer of their own accord, the anger on her face only drawing me in more. I'd give anything to hold her again.

It takes me a moment to realize she isn't alone. Her parents are talking about how happy I've made their daughter and telling stories about me like it might help people see me as a human instead of a murderer. She must have shared these with them, because even though they're speaking about me like I'm their son-in-law, I've never actually spoken to them. I've never met them at all, and yet a stranger would never guess it.

She looks like her mother.

Aside from my mom, no one has ever had my back like this, and the emotions coursing through my body are almost too much to contain. One day I'll thank them. They've already done so fucking much for me I don't know how, but I make a promise to myself that I will.

When the interviewer brings up what people of my past have been saying about me, my girl snaps, letting everyone watching know that those people never truly knew me at all because they were always too wrapped up in themselves to get to know me. She's not wrong, and by the end she's practically screaming into the camera at every single person that spoke against me. “You're all fucking stupid and never deserved to know him!”

The camera pans away before she can cuss on live television again, and the smile on my face only fades when I turn around and find everyone in the room watching me. The card games are paused, inmates whose noses were buried in a book are staring, the guy that was coloring some abstract positive word of the day is frozen with a crayon in his hand. All of them look just as shocked as I feel.

I get the sense none of them have ever had a chance to feel that level of support, and I can't help but feel sorry for them. I'd have been no different if it wasn't for her. "You guys want some snacks? We have plenty."

I nod toward the loot we splayed out and sit on the couch again as a few of them make their way over to start a conversation, and once again I find myself thanking Joey. She's why I haven't lost my mind, my way, my heart, and now her support has me gaining friends here too. She's made my life better than anyone or anything before her, and if I ever go free again, I make a vow to do the same for her.

We're walking through hell right now, we just have to remember to keep on going. We'll make it to the other side eventually.

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 2:05 am

“Are we ready?” Violet asks, looking over our mom’s shoulder to meet my eyes. “Everyone?”

My heart is in my throat and my fingertips are shaking, but I nod as I look around the room. My parents are smiling softly, and Erin and Sarah — the two interns we borrowed from their company — look nervous, but ready. I fix my eyes on the clock. “It’s time. Five, four, three...”

On one, we each hit send. In the seconds that follow, I feel myself relax. We just told the world the truth. In a series of emails, interviews, and social media posts, we told the world who Senator Jack Lawson really was. It took days for us to get everything together, to coordinate with newspapers and reporters who were willing to hold our interviews until right now, draft the posts, and make sure every word will get past the censorship bots trying to stifle the truth.

Jack Lawson was evil. If the media wants to paint Killian as a vigilante, that’s fine. Instead of fighting it, we decided to lean into it. To show everyone who will listen exactly the kind of man Killian supposedly went after, while simultaneously trying to piece together the history and personality of a man who would never do such a thing.

He did it, of course he did. But thanks to my dad’s mathematical skills, my mom’s background in law, and the sheer willpower put forth by the rest of us, we’ve unraveled the evidence. The timeline doesn’t make sense. They never found the gun to match to the ballistics after searching the cabin, they have no paper trail putting Killian anywhere near the scene, and the pictures they released to begin with are too grainy to make a positive ID. Adding in the coke bottle that didn’t have his fingerprints and the two dozen people we’ve found who also loop their K’s, it’s all

circumstantial. And now that we've just made the crimes of Jack Lawson public knowledge, we've introduced a flurry of new suspects.

Motive won't get them across the finish line anymore.

Still shaking, I stand up from my computer and make my way to the kitchen to get a drink. It's only 1:00pm, but I think this calls for a little bourbon. Violet meets me there.

"Are you okay?" she asks, grabbing a glass for herself. "It won't be long now."

"I know. I just feel like shit that we waited so long. Donna told me to do this ages ago."

The bourbon burns my throat, but Vi pours me another glass anyway. "It wasn't safe. This isn't just about saving Killian, Joey. If Ryan figured out where you were while you were still alone, he could've killed you. But you're safe now, okay? You won't be alone again. Greg and the kids will be here in a couple of days and mom and dad aren't going anywhere either, so he'll have to get through all of us if he wants to get to you."

"He can try," my dad pipes up from the other room. "I owe him one. Bastard broke into my house."

"What?" I snap, forgetting my drink altogether as I rush toward him. "What do you mean he broke into your house?"

"Just as I said. He used the key in the planter on the porch to let himself in, the cameras caught him. Don't know what he was looking for since nothing was missing, but I'd still like to put a couple of holes in him just for being such a prick."

He was looking for me, I'd bet my life on it. Knowing I wasn't staying at home anymore, of course he'd think I went to my parents'. It never occurred to me to worry about it because they were overseas at the time. "Jesus. Did you call the police?"

"By the time we saw the footage, he was long gone. He planned it for the hours that we'd be asleep in Japan, but we filed a report for the trail."

My mother scoffs. "We would have panicked if we hadn't already heard from you and Vi, and with all of this we didn't want you to worry more about a man from your past. By now he knows you've moved on."

Which is exactly what I was afraid of, but they're right. Ryan isn't my concern right now. Killian is. "I'm sorry," I say softly. "I had no idea what kind of animal he really was. I'm sorry I brought him into your life."

"Oh, honey." My mother closes the distance to give me a hug. "Don't apologize. For what it's worth, I already like your prison boyfriend more," she jokes. "I feel it when I look into his eyes. Mothers know these things."

"Our Joey sure knows how to pick them," dad says teasingly, moving over to ruffle my hair. "Don't stress anymore, Buttercup. We'll be here with you until he's a free man. Then I'd like to look him in the eyes and thank him for bringing our daughter back to life."

Vi weasels her way into our weird little huddle, her arms wrapping around us to give us a squeeze. "I want in on this. It's been like twelve years since our family had a good group hug. We can thank Killian for this too."

Is that what he did? Bring me back to life?

I think of how scared I was when I left my home and went to the cabin, how

convinced I was I'd never love again. I was isolated and sad, with nothing to focus on and no direction.

He's changed... all of that.

"Thank you guys for believing us," I whisper, squeezing them tighter. "I know it was a big ask, especially since you know the truth. You didn't have to do any of this but I'll never stop being grateful."

My dad chuckles as he becomes the first to step back. "You know how we feel about the government. Fuck 'em. If you ask me, your boyfriend did this country a service. He should be rewarded, not thrown in jail."

"I'll cheers to that," Vi replies. "Hell, I say we start a petition to let him take out a few more. Too many corrupt people have power, and they need to learn everything has consequences. They're not untouchable."

"I may not like violence, but I agree," Mom says. "Si vis pacem, para bellum, right, babe? Nothing is free."

If you wish for peace prepare for war — Publius Flavius Vegetius Renatus.

My dad always did love that quote.

"Guys?" Erin interrupts, spinning her laptop around. "People are starting to respond on all platforms. My keyword alerts are going nuts."

Fuck. Here we go. Time to figure out if it worked.

Instead of crowding her, I grab my own laptop and search his name. Immediately I see even more support than I did earlier. Sure people are still hung up on how

attractive Killian is, but more people are looking into Lawson than before and painting Kill as not just some hot criminal, but a vigilante that took out someone who deserved it.

The senator's crimes are out now, and multiple people he worked with are coming forward to claim they had no idea, which means his inner circle is already imploding.

Good.

It almost makes up for the weird coil of jealousy I still feel. It's not Killian's fault, I know he loves me. Only me. But women are feral, especially on the internet, and it irks me. Maybe jealousy isn't the right word. Maybe it's territorial.

Yeah, that fits a little better. He's mine and I don't want to share him, even if this outcome is exactly what we were aiming for.

I just hope it actually helps.

