



Guarding His Sunshine (Men of Valor Springs #9)

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Category: Action&Adventure

Description: Missy

What do you do when you're in danger and no one believes you? I have a stalker. I know that I do, even though I've never seen him. But everyone keeps telling me it's all in my head. And when my unwanted admirer makes a bold and dangerous move, I do the only thing I can. I flee. But when my safe haven proves to be anything but, I'm left with no choice but to put all my trust in a stranger—Officer Howard Westwood. He's the only person to take my claims seriously and promises to keep me safe. For the first time since this nightmare began, I feel like I can breathe again. And it doesn't take long for things between my hero and me to heat up. But my stalker is still out there, and hes getting impatient. Can Howard really keep me safe, or am I only putting the man I'm falling in love with in danger?

Howard

Serving as a police officer in the small town of Rosewood is about as exciting as watching paint dry. It's a far cry from my days in the Marines, that's for sure. That is until a beautiful blonde with mesmerizing blue eyes runs a red light. What should have been a routine traffic stop becomes a game of cat and mouse when pop princess Missy Sullivan begs me to protect her from her dangerous stalker. Something about Missy awakens something in me I thought was long dormant. I'd die before I let any harm come to her. She's mine, stalker be damned. And it's time for the hunter to become the prey.

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Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 2:48 am

Missy

Pick up!

Please pick up!

I groan when the call sends me straight to voicemail yet again, and my heart sinks a little when I hear the familiar beep on the line. With a frustrated groan, I toss the phone onto the passenger seat and run a trembling hand through my hair, pushing back the need to cry.

It's okay. He'll call me back soon. It's fine. You're fine.

I close my eyes and force in deep breaths, pushing back all the negative thoughts like that website said I should do whenever I'm close to having a panic attack. It mentioned something about thinking positive thoughts. Apparently, I'm supposed to picture myself standing in a field of tulips, feeling the warm rays of the sun on my skin and breathing in the sweet scent of the...

"It's not working!" I cry out, flopping back on my seat with another groan and kicking my feet in frustration. It's not like me to throw a fit, but I can't think any "positive thoughts" over everything that's happened, and the loud beeping of the fuel gauge isn't helping matters. I know I need to climb out of my car to fill up on gas and at least take care of one problem, but I can't move.

The truth is, I am terrified.

I'm scared out of mind that he might be somewhere outside lurking, waiting for me to get out of my car so he can grab me. I don't know what he'll do to me if he catches me, and the worst part is...I don't even know what my stalker looks like.

It could be anyone!

For a week now, I've been getting notes slipped under my apartment door. At first the notes were simple, compliments about my hair and singing voice, all innocent really, but their presence alone frightened me. I knew they'd been written by a man because of wording he used and how he described himself. And when they increased in frequency and became more graphic in detail, I told my manager about the notes. I thought he too would be concerned. As an artist under his management, I figured my safety would be his top priority.

I was wrong. Naive to think I am anything but a cash cow to the man.

Instead of taking the notes seriously, he simply brushed off my concerns and told me I was overreacting. Then his indifference turned to annoyance before downright accusing me of writing the notes myself for attention.

"Who the fuck even hand-writes notes in this digital age? If you want attention that badly, there are better ways to go about it."

So, I pushed it all down, convinced myself that I was overreacting. It was probably just a fan who'd found out where I lived. It wasn't comfortable, but they weren't hurting me, so I was set on ignoring it.

Until last night.

The memory of walking out of the shower to see a note on my nightstand still sends chills down my spine. My stalker had been in my apartment while I was in the

shower. There was nothing innocent about it anymore. He broke into my apartment, and I shudder to imagine what would have happened if he had decided to stay.

So yeah, I grabbed whatever I could from the closet, tossed it into a bag, and left the city in a hurry. I could have called my manager or the cops, but who's to say they'd believe me this time? The other notes weren't enough to convince anyone, I doubt this would be either, and the fact that the stalker was able to get in without leaving any signs of a break-in wouldn't help my case either.

So, I left.

In the middle of the night, with my hair still wet from the shower, I grabbed my things and fled the apartment, looking over my shoulder the entire time. I drove out of the city in the direction of the one person I knew would believe me.