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 2:05 am

Roo,

Fuck, I miss you so much. The view in here is dull and depressing, so I spend most of my free time with my eyes closed so I can imagine your face and that beautiful red hair. When you're not on the news, at least. I stared at this paper for a while trying to think of an adequate way to thank you for what you've done on my behalf, but I know you. You'll wave it off like it isn't a big deal so I decided not to go on about it and make you blush. All I'll say is I'd be lost without you, and how thankful I am can't be put into words. I'm the luckiest fucking guy in the world.

I'd do anything to see you again and cover you in cum, love. Steel said she's trying to work that magic, but whether she does or not, I'll be waiting for you. I still haven't spilled a drop without you and I don't plan on it. I only want to feel good with you. If you happen to play with those toys though, I'd like you to write out every detail you can. Just because I'm not doesn't mean I don't want you feeling good. I'm surrounded by nasty dudes, so my dick doesn't mind hibernation when you're not around.

Can you do me a favor and send me a photo of you? I'd like to kiss you goodnight at lights out every night if possible.

Oh, I almost forgot we're sharing stories. One time when I was thirteen, my school went on a field trip to the waterslides. There was this one slide that was so high no one wanted to do it. You stood on top of this trap door thing and it would drop you into the slide. I pretended that I wasn't scared, but in reality, I was so close to pissing myself I thought I might when the time came. It ended up being a situation like yours. It was the best damn slide there, and I did it so many times it convinced most of my

class to try it out. I guess I wasn't always a loner, huh?

Okay, so I'll try and think of a better story for you next time. Did your school take trips at all? When was your first kiss? I want to know it all even if it makes me jealous. I love you. Tell Gus I miss him too.

Killian

Setting his latest letter down after reading it yet again, I grab my response to him, the best picture of me Violet could take, and the same blanket I used last time.

This is it. The last time I'll get to see him before his trial starts in a couple of days. Jury selection is done, Donna has finalized his defense, and I think I've invented a few new emotions trying to deal with all of it. There's only one thing that matters right now — Killian.

It's a lot harder to sneak someone out of gen pop than it is solitary, so there are twice as many envelopes this time and they're all twice as thick, but I don't care. I'd pay anything to give us both a little comfort, even if we have to meet in the same musty, damp hallway we did last time.

They also make me wait longer, too. I'm beginning to think our plan failed when I finally see him coming around the corner, and much like last time, my heart seems to beat in sync with his steps.

He's in gray sweatpants this time and even from here, I can tell he got a haircut since I last saw him. It's still deliciously messy and probably grown out since the trim, but it's a little shorter than it was.

His face is just as scruffy and his eyes just as tired, but he's in one piece, and the smile he gives me is everything.

“There’s my girl.” He jogs over and kisses me hard, his cuffed hands falling to my lower back to cage me in. “Nice dress.”

It’s dark red this time, not black like Donna requested. “I brought the picture you asked for. I know it’s a little late, but things have been crazy. Are you okay?”

“Yeah. People are really nice here, believe it or not. To me, at least. I’ve been sharing commissary so I’m sure that’s why, but whatever.” I tuck the letter and photo into his pocket when he kisses me again. “How are things out there? Your family doing okay?”

“We’re fine, I promise. We’ve got a bit of a full house, but that’s okay. They’re all dying to meet you.”

He smiles a little wider. “So your dad doesn’t have any thoughts about your boyfriend being a convict?”

“Oh, that’s his favorite thing about you. He thinks you’re an American hero.” Wrapping my arms around him, I nestle my face against his chest. “Hopefully the jury will too.”

“I hope so.” His face presses into my hair. “I feel like I can smell you in my sleep and it wakes me up. Has my body searching for yours.”

“You’ll be home soon,” I promise, even as the fear that he won’t be creeps up my spine. “Do you want me to uh... y’know. Do a little jury tampering just to make sure?”

“I love you for offering, but no, baby. We just have to hope they don’t give me the death penalty, right?”

His joke falls flat, because that's the thing I'm most scared of. I can live with it if he's in here for ten years, twenty, even thirty. But if he's taken away from me altogether...

"Don't even say that," I whisper. "Don't. Donna's amazing, she's gonna get you off."

"She's not really my type. I'd rather you get me off instead." It's a better joke than the last one, but I roll my eyes at him playfully and pretend it isn't. "I'm kidding, Roo. I know she'll get me out of here because she has you. I'm not worried at all."

He's lying. I see the fear in his eyes as he studies my face like he may never see it again, and I'd be stupid to let this moment pass without saying a proper goodbye just in case.

Guards are much easier to bribe before conviction.

"I'll never stop fighting," I say instead. "They may overturn on appeal just because they're sick of me."

"I don't doubt it." Killian presses his forehead to mine. "We're almost there, Roo. You will sleep in my arms again, and once I'm out you'll never have to sleep anywhere else."

Nodding, I hold him a little tighter. "How long do you think we have?"

"I don't know. I was going to ask you to just climb inside my clothes so I can sneak you back in there."

He kisses my nose, then leans in closer to brush our lips together. It sends a spark through me I can't deny. I wanted this to be sweet, about our relationship, not just sex — but I get it. The fire, the drive. The fact that one little kiss woke me up to the point where I need him.

This is us too, passion and frenzy.

And it may be the last chance we get.

Biting his bottom lip, I wrap my arms around his neck and jump up, securing my ankles behind his ass as he catches me with cuffed hands.

I open for him with a moan, that skilled tongue swiping into my mouth as my back hits the wall, and what I feel pressing against my pussy has me grinding for more. “You need it, love? Need me inside of you?”

“Yes. Fuck, you have no idea what you do to me.”

“If it holds a candle to what you do to me, I have an idea. Think we have time? Fuck, my cock is searching for you.”

He’s not lying, I feel it twitching in desperation even before I reach down to palm him. My fingers slip as I pull him out and try to shove my panties to the side, but just as the head of his cock presses against my entrance, he pauses. “No, wait. Give me these panties first. I don’t want them to smell like me.”

He sets me down and makes quick work of it, then puts his cuffed hands back where they were so he can lift me up. “Eyes on me.”

Slowly, he inches inside. Butterflies race through my system as I struggle to make eye contact. It’s somehow so much harder when I know he wants me to, because I know what he’ll see in my eyes — need, devotion, and something too close to submission.

He tugs his bottom lip between his teeth and pushes in more, not breaking eye contact until he’s fully sheathed inside, and even then it’s only because he’s struggling to

keep his eyes open. “Fucking perfect,” he praises, making me whimper.

I know it makes me blush, I just have to hope he doesn’t see it down here in the dark.

“Blushing for me, love?” Of course he sees me, he always has. “So so beautiful.” He kisses both of my cheeks and begins moving, the space between our faces closing as he inhales my air like it’s all he needs in the world. “Tell me it’s still only me.”

How can there be anyone else?

“Only you. Never anyone else again.”

He releases a groan that’s so close to a whimper, my pussy clamps around him. God, I love how vocal he is.

“Only you for me, too. You got me, baby. All of me is devoted to you. Fuck, do that again.”

Grinning, I squeeze his cock and use the wall to brace myself as I ride him right here, his hips meeting every bounce as words evade us completely. There’s nothing we could say that could bring us any closer than we feel right now, and when he pulls me in and bares his neck, I know exactly what he wants me to do.

He wants me to mark him.

I don’t stop to wonder how it’ll look in court or how he’ll explain it in the morning, I don’t care. I’ve never done this before, not with anyone.

Not on purpose, anyway.

So it feels good sucking his skin, knowing he’ll look in a mirror tomorrow and

remember this. That he may wear my mark when he perp walks to the courthouse.

Holy shit, the orgasm that hits me shocks us both and every ripple of pleasure that shoots through my body shoves him closer to joining me. “Strangling me, baby. Fuck, you’re gonna make me blow already.”

As if in defiance, he begins fucking up into me even harder, and I have to cover my mouth to stifle the scream.

“Joey,” he growls. “Give me one more, I know you have more for me.”

When he nuzzles in and bites my throat, I grind on his cock like getting off might actually set him free, but it’s the way he grunts that sends me over. It’s such a sinful sound and all for me.

“That’s my girl. Gonna... fucking... come.”

He thrusts as deep as he can three more times before he releases with a groan that tells me he didn’t want it to end. I feel him pulsing inside of me until he stills, filling me up so much I know I’ll be just as much of a mess as last time whenever he decides to separate us. One look in his eyes tells me that won’t be any time soon, not if he has a say in it.

I wish he did.

“Stay with me here,” I whisper. “Right here.”

“I would.” His arms wrap around me a little tighter. “I’d leave with you right now if I knew I wouldn’t be fucking up your life even more than I already have.”

We could make it work. With a little money and a lot of stealth, we could disappear

— but then what? We'd never be free.

“You haven't fucked anything up,” I say firmly. “My dad said you brought me back to life, and he was right.”

“He did?” Killian pulls back to look at me, a ghost of a smile on his lips. “I can't wait to meet them.”

“Mmhm.” I kiss him quickly, then glance down between us. “I know I brought them up, but maybe we can find a better time to talk about my parents.”

He follows my gaze, pushing inside a little more with a full on smirk now. “Better get used to talking about everything like this, Roo. My dick is taking a stand, and I don't think I can get him out.”

Like I'd want him to anyway.

I wasn't kidding. I'd stay like this forever.

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 2:05 am

I'm not sure I'll ever be able to breathe again.

They won't let me in.

They won't let anyone in.

Killian is on trial for his life and he's not allowed support from a single human being.

Donna won't say it's my fault, but I have a feeling it is. The media circus we created when blasting Lawson's crimes out to the world created an almost unstoppable frenzy, to the point where it radicalized a lot of people. Some are calling for Killian's head, but a majority of people began demanding that he be set free, no questions asked. There were protests in the streets, a riot not far from the courthouse. They didn't really have a choice. Opening this trial to the public almost certainly wouldn't end well, and despite my best efforts to get Donna to put me on the witness list, she wouldn't. Apparently, she can't in good conscience allow me to commit perjury.

Fine.

I'll sit on this uncomfortable ass bench just outside the courtroom doors holding my nephew Noah like a lifeline while my sister looks at me like I'm nuts. "Don't judge me," I mumble.

"We're in a courthouse, Joey," she deadpans. "If I can't judge you here, where can I judge you?"

"Nowhere, that's the point. You're supposed to blindly support me."

She sighs, scooting closer and moving my niece Avery to her other side. “I do. But you know everything is going to be fine. From everything we’ve heard, the prosecution doesn’t have a leg to stand on.”

“When has that ever mattered?” I snap quietly. “People make their own decisions, and jury verdicts are rarely a reflection of the strength of the prosecution’s case. No one just says ‘oh, I think he did it, but the prosecutor didn’t bring enough evidence so I guess he’s innocent’ and you know that. It’s all biased.”

Violet nods as Avery speaks up. “But people like Uncle Killian, don’t they? Why would they think he did the bad thing?”

I don’t know what gets me more, the fact that she just called him Uncle Killian or the fact that she knows people like him. It makes my chest tighten, so I hand baby Noah over to Violet and pat my lap as Avery climbs up. “You know what, Av? You’re so right. People do like him, because he’s a likeable guy. You’re gonna love him.”

“I bet he’ll let you braid his hair,” Violet whispers, eliciting a joyous laugh from her daughter that sounds so out of place bouncing off these walls. “What do you think, Joey?”

The thought alone nearly makes my heart explode. “I think he’d love that. We’ll get bows and clips and you can make him look just as cute as you.”

Avery smiles widely, wrapping her arms around my neck. “I like Noah even though he does bad things.”

“What bad things?”

She pokes his little nose gently. “He pulls my hair and throws up.”

“Sounds like the men your mom dated in college,” I tease, earning a playful glare from my sister. I guess I deserve that. “You’re a smart kid, you know that? I don’t think I was half as smart as you when I was your age.”

“You weren’t,” Violet agrees. “You were scared of blankets, do you remember? You were convinced if you slept with one, it would wrap around your neck in the middle of the night, fling you off the bed and hang you.”

“What does hanged mean?”

Oh, god. “Nothing, sweetie. Your mom is just being silly.”

She’s not wrong though. I really was scared of everything, and it’s funny to me now that I’ve dealt with real-world problems and things that should actually terrify me. The blanket noose doesn’t seem so bad anymore.

We fall into silence until the courtroom doors open and a couple of people file out, but I can’t see Killian anywhere no matter how I strain my neck. Donna comes up a couple of minutes later looking grave. “Okay. I told you this would be a quick trial, right? I warned you?”

It can’t be over already. “Yes, but it’s only been a couple of hours. What the hell happened?”

“Nothing, we’re just breaking for lunch. We laid out our opening arguments and the prosecution began with their case. After lunch, we’ll hear from the prosecution’s experts. There are only two, so their side will likely rest today. Tomorrow it’ll be my turn, then our closing arguments, then it’ll be up to the jury.”

Killian’s life will be up to the jury, she means.

Forcing myself to stay calm, I nod. “And? How’s it looking so far?”

“I don’t know,” she says honestly. “I still don’t believe the prosecution has met the burden of proof, but the jury seems... undecided. Just based on body language, I’d say we have about a 70/30 shot at a not guilty verdict.”

That’s better than the reverse, but she was almost a hundred percent sure before the trial started. This isn’t good. “I understand. How is he? Is he holding up okay?”

For once, she smiles. “He’s holding his head high, staying calm, and doing everything he needs to be doing. I’ve never seen someone with so much poise in my life. It may be the thing that turns this in his favor. He’s coming across as confident but not arrogant, capable but not cruel.”

Of course he is. That’s my Killian. “Good. Thank you again, Donna. You’ve been incredible.”

“Don’t thank me until it’s over. Just hang tight, okay? I’ll come find you when we’re done for the day.”

Nodding, I watch her walk away and let my shoulders slump. “I knew the jury would be a problem. We should’ve never left the cabin that night.”

“So it would’ve happened the next time, anyway,” Violet reminds me. “You weren’t ever going to be able to stop this. Prolong it maybe, sure. But not stop it. If you ask me, it’s better this way.”

“Better? On what grounds? He’s in there fighting for his life while twelve strangers decide if he gets to go home or if he has to spend the rest of his life in prison. How is that better?”

“Because he did it,” she whispers, nearly inaudibly. “Whether we agree with him or not — which we do, don’t forget that — he did it. This was always going to be hanging over your head, grinding your lives to a stop. You’d have been setting yourself up for a lifetime of seclusion and fear. Were you ever going to bring a child into that world? A pet? What were you going to do if he got hurt, or sick beyond what soup and NyQuil could handle? I wouldn’t wish that life on anyone, let alone my sister. At least this way, one way or the other, you can really live again.”

She’s right. I hate it, but she is. The cabin was always a temporary solution, even before I realized Killian was there. And it’s not like I don’t have a plan if the worst happens and he goes to jail. As long as he doesn’t get the death penalty, anyway. Death row changes things. But without that, it’s not complicated. I’ll move out here permanently, we’ll get married. I’ll have access to conjugal visits, he can call me, I can visit as often as they’ll let me. I’ll make sure his commissary stays stocked and he’s well taken care of, and I’ll pay as many lawyers as I have to in order to ensure we exhaust every appeal effort. There’s also parole, if the sentencing doesn’t take it off the table.