Sebastian Foster.

He's been in the industry for close to a decade, long enough to have encountered an overzealous fan at least once or twice in his career. He'll believe me when I tell him about it. Once I finally get in touch with him, I know he'll believe me, and maybe he'll help me, give me the advice my manager and the police will not.

My eyes cross back to the phone, but the screen remains frustratingly blank. I must have caught him at a busy time. He'll call back. I know he will. Soon, this nightmare will be over.

My hands grip the steering wheel tightly, knuckles white as I glance around the nearly empty lot. It's eerily quiet, save for the soft hum of my car's engine and the distant sound of a car passing by.

Taking a deep breath, I finally convince myself to step out of the car. The door

swings open, and I wince at the sound, suddenly feeling exposed. I glance over my shoulder, scanning the area for any signs of movement or suspicious individuals, but there is only an attendant dosing on a chair in the distance. Their presence brings me little comfort.

It's okay, Missy . "You are a million miles away from the city." Not quite, but the words bolster me anyway.

I fumble with the gas cap, my fingers shaky, and I can't help but look around, half expecting to see someone watching from a distance. The sunlight casts long shadows that make every corner seem like a hiding spot, and that thought alone sends chills running down my body. My hands are trembling as I pay for the gas. I clasp the cool metal pump and start to fill the tank, watching the numbers tick upward.

Breathe, Missy. Deep and slow!

The sharp scent of gasoline fills the air, and I catch a faint aroma of coffee wafting from the convenience store nearby. I'm tempted to go in and get myself a cup, but I don't want to risk walking too far from the car. It's probably for the best. My mind is already racing with every little noise, and caffeine is the last thing I need when I'm this jumpy.

My heart is still racing when I replace the pump, and I'm about to climb back into my car when the sound of a throat clearing scares the living daylights out of me. I quickly turn around, expecting to find some scary-looking guy, but it's young man, no older than a teen, with a slight build. He's shifting from foot to foot and has his hands shoved in his pockets, shoulders hunched. He looks harmless and a little nervous. I should probably force a laugh at my overreaction—anything to clear this awkward moment—but my heart is beating too loud for me to think straight. I glance over his shoulder and notice a dark sedan a few pumps over. It's unoccupied, so it must be his. I assume he pulled into the station while I'd been occupied starting the pump.

“Hi, sorry,” the man says sheepishly, rocking on his heels as he flashes me a wide smile. His startling green eyes light up with the smile, and that immediately puts me at ease. He looks so young, with a bowl cut and acne. A local high schooler perhaps? “I didn’t mean to scare you.”

“It’s fine,” I say, waving off his concern.

“I’m sorry for startling you,” he apologizes again, “I thought I recognized you and just wanted to be sure,” he says, eyes widening at his words before quickly adding, “I don’t mean to sound like a creep, but I think I’ve seen you online before. I remember because I thought you were so pretty.”

“I...uh, thanks.”

“You’re the singer rumored to have been dating Sebastian Foster, right?”

I chuckle, but it’s awkward at best. “That was weeks ago; I’m surprised anyone remembers that.”

“I only heard about it recently,” he says, and my smile falters when he doesn’t drop it. “You are not actually dating Sebastian Foster, are you? I’m sorry if I sound nosy. I swear I’m not a stalker or anything, just chronically online.”

The way he says stalker sends a shiver down my back, but I push down my fears. It’s rare for me to be recognized in public, but after the dating rumors my label pushed of me and Sebastian, I’ve found myself in the spotlight. The attention hasn’t been all positive.

“No, Sebastian and I are just friends.” Will only ever be friends despite my manager’s best efforts to force us into a fake public relationship. A PR relationship that was meant to get my name out there and help Sebastian’s image, but I don’t tell this

stranger any of that. “I’m actually in a hurry, do you need something? An autograph or photo...?”

“Yes, that would be great!” He beams, fumbling as he pats his pockets for what I assume is his phone, chuckling nervously when he finds it. The smile on his face stays as he moves closer to me to take the shot. I follow suit, flashing my camera-friendly smile I’ve practiced a million times in my bathroom mirror. He takes a few snaps before turning to face me. “That was perfect. Thank you so much. It’s not often a celebrity passes through here. At least not one as gorgeous as you.”