So I have a plan. Either way, she’s right — life will begin again.

I’d just prefer he was out here with me to enjoy it.

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 2:05 am

Killian

“The senator isn’t the one on trial here. We’re here because a man decided to take the law into his own hands, and if we let that go, where does it end? I rest my case.”

As he takes his seat, I find it hard not to look over at Espn Finney — one of the best prosecutors in the state. He’s right. I did take the law into my own hands, and the world is better because of it. Where does it end? It ends with the upper percenters thinking twice before stepping on those they deem lesser than them.

But I can’t say that.

It’s surreal to be sitting here at my own closing statements after how many shows and movies I’ve watched. They portray it well and not so well all at the same time, because although they hit the cliff notes, they never talk about how many hours all of it takes. They don’t talk about the long pauses that only get broken up by someone’s dry cough, the chaos and confusion that goes on behind the scenes or how many recesses people actually have to take.

It feels like I’ve been sitting here for days with my chin held high when all I’ve wanted to do is lay it down and give up. I know this is all part of my dues, but goddamn, am I over it all. I thought I’d have Joey to look at in those moments where I was feeling hopeless, but with the media blast, they ensured the doors were closed. It left me with absolutely no support on my side, and Senator Lawson’s family on his.

If only I would have married her. I dismiss the thought as quickly as it comes, because although I absolutely want to marry that woman, I don’t want it to be like

this. I won't tie her to me if I'll never be free again, not even I'm that selfish.

When it's my lawyer's turn the next day, she immediately goes into all the holes the prosecution left in their case. She reminds them of all the possible suspects without ever saying any names, shows them the proof of how many people loop their K's like I do, and even ties some of those examples to people who work in Lawson's office. She reminds them where that evidence came from and how Krystal obviously held a grudge against me, making her an unreliable narrator. She shows everyone here why she has such a high rating in this field, and how if you go up against her, she will poke holes in every piece of your evidence without breaking a sweat. She's absolutely amazing, and I wouldn't have been able to even afford a consultation with her if it wasn't for Joey and her family.

"I ask each and every one of you to put yourself in Mr. Blake's shoes. His mother was the only family he had, and she died in his arms thanks to Senator Jack Lawson. Did my client go off grid a few months ago and cut ties with people from his past? Yes, he did. But it wasn't because he was hiding from the law, it was because he was hiding from his reality. In the middle of nowhere Washington, this young man decided to start anew in a place where he wasn't reminded of the mother he lost, a place where after everything he endured, he opened up his heart and found love. Can you say without a reasonable doubt that he deserves to have that stripped from him? After everything this world has taken from him, the prosecution stands here and demands more."

She clicks a button on her remote and shows the jury a photo of my mom and me completely soaked from the rain, the image punching me in the gut even though she previously warned me she'd be using it. I remember that outing clearly because it was the day she was taken from me.

"Don't send an innocent man to prison because the prosecution is desperate for a scapegoat. Killian Blake isn't guilty of murder, his only crimes are loving his mother

so much he had to run from her ghost, and having blue eyes that may or may not resemble the perpetrator depending on the angle of the grainy photo evidence they have. We don't convict people for cutting off old classmates and ex girlfriends, and we do not convict people for having pretty eyes."

I feel a tear slide down my cheek and do my best to discreetly wipe it away before anyone can see it as I tune out the rest of her closing statement.

I don't want their sympathy. If a jury of my peers decides that I'm guilty and deserve to be in prison, then so be it. I may not be admitting my guilt in this courtroom, but that doesn't mean I don't carry my sins with me everywhere I go. I killed him, fully aware I might rot in prison for the rest of my life if I was ever caught, but the prospect of that being my future now bothers me. Not because I don't deserve it, but because of her.

Joey doesn't deserve it.

We found each other in the darkest time of our lives, became each other's light, and the thought of leaving her out there in the darkness all alone might kill me.

So no, I don't want their sympathy, but it would be nice if they saw this crime for exactly the karma it was. If they decided the crime was justified, or the prosecution was just plain weak. I don't really care which, I just need them to let me go home to my woman.

We can disappear to our cabin and live out our days in the only place we've ever truly felt home.

I'll carry the weight of my skeletons no matter where I live, but with her by my side, those bones are far less crushing than they are when we're apart.

When everything is said and done and the jury files out with my life in the palm of their hands, I find myself wishing Joey was in here with me once again. I've needed her presence to help me breathe during this court hearing more than a few times, so once again, I close my eyes and imagine her sitting right behind me in support.

I wouldn't be here at all if she and her family didn't rally behind me, and for that, I will forever be grateful they have my back. I just hope I get to thank them in person soon and one day prove to them it was all worth it.

That I'm worth it.

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 2:05 am

The coffee in my mug is cold as I take another sip, knowing it won't do anything to wake me up or make time move faster. I feel like I've been on this bench for months just waiting for the end, for the gavel to fall and this to be over. People have come and gone, both supporters and people telling me I'm crazy for loving a killer, family and strangers alike. My capacity for small talk has long since been met, and as much as I need my family here, I know they need sleep.

The jury has already been deliberating for days.

It's been wild watching all the people show up to wait. Influencers, journalists, people from his past who spoke out against him. Even Krystal showed her face for a few minutes — but one look at mine had her heading for the door. Good. I'm not above beating a liar's ass in a courthouse.

None of these people care the way that I do. They stayed for a few hours, maybe a day. Some came back the second day. But now at the end of day four, I'm one of the only people left. I don't want to go home again without knowing. I don't want another sleepless night where people try to force me to eat or shower. I want this to be over. So when Donna comes out with her briefcase, I have hope — right up until she shakes her head.

"Not today," she says again. "I'm sorry, Joey."

"What's taking so long? I don't understand. You said the prosecution failed to make their case. What could they possibly be arguing about in there?"

She leads me toward the door with a sad expression. "I told you. I did the best I

could, but I think at least a couple of the jurors didn't like him. Bentley agrees with me."

Bentley Morgan is her second chair, one who has seemed rather useless so far, but he's another set of eyes inside. If they both agree that some of the jurors hate him, it's probably true.

"Why did you help him?" Stopping just outside the main doors, I turn to face her. "I know it's not about the money because you insisted you wanted to talk to him first. The money didn't matter."

"I chose to help him because he didn't strike me as the cold-blooded killer type, and I believe in our justice system. I know he says he did it, but people make false confessions all the time whether they're trying to get clout or protecting someone they love. Occasionally, people even make false confessions to convince themselves that they had a hand in bringing about justice. So I didn't care that he said he did it. I cared about the evidence against him and making sure that he was given a fair trial, one way or the other. I did my best to ensure that. The rest is up to the jury."

This is why I think the concept of a jury is bullshit. Human beings can't be objective enough, it's not possible. Most don't have the nuance needed to understand the laws or the reason required to put aside their own feelings. I'd personally never be able to. Life is just messier than that. I'd like to tell myself that if I heard some incriminating evidence that the judge then ordered me to disregard, I'd disregard it, but I know I wouldn't. You can't unhear things. You can't just erase knowledge from your mind in the blink of an eye. I know it's still a better system than allowing a single judge to decide things when judges can be bought, intimidated, or corrupt, but still.

She believes in our justice system.

I guess I don't.

“The jury is back,” Donna announces, pocketing her cell phone and heading toward the courtroom doors. “There’s no media in there so you’ll have to wait until someone comes out. I doubt I’ll be able to right away, but I can send Bentley out as soon as we know.”

I feel like a newborn deer trying to follow her on shaky legs. “Yes. Yes, go. Fuck. Okay.”

Adrenaline overtakes my system as two burly guards stop me from sneaking in, and I’m forced to head back to my least favorite bench to wait. My fingertips feel useless as I try to send a text to our family group chat that it’s time, now six and a half days past the closing arguments.

It’s finally time.

The next ten minutes seem to drag on for a dozen lifetimes as I stare at the door in front of me. More people are gathering inside again, and I bet the crowd outside is already getting insane. I know I should probably be out there with them holding signs and chanting or whatever it is they’re doing, but this is personal for me. It’s private. And as that door finally opens again, I have to admit I’m glad I’m alone.

“Well?” I demand, practically rushing the poor man before he can even get halfway to me. “What happened? What’d they say?”

He exhales hard as a smile breaks out across his face. “Not guilty on all counts. I’ve gotta get back in there, but Miss Steel wanted you to know.”

“Wait!” I yell as he starts to retreat. “What happens now? Where will he go?”

The doors shut and the guards block me again as chaos erupts around me. I wasn't the only one who heard, and as word spreads, things get crazier.

I just don't care.

Not guilty. My phone drops from my hands as my knees hit the marble floor beneath me. All the air leaves my lungs as all the blood in my body rushes south, making me dizzy.

Not guilty.

He's free.

We did it.

Nausea rolls in my stomach as my body tries to adjust to the receding adrenaline, but I can't get to my feet until Violet rushes to my side and picks me up. "We were waiting outside since you said you wanted to be alone. Are you okay? Joey?"

"I—" Am I okay? I should be, this is what I hoped for. What I begged for. "I think so. Just a little lightheaded. He's free, Vi. He's free."

"Yes! Oh, fuck yes." She hugs me quickly, then steps back and starts looking around. "Where is he then? Can he come home today?" she asks, like I have any answers at all. "Call Donna! I know sometimes defendants have to go back to prison to be processed out but sometimes they're just let go."

Gathering myself, I snatch my cell phone off the floor and try a dozen times to get ahold of Donna Steel. Each call goes straight to voicemail. Violet pushes me out the back entrance to get some air before I have a panic attack right there in the courthouse, but her efforts almost immediately backfire.

The transit van is leaving. “What the fuck?” I yell, racing after it on foot. “Killian?!”

“Let’s go, come on!” Violet grabs me and drags me toward the car. “I just told you he’d likely have to go back to be processed out. Let’s just go to the prison and wait for him there.”

“What if the van was empty and he’s still here?”

She huffs. “Okay. Call Donna again.”

I try twice more, but don’t get through.

“I’ll stay,” she offers. “Take the car and go to the prison, because I’m absolutely positive that’s where he’ll be. But I’ll stay here until I get confirmation just in case, because he shouldn’t be alone when he gets out. Go.”

Nodding, I snatch the keys and take off toward the car, trying to keep an eye on the van as it exits the parking lot and gets on the road. Traffic is so ridiculous that I lose sight of the van more than once, and by the time I actually get to the prison, I’m sure it beat me here by quite a while.

All I can do, once again, is wait.

And wait. And wait.

I think the soles of my shoes wear down the pavement by the time I see any movement at the prison entrance, but when I do, I nearly sob with relief.

Killian. No cuffs, no prison garb, no shackles or chains.

Just Killian.

Immediately he begins running toward me, meeting me halfway just in time to catch me as I launch myself into his arms. “You did it,” he breathes into my hair, squeezing me tighter. “You set me free.”

It wasn’t me, but I’m so happy to be hugging him in the daylight again that I won’t argue. “They can’t come after you ever again,” I promise him, kissing the hell out of his face. “It’s over.”

His mouth presses into mine once, twice, three times and suddenly I’m being pressed against my car and he’s smiling against my lips. I didn’t even realize we had been moving. “I love you, Joey. I’ve been dying to say those words without handcuffs and now I finally can. Be my fucking girlfriend, woman.”

“Yes,” I rush out, kissing him fiercely as a relieved laugh bubbles out of me. “Yes. I’ll be whatever you want me to be.”

“Good girl. You’re gonna be my wife one day, but I’ll take this for now. Long as you stay mine. No take backs.”

I can feel happiness radiating off of him, an echo of my own.

And this time, no one can take it from us.

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 2:05 am

Killian

The house she told me about in letters is even nicer than I imagined, but it's hard to focus on that when all I can think about is meeting her family for the first time. These people had my back in a time I didn't expect to have anyone, and the words "thank you" just don't feel sufficient.

It's been so long since I've been around a family that I don't even know how to act. I feel like I need a shower to wash off prison, but thanks to the haircut Kev gave me and the dressy outfit Joey got me for court, I at least look like someone attending a dinner. It doesn't take much for me to recognize these feelings aren't about how I look or even how I act, I'm just... nervous to meet them.

"Go over their names for me one more time, love. The kids are Noah and Avery?"

She watches me drum my fingers on the steering wheel anxiously before reaching over to squeeze my leg. "Yes. My sister is Violet, her husband is Greg. My parents are Moses and Sheri, and not one of them will blame you if you don't know their names by heart. It's okay, baby. I promise."

I nod, taking her hand in mine to bring it up to my lips. "I may not know their names, but I already love them all."

"They love you too. You'll see."

Her blinding smile helps put me at ease enough to climb out of the car. She makes it all the way around to me before I can finish smoothing out my collar in my reflection,

but I only smile a little wider at her chuckle. “Alright, let’s go meet my new family.”

I tug her hair teasingly as we begin walking, relishing the way she bites her lip and tells me to behave.

I will... but not for long.

It’s not even my fault.

Thankfully for her, the door opens before we even reach it and Violet rushes out to launch herself at me.

I’m knocked back by a force that shouldn’t be possible from a woman her size, but I hug her back without hesitation. She’s the one that’s brought my girl comfort all her life, and because of that, I fucking admire her. “Hey, Vi. Thank you for being there for my Roo.”

“Your what?” she laughs, stepping back to get a better look at me as a little girl with wavy brown hair nearly trips trying to get closer. “Roo?”

“Long story,” Roo mutters, scooping Avery up to hold her. “Say hi, baby girl.”

She eyes me skeptically for a moment. “Are you Uncle Killian?”

Uncle. I’ve always wanted to be an uncle, and now I can be because this family has welcomed me with open arms. It feels so damn good I struggle to find the words. “Uh... yeah.” I clear my throat. “I’m Uncle Killian. You must be Avery, I’ve heard so much about you.”

She beams, wiggling forward to throw her arms around my neck. “Yay!”

I look to her mom for permission before I take her into my arms. “It’s nice to meet you. You wanna introduce me to everyone?”

“Mmhm.” She points to her mom. “That’s Mom.”

“Hi, mom.” I’ve been here less than two minutes and my cheeks already hurt from smiling. “Where’s dad?”

Avery leans around Violet and points. “He’s over there being a stink.”

Suddenly, a man with a full beard pops around the corner with a sheepish expression, one that doesn’t at all match his burly appearance.

He’s a big dude, and that’s coming from me. “I’m Greg,” he says. “I was trying not to overwhelm you. I know how... welcoming my wife can be.”

She sticks her tongue out at him as my girl’s parents join us. After I shake his hand, I let Avery climb into his arms as I face my future in-laws.

Joey definitely takes after her mom, but I can see her in her Moses’ hazel eyes. They’re both wearing warm expressions that have me feeling at ease even when he shakes my hand a little harder than Greg did, and when Sheri pulls me in for a tight hug, I linger there a little longer wishing my mom could be a part of this. “Thank you both for supporting me when you didn’t have to. I can’t even begin to tell you how much I appreciate everything.”