“Thank you,” I tell him, already reaching behind me to grasp my car door handle.

“Has anyone ever told you that you look a lot like Taylor Swift? Not this new pop version of her, God no!” He visibly shudders. “The country version, with pretty blonde curls, gorgeous blue eyes, and a lovely, innocent smile.”

My heart is racing when I finally pull open the car door. “Uh, yeah, I get that a lot.”

“I hope you never lose that innocent smile.” The kid steps back, his own smile in place as he watches me climb into my car. “Well, have a great trip, Missy.”

It doesn’t register that the kid used my name until I am tearing away from the gas station. Even then, I don’t let myself focus too much on it. It’s not the first time someone has told me I look like one or another celebrity, it’s just no one else had never been that weird about it. And no one else has called me by the nickname my friends and family use. To my fans, I’m Melissa Sullivan.

No, I can’t afford to worry about that. I have other things to think about. Like getting in touch with Sebastian Foster, the man my manager tried to set me up with for publicity. At first, I wasn’t willing to go along with the idea. Sebastian is a very nice guy and all, but I didn’t feel a connection to him when we first met in person. As a

hopeless romantic, I wanted more for myself than a PR relationship. I wanted sparks and chemistry, which I have never experienced with anyone before. I didn't want my fame built on a lie.

The short-lived publicity stunt got me the popularity my label wanted, but out of it all, an unlikely friendship was formed between Sebastian and me.

A friendship I am hoping I can lean on now.

It's not until I've passed the Valor Springs town sign that my phone starts ringing, the sound echoing through the car speakers, and my heart nearly gives out as relief floods in. I press the button to connect the call, expecting Sebastian's voice to come through the speakers.

"Where the fuck are you?"

And my heart drops. "Gary—"

"You have an appointment at six with that new producer to discuss your next release," my manager's voice breaks through the speakers. "Where the hell are you, Missy!"

"I... The stalker left me another note last night. He didn't just slip it under the door this time. He left it on my nightstand. He was in my apartment, Gary!"

The man makes a strangled noise. "This nonsense again? I have told you a million times that you have no stalker!"

"But—"

"I don't want to hear this shit anymore. You get a little attention in the media, and

suddenly you think everyone's out to get you."

It's pointless.

Fighting my manager on this like I have countless times before is pointless. Up until this moment, I've bent to the man's will, letting him convince me that I was all up in my head, but it's not his life at risk. It's mine! "I'm not coming, Gary, not until he's caught—"

"For fuck's sake!" he rages. "This is what I get for signing brats. You better not embarrass me, Missy! I pulled a fuck ton of strings to get this producer, so you better get your ass to the studio in the next hour, or you can kiss your contract goodbye. And wear something photo ready."

The line goes dead before I can tell him I'm hours away from the city, in Valor Springs. I bet he won't like the sound of that, but he needs to know where the hell I'm going. By calling him back, I risk getting yelled at again, so it's probably better if I just text him.

I take my eyes off the road for a brief second when I suddenly hear a blaring horn as I cross through an intersection. The sound nearly gives me a heart attack, so I glance at my review mirror to see cars behind me braking abruptly, their headlights flashing.

Oh God!

I just ran a red light!

I feel a surge of panic, my heart racing as I quickly check my surroundings, making sure no one was hurt by my carelessness. I took my eyes off the road for only a second to grab my phone. One second!

A cop car's siren blares behind me, and I glance in the rearview mirror, seeing the flashing lights.

With a sinking feeling in my stomach, I slowly pull over to the side of the road and notice that the cop does so as well, turning off the sirens. My brain runs through all the possible scenarios of what might happen next, but I keep landing on one.

I was reckless, and now I'm going to get a ticket, or worse, arrested.

Holding my breath, I watch the driver's door of the cop car push open and a uniformed man step into my line of view. He's tall, easily towering over my small sedan, and his muscular frame is evident from several feet away. The man is built like a mountain, and I notice the uniform fits snugly over his broad shoulders, the fabric stretching slightly as he moves. As the officer comes closer, the badge gleaming on his chest catches the light and reminds me of the fact that the last thing I need to be doing is ogling the man.