“Thanks for doing the Lord’s work,” Moses laughs, nudging me with his elbow. “Fuck that guy.”

“Dad!” Violet covers Avery’s ears, but it’s too late. Her shocked expression says she heard him loud and clear.

I can't help but laugh and toss him a little shrug. "Yeah, I agree."

We make our way into the living room where I meet Noah. It's obvious he was slowly making his way over to where all the noise was coming from, and when he pauses to look up at me, I feel my chest tighten. He's so fucking cute it hurts. "Hey, buddy." I kneel down to his level and take his tiny hand. "Man, you got a grip, huh? I know you're the one I have to answer to here, so I give you my word I'll take care of your auntie, okay?"

He just stares at me with giant brown eyes, but slowly breaks out into a cheeky smile, his soft dark curls falling over his forehead. I think that means I have his approval.

"Are you hungry?" Sheri asks. "You have to be, prison food is hot garbage on a good day. Come eat. Joey said you like a good steak."

Yeah, I think I've fallen in love with this whole damn family. "Did she also tell you I'm always hungry?"

I lift him up and follow her to the kitchen, the delicious smells of real food making me cuss under my breath, and when Noah repeats it, I fear they might toss me right out the window. "Damn. Damn. Damn."

Damn is right, kid.

"Oops. My fault."

I meet Vi's narrowed gaze and hand him over, but she softens as everyone starts to sit down. "My kids will grow up to be heathens because of you."

"Like you've never said anything inappropriate in front of them," Roo laughs. "Just the other day, you—"

“Alright!” Violet blushes, mouthing for her sister to shut up. “Are the baked potatoes ready?”

“Yes, they are. Come grab the toppings to set on the table,” Sheri says, shoos me away so I can’t help.

I take a seat next to Joey and instantly grab her thigh. I’m not trying to deliberately start something here at the table, but I feel that touch all the way through my body. “I missed you.”

I lean in and kiss her nose, catching the little hitch in her breath as she meets my eyes. “I missed you too. But no one can take you away from me now.”

“Nope. Stuck with me, and we both know I’m not afraid to tie you up,” I joke, then sit up a little straighter when I realize Greg absolutely heard that. Oops. At least he laughs.

Did I mention it’s been a while since I’ve had to behave around family?

My fingers dance a little higher up on her thigh before everyone finally sits and I’m forced to use both hands to cut the most delicious looking steak I’ve ever seen.

“It’s medium rare,” Moses grunts. “If you don’t like it, well... maybe you should eat tofu.”

The playfulness in his eyes lightens his delivery, but I hear him loud and clear. “It’s the only way I’ll take it. Anything more may as well be rubber.”

“Good man.” Satisfied, he turns to Roo. “Don’t fuck it up.”

Her jaw drops. “Me?! Tell that to him!”

“Look at him, Joey. He knows what he’s got. Don’t you?”

“Absolutely,” I say without a single doubt. “I may have made some questionable decisions in my life, but this right here I’ll never question. I’ll work every day to show her I know what I have... even in the mornings when she has that messy bun and she’s yelling at me until she has coffee.” I miss that so much.

“He’s got your number,” Sheri teases. “God, she was a nightmare as a teenager.”

“I can imagine.” I laugh even though she’s pouting at me, and it only makes me fall a little more. “She can yell at me all she needs. I’m not going anywhere.”

“Will you guys stop talking now and let the poor man eat?” Roo’s cheeks are deep red as she grabs a steak knife. “He had prison slop for breakfast.”

“Actually, this is my first meal today.” My appetite this morning — this whole week actually — has been nonexistent. “Steel forced me to eat a protein bar though, and I swear it tasted like sand. Please don’t judge me if I eat like an animal.” Or a prisoner.

None of them judge me at all. In fact, they seem happy to watch me enjoy real food for the first time in months, and when I finish well before everyone else, I get to put my hand back on my girl and tease her a little.

It’s impressive how well she keeps the conversation going even as she spreads her legs further for me, but I screw myself over the moment I graze her pussy.

My cock wants more.

Hell, it needs more, and we’re not going to survive if we have to wait for her family to head out. That might not even be today.

Maybe we can be quiet enough.

“Where’s the bathroom, love? Can you show me real fast?” I meet her eyes so she knows exactly what I need, but if she understands, she doesn’t show it.

Her movements are flawless as she stands and sets her napkin down. “The good one is upstairs. It has a bidet.”

I definitely don’t need that right now, but it’s better if they believe I do, so I don’t argue as I let her lead me up the stairs. And I damn sure don’t keep my hands to myself.

When we reach the bathroom, I tug her inside with me and close the door, lifting her up on the vanity so I can slot between her legs.

God, I love the fact that she wore a dress today.

“Killian,” she gasps. “They’ll hear us!”

“You’ll have to be quiet for me, Joey. You think you can do that?”

Painfully slowly, I drag her panties down her smooth legs without breaking eye contact.

She licks her lips slowly as she nods. “I can try.”

“That’s my good girl.” The second she’s bare for me, I inhale her scent and drop down for a taste, finding her hot and ready for me at the first swipe of my tongue. I can’t linger there like I want to, but I go until I feel her body tensing and then stand to free myself. “How much time do you think we have?”

Before she responds, I step in and slide inside her, the overwhelming sensation of coming home hitting me all at once and making me melt into her.

“Fuck it,” she whispers, curling one arm around my neck as she braces on the counter with the other. “Take what you need, baby. However long it takes.”

What I need is for her to promise me forever, but as I slowly slide in and out of her, I realize I don’t need to hear those words. She’s shown me every single day since we decided to take this leap, and every kiss she gives me is laced with that promise. This incredible woman has chosen me, and she isn’t the type to turn her back on someone once she’s opened her heart to them — especially if they give her that same devotion in return. “I love you. You feel like home.”

I crash my mouth to hers and pick up the pace, swallowing the moans she lets out as I drive myself deeper.

“I love you too,” she whispers between kisses, clenching around me as her body trembles.

“Wanted this every single day we were apart, love. I can still say without a doubt that I will never get sick of this. I’ll crave you in the afterlife, and even then you’ll be my captive.”

I told her to be quiet for me and here I am moaning into her ear like we’re the only ones in the house. Her hand clamps over my mouth as she leans back, lips parted in pleasure, and she’s so damn beautiful I almost blow at the sight.

With her hand muffling the noises, I get a little louder as I fuck her harder against the vanity, but suddenly, I want something much different.

I need her to see what I see.

Stepping back, my cock throbs in protest as I pull out of her. “Turn around. Don’t make a fucking sound.”

Her eyes widen for a moment, but she hops off the counter and spins for me anyway. “What are you going to do to me?”

“I want you to watch yourself take it,” I growl as quietly as I can, pushing her dress up above her beautiful ass and slapping the skin. It’s too loud and I know it, but the way her body reacts is worth it. “Eyes on me.”

She glances up at the mirror as I shove myself inside of her again, so close to the edge I wish I’d have thought of this sooner. But here, I can see the slender curve of her neck, the way her dress teases what’s underneath, and the desperation on her face.

And she can see it, too.

“Go ahead, Joey,” I whisper, leaning in to ghost the words against her ear. “Tell me not to come inside you.”

Her breath catches as her pussy strangles my cock, but she shakes her head. “Fuck that, baby. Fill me up. Send me back to dinner with your cum dripping down my thighs.”

I hit the edge so fast I barely have time to grab a fistful of her hair to make her watch. It’s so fucking hard to stay quiet as I pump her full that I know I fail, and the desperate little whimper she lets out isn’t exactly quiet either.

Oh, well.

“Thank you,” Roo laughs. “I needed that.”

“Me too.”

I get her cleaned up and pocket her panties, then follow her back down to the dining room with a sheepish expression.

“We heard that,” Violet mutters. “We all heard that.”

Roo just shrugs as she takes a seat again, and I can’t find it in me to worry about it. Maybe I’ll care later about the way her dad struggles to meet my eyes again, but right now, all I feel is bliss.

Right now... all I feel is free.

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 2:05 am

No one comes here. No one. Not neighbors or delivery drivers, not friends or family. No one comes to our cabin in Windwinter. So when I walk in the front door to see lights on, my blood runs cold.

Killian's still outside trying to wrestle all of our bags out of the car, I can hear him cussing out there. My parents flew out last night to go back overseas and Violet had to get the kids home and back into a routine, so it's not any of them. Who the fuck is in my house?

With my heart beating wildly in my chest, I scramble forward to grab my gun from the side table, but I'm met with hard resistance just before I can get to it. I'm thrown sideways as I hear a triumphant laugh, and the scream dies in my throat as I look up to see Ryan pointing a gun at me.

Again.

"I knew you'd come back eventually."

Fuck. Fuck! My eyes flick to the side table I was trying to reach, but he's standing between us. I can't reach it. Killian's shotgun is closer, but there's no way I get to it before he fires. "What the fuck do you want, Ryan? How the hell did you even find me?"

"Oh, it's a fun little story, actually. I knew your parents were out of town, so I let myself in with the spare key they keep in the planter. I was looking for money, maybe some jewelry. What I found was much better."

I wait for him to continue, but he doesn't. His eyes are fixed toward the front window.

"You're not alone? I should've fucking known."

Killian. He didn't know. After all the news stories, he still didn't know. "I'll never be alone again, and this one already escaped murder charges once. I can't wait to watch him do it again."

Cussing under his breath, Ryan orients himself to face the door, keeping his gun trained on me. "I'm going to assume he won't be walking in with a gun, so I'll take him out first. It won't make any difference to me."

"Oh?" I press, biding time and raising my voice as loudly as I dare. "Don't you want to gloat about how you found me first?"

"Family photos. Ones I've never seen before, of course. Ones they didn't want anyone to see. You, your bitch sister, and your parents right here in this little cabin. I always wondered where you ran off to with them. I have to admit, it made me a little jealous," he laughs, cold and almost maniacal. "But that's okay. I'm a big boy. With the mountains in the background, it wasn't hard to find you. The internet is a wondrous place. And now, I've got you all to myself, and no one even knows you're here except the walking dead man."

There's no way in hell we just survived everything we did for Ryan to end up killing us. I won't let it happen. "So now what?" I ask, still trying to stall. "You kill us both and go back to your miserable life?"

Slowly, I start moving toward the kitchen, pausing only when he raises the gun a little higher.

“Relax. If you’re going to kill me, I’d like a drink first. Feel free to shoot if you see me reaching for a knife.”

Ryan scoffs, but follows me, flicking his eyes toward the door every few seconds. What the hell is taking Killian so long? “Pick up a drinking problem?”

“Not at all. Wouldn’t you want to take the edge off a bit before you’re sent into the afterlife?”

He doesn’t seem to have an argument as I pour a shot of tequila. “You rich bitches think you’re so clever. You think your money will hide you, but I found you. And you know what? I don’t think I will kill you. Not yet, anyway. You’re not nearly terrified enough.”

”Because I don’t fear you anymore,” I say coldly, downing the shot and slamming the glass on the countertop. “Men like you are all the same. You think guns make you strong, that the dick between your legs makes you better than everyone else. You can overpower me, sure. You can kill me. Hell, you probably will kill me. But what does that say about you? How does shooting an unarmed woman half your size make you strong, or powerful, or worthy of anything?”

“Who said I’m going to shoot you? I have much bigger plans for your body, Jo. It would be a shame to put bullet holes in it so soon.”

The ice in his tone sends a chill down my spine, but one I won’t show on my face. He turns his back to the front door just like I wanted him to.

Over his shoulder, I see Killian creeping toward us with a gun in his hands. Here we go.

“Ryan, just get on with it. Okay? Your games are boring. I get it. You’re mad at me

and you need to hurt me in order to get a boner again. I've had better sex humping a pillow, so—”

He slaps me across the face so hard, my teeth rattle. “You want me to get on with it? Fucking fine. You’ll beg me to kill you soon enough.”

The gun clatters to the floor as rough hands tear at my clothes, but before he can remove any of them Killian cocks the shotgun and steps closer. “I suggest you take your hands off of her in the next two seconds. I won’t ask again.”

Ryan jerks away in shock, giving me enough time to scramble backwards, and Killian nods to his side like he’s beckoning me over. “Use your foot to push away his gun, Joey. Don’t leave prints.”

Fuck that. If he dies, I want the world to think it was me.

Yet I do what he asks, almost giddy at the look on Ryan’s face. “You said I wasn’t scared enough to die yet. Are you?”

“You really brought that fucking murderer with you?” he spits.

Killian releases a breath when I’m safe at his side, then takes a step forward to hit Ryan in the mouth with the barrel, never moving his finger from the trigger. “I’m the man with the gun now and that’s all that matters. You danced around it when you thought you were in control, but I want you to say the words. What did you plan on doing to her body?”

As much as I love seeing Ryan scared and bleeding on the floor, I still shiver from the ice seeping from Killian. He doesn’t even sound the same as he stares down at my ex fiancé unblinkingly, and I have to wonder if this is what Senator Lawson saw just before he died.

I hope it is.

“I-I—” Ryan stutters, then drops his shoulders with a scowl. “Fuck it. I was gonna take her, then show her what happens to bitchy little girls who don’t respect their betters.”

My stomach churns at the thought.

“That’s what you think you are? Her better?” His grip tightens. “Are you better because you’re in debt? Because you’re so pathetic you refuse to get a job and instead harass a woman that wants nothing to do with you? Because you can overpower her? Rape her?”

His voice rises with the last one, his emotions getting the best of him as he hits Ryan again.

The crunch of his nose breaking makes me smile.

What the hell does that say about me?

“The fuck!” Ryan yells, covering his face and trying to scoot backward. “Alright, fuck! I’m sorry, just let me go!”

“You scurried into the wrong hole this time, rat. You will not terrorize her anymore. Joey... I don’t want to take this from you, but I need you to tell me what you want.”

What do I want? I want to hurt him. I want to claw his fucking eyes out and cause enough pain that he begs me to just kill him, and then I want to hurt him some more.

“Keep him there. I’ll be right back.” Pivoting, I race to get my handgun from the side table and make sure it’s loaded and ready to fire, then walk back into the kitchen

knowing exactly what I'm going to do. "Any last words?"

"You're not going to shoot me. Fuck you. Those are my last words."

Killian steps forward like he's about to hit him again, but regardless of the fact that he's trembling, he gains control again. He really is letting me decide Ryan's fate on my own.

And now I'm even more tempted to shoot him.

"You're right," I say instead, pulling my cell phone out of my pocket and waving it at him. "I'm going to do something much worse for you."

"You're not gonna do shit unless you want your little boyfriend to go right back to prison. He assaulted me!"

"I'd do much worse if it was up to me," Killian says coldly. "Your life means nothing to me, and I'd gladly go back to jail if it meant you were in the fucking ground. Look at her face. You assaulted her first, and I have every right to defend my woman."