I'm going to jail. Maybe that's not entirely a bad thing. On the bright side, at least my stalker can't get to me once I'm behind steel bars, right?

I wouldn't last a day in prison!

I feel a knot tightening in my stomach, the weight of everything leading up to this moment pressing down on me as I prepare for whatever is going to happen next. No, I can't go to jail. I don't even know how to defend myself, so what happens when a brawl breaks out in the cafeteria? I've seen it in the movies, I would be crushed if that were to happen.

Think, Missy. Think!

I search my mind for what I might do to get out of this. Seduce him, maybe? But I've

never seduced anyone before. Maybe I can lean into his sympathetic side, but the man has the countenance of a grizzly bear, he doesn't look like the kind to be moved by tears.

The officer approaches my window, and I quickly roll it down, my jaw dropping when I finally get a good look at the man that is going to arrest me. All thoughts leading up to this moment disappear as I gape at the man staring down at me.

His eyes are gray—piercing, and mesmerizing in their allure, challenging when they lock on mine. His dark hair is cropped short, the strands slightly tousled, giving him a rugged look. He doesn't look like any cop I've seen before.

There is a wild fluttering in my stomach that has nothing to do with the fear of getting arrested. I gasp when the area between my legs begins to tingle and wetness pools the private spot that only I have ever explored. My cheeks flare at the feeling, half terrified that the man can tell what is happening to me in this moment.

“Hello, Officer—”

I break our stare and find myself gazing at his lips, which are set in a firm line, and God, I've never seen stubble look that good on anyone before. And that mouth...

Snap out of it, Missy!

“Ma'am, do you realize that you just ran a red light?”

And just like that, I am pulled back to reality by that deep voice that wraps around me and intensifies the feeling between my legs. It's a rich timbre that rumbles and commands my full attention, making everything else fade into the background.

The man just asked me a question, but I don't remember a word of it, and all I can

manage is a dazed, “I’m sorry.”

“Ma’am, have you been drinking today?”

I’m about to respond, but just then, my phone pings with a text and then another and another, and soon, there is a continuous buzz as a dozen messages flood in. We both turn to the device that is still buzzing, and I am almost afraid to touch it. There are bigger things to be worried about, like ending up in prison. Whoever is texting me can wait.

“Sorry, Officer, I’ll just turn this off,” I say, panicked, grabbing the phone, ready to switch it off when something on the screen grabs my attention. Against my better judgment, I tap on it, and image after image floods my screen.

There are pictures. Of me.

In my apartment building. Outside my manager’s office. At the coffee shop. At the restaurant I frequent. Everywhere I’ve been to this week—including the gas station I was at less than half an hour ago.

Following the images is a single text message: Wherever you go, I will know, and I will follow.

I’m not crazy.

A part of me—one that was inclined to believe everyone who called me crazy—hoped that I was actually making it all up. That by some miracle, I was imagining the eyes I always felt on me.

I do have a stalker. And he knows I’ve left the city.

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Howard

In the five years I've been a patrol officer, I thought I'd met all manner personalities. The chaos of the road brings out all kinds of madness, but I wouldn't say there's been one truly unique experience. Every driver is unique, but nothing is ever surprising enough to get much of a reaction from me.

This is different.

One second, the girl is staring at me with dazed eyes, almost as if she's had one too many glasses of wine, and the next, she looks stone sober. Her previously flushed cheeks have gone completely pale, and if I hadn't watched it happen with my own eyes, I never would have believed such a fast change in demeanor to be genuine.

"Ma'am?" I call out, but she doesn't respond to me. It's only when I tap her shoulder that her gaze shifts from the screen of her phone back to me, and I am immediately taken aback by the tears in those beautiful eyes. I've stopped women before, perhaps more women than men, and there have been some who looked at me with raw fear, occasionally some with desire in their eyes, but none have triggered my protective instincts quite like this one.

And that's what makes this stop different.