Grinning, I add, "Not to mention, you were caught breaking into my parents' house. There's a police report for that, and for all the times you've stalked and hurt me in the past. And this time, we're not in a house with your name on it. As of two days ago, this cabin belongs to me and me alone. So I think that will mean quite a few charges, don't you?" I look to Killian. "You're the expert, but I'd say this would include stalking, breaking and entering, attempted rape, attempted murder, and..." I glance around, noticing the dishes in the sink. "Robbery, too. That should put him away for a while, don't you think?"

With a tense jaw, Killian nods. "Too bad he's not going to Blackridge. I made more than a few friends in there that would love to meet a rapist."

I'm sure he'll have a good time wherever he goes, and honestly? I don't care what happens to him from here.

The last thing standing between me and a happy, healthy future is about to go to prison for a very long time.

As I call the police and give them the address, I feel a weight lift off my shoulders. This is how I want to live my life — not with pain and suffering, but with peace.

The sirens drawing nearer illustrate just how close we are to that peace.

“I won, Ryan,” I say as his face goes white and the police knock on the door. “I finally fucking won.”

Source Creation Date: August 7, 2025, 2:05 am

Sunsets are beautiful. Stunning, even. I've seen my fair share of them over the years, but nothing compares to a sunrise on our front porch. There's nothing but land, trees, and mountains as far as the eye can see, and the orange and pink hues painting the horizon are almost enough to steal my breath.

It's been ten years and he finally convinced me to wake up early enough to see one. "Okay," I relent softly, tipping my coffee mug toward him. "You win. Sunrises might be superior."

His body is facing me more than the view, and before he even opens his mouth, I know he's about to say something cheesy. "Still doesn't compare to your beauty."

"Mmhm," I hum, reaching over to take his hand. "How long have you been holding that one in?"

"Since I first sat out here and watched the sunrise while Jude ran around being crazy," he says, watching him climb the same tree now. It's crazy to think he'll be seven this year. "Our favorite little accident."

Ahh, yes. Three months after we decided we weren't going to have kids, I got pregnant. He's the best whoopsie I've ever had in my life, but the older he gets, the more I'm reminded why we didn't want kids. He's the spitting image of his father with startling blue eyes and messy dark hair, but his attitude is all Mama. It's like arguing with a miniature version of myself, only this one can already beat me at arm wrestling.

It just worked out Violet got pregnant a few weeks after.

“Think they’re almost here?” I ask.

“Probably. Jude’s been dying to hang out with Nick even though it’s only been like three days.”

And he’s been dying to hang out with Greg, but I won’t tease him about his bromance. Not yet anyway.

“They act like it’s been a lifetime. Maybe for them, it has been. I don’t really remember what time was like back then, just that it never really seemed to move fast enough.”

“And now it won’t slow down,” he finishes. “I still can’t believe it’s been ten years since that verdict, and I still dream about it like it was yesterday.”

I squeeze his hand a little tighter. “I know. But that’s why we’re celebrating today. Ten years since you got away with murder.”

I’m utterly incapable of hiding a giddy, almost insane smile, just like every other time I make a joke like that. It really isn’t as funny as I think it is, yet he chuckles alongside me and leans in to kiss my cheek. “Killed the bad guy, got the girl. Man, I made out.”

“Luckiest bastard in the world.” Suddenly, my jaw goes slack. “Wait a minute, am I still your prisoner? You never actually formally set me free.”

“And I never fucking will.” He tugs my hand closer to him and squeezes it tighter. “I know what I got, and you’re not going anywhere, Roo. I’m just as obsessed with you as I was the day I laid eyes on you — actually more, because now I can’t live a day without you, so I’ll lock your ass up if I have to. You’re my captive for life.”

My stomach still flips when he says things like that, and I don’t think it’ll ever stop.

It also means it's time for my favorite game.

As nonchalantly as I can, I wiggle my hand free and then take off at a run, down the porch steps and into the front yard.

The grass is cool under my bare feet, the wind even colder whipping through my hair, but I'm alive. I'm free and I'm alive, running from a man who I can't wait to catch me.

When he does, he lays me softly on the ground, and the explosion of color above his head makes him look like art.

"Whoops," I tease. "I guess you're still faster than me."

"Even if I wasn't, I'd never stop chasing you," he admits, leaning in to kiss my nose. "I don't know how I got so lucky, Joey. Fuck... marry me."

"Marry you?" I snort. "We're already married, Killer."

"I don't care. Do it again." His voice is deadly serious, but the playful expression on his face is priceless. "Every day I wake up wanting to marry you again because I still choose you. I told you I'd never get sick of this and I meant it."

It took me a while to truly believe him. Longer than I'd like to admit, actually. But he's still as obsessed with me as he was that first week in Windwinter, and I swear it's only gotten stronger.

I guess it's true what they say that when it's right, the honeymoon phase never ends.

"Fine. Donna's a judge these days and she'll be here for our celebratory dinner, so we'll ask if we can renew our vows. Good enough?"

“It’ll do for now,” he jokes, leaning in for a much slower kiss, and as we hear tires crunch along the gravel of our drive I know our sweet morning is about to become chaotic.

Greg honks his horn at us as my sister yells out how gross we are, echoed by our son yelling “Eww” as he streaks across the yard to greet his cousins.

Whatever. I’ll never be upset that Killian is showing Jude how real men treat women. Not today, not ever.

It’s one of the things that makes him such a good dad.

Getting up, I high-five Avery and ruffle Noah’s hair just to hear him complain. Nick is already chasing Jude into the house.

“Come on in, guys. Mom, Dad, and Donna aren’t coming until later.”

The second all the kids are out of earshot, Greg responds. “It’s only because they hope you two get the bathroom sexy time done and over with before they arrive.”

He brings up that first rendezvous when they met Killian every single time we’re all together as a family, and the fact that Killian has cornered me in the bathroom multiple times since then leaves me with absolutely no argument.

“Bold of them to assume we’re good off one of those a day. You guys know how it is, gotta get it whenever you can when you have kids.”

“Fuck off, you guys have one. Try hiding from three,” Vi hisses, shoving my husband gently to keep walking.

“We have Skunk too. That little shit pops up every time I try to touch some ass.”

“Your cat doesn’t count.”

Greg laughs at the way Vi and Killian argue like siblings, but I guess that’s what they are. Killian blends into my family so well, it was like he was always meant to be here.

“Oh!” I pipe up, spinning to stop them just outside the front door. “I have some other good news as well that probably shouldn’t be brought up in front of the kids. Ryan’s parole was denied.”

Killian’s smile is so wide I feel my face mirroring his. “Hell yeah. Another year before I may have to murder again,” he jokes, but as he pulls me in and gives me a strong hug, I know there’s truth behind his words. He’d do anything to protect me.

And I’d do anything to make sure he doesn’t have to. “So we have more than one thing to celebrate today.”

The oven dings to let me know our breakfast casserole is done, and miraculously all four kids stop chasing each other long enough to come eat. When we’re finished, we have a crazy family dance party around the living room for a while like we usually do, then make our way onto the back porch to let the kids run around some more.

“Another thing to celebrate.” Killian takes the White Claw my sister is handing him and holds up his can. “Joey said she’d marry me.”

Greg huffs, crossing his arms and rounding on his wife. “And you said that I was stupid for suggesting it.”

“I would never call you stupid,” Violet argues. “I said it would be stupid to get married again since we already were.”

“See what you did?” I tease, nudging Killian and melting against his side. “Troublemaker.”

“Can’t help it.” He winks at me and sits back with a genuinely happy expression on his beautiful face, and as I watch Violet and Greg argue themselves into fits of laughter, I think the last dredges of fear finally leave me.

This is it. This is happiness, this is love, eternal. No one can touch us, and nothing will ever change our minds. A life I never thought I’d have is mine forever... all because I fell in love with a killer.