She's beautiful, stunning even. This girl has the most electric blue eyes I have ever seen, and as I watch them fill up with tears and her cupid bow lips begin to tremble, something in my chest tightens.

It makes no sense!

I don't let myself be moved by sob stories or tears. I am known as the station grump because of the cool, detached way I approach my job. Everyone calls me cold, but one needs to have balls of steel to deal with half the shit I do on a daily basis. I don't ever let my emotions get the better of me, so why the fuck do I want to reach in and swipe a finger over the girl's wet cheeks and wipe away her tears?

For fuck's sake!

"Ma'am, have you had anything to drink today?" I ask again.

"I don't drink," she sniffs, reaching up and swiping the back of her hand over her wet cheeks.

"You just ran a red light, and you're clearly distressed. Are you sure you aren't under the influence of anything?"

She nods. "I didn't even drink coffee this morning," she says, muttering something about being in a hurry to leave. "I didn't mean to run the red light. I...I was a little distracted."

"You could have been hurt, or hurt someone else."

"I know, and I'm sorry," she sniffs, and the tears are back.

Fuck, I'm not good at this—dealing with overly emotional people. No, that's my partner, who is conveniently on sick leave, down with the flu he caught from his wife. Normally Danny deals with the teary law breakers, and I strong arm the big guys who cause trouble. That's more my style. This—the tears and the red nose—is out of my comfort zone.

Fuck, what would Danny do?

Maybe comfort the woman, ask her why she's crying before offering his unsolicited advice then ticketing her. The latter is easier for me, the first two involve me chatting her up, and I am not exactly known for being a talkative guy.

I need to get this over with and get back to my cruiser. Pushing back the unbidden thoughts calling me to take care of the girl, I decide to do my job. "Ma'am, I need to see your license and registration."

"Of course, just a second," she replies, reaching for her purse and digging through it before finally handing the documents over. I glance at them, taking in the somewhat familiar name, but I can't place it. Melissa Sullivan? I could have sworn I've heard that name before. "Thank you, Ms. Sullivan," I say, passing them back to her. Technically, I should take her information back to the cruiser and run it, but something about this girl makes it impossible for me to walk away for even a moment.

"Are you going to arrest me?"

Arrest her? Fuck, why is the thought of this girl in handcuffs, lying on the backseat of my cruiser with her legs spread for me the first thing that comes to mind? I can already imagine burying my fat cock into her warm pussy. Fucking her raw and hard in the back of my cruiser.

"No." I don't know whether I am responding to her question or my own deluded fantasies. I lean back and assess the girl, taking in her wet cheeks and teary blue eyes, feeling myself be swayed by a beautiful woman like I never have before. "You are lucky no one was hurt. I'll let you off with a warning this time, but you need to be more careful, ma'am, it's not just your life at stake on these roads."

“So, you are not going to arrest me?”

“No, but I need you to keep your eyes off that phone when you are driving. Whatever it is you are looking at can wait.”

“What if it can’t?” she mumbles, but I hear her. Even so, I don’t push her to explain what she’s talking about. “I’ll turn it off, Officer,” she says to me, and I watch as she tosses the phone to the passenger seat. “I’m sorry for causing trouble, I’ll be careful from now on.”

I believe her.

Fuck, I don’t know what it is about this girl, but I believe her.

With a nod, I push back from the car. “Okay, then. Be careful and have a great day.”

I turn around and walk to my cruiser, my heart tugging achingly at the move, and I question what the fuck this girl has done to me. I have never let anyone off with just a warning, but the second she looked up at me with those beautiful teary blue eyes, I forgot for a moment that I was a cop. That my responsibility is to more people than just her.

Goddamnit!

I yank the car door open with perhaps a little too much force, but before I can climb inside, a voice calls out to me. “Wait!”

I look up and spot the girl getting out of her car. She leans back in to grab something, giving me a perfect view of her ass in those snug jeans, and my semi-erect cock hardens to full mast. Fuck, she’s a fine little thing, and those jeans look sinful on her. She straightens, and my eyes drop to the rest of her. Her front looks just as enticing as

her back. A white top accentuates her cleavage and the shape of her tits in a way that has my cock aching. I only notice the purse in her hand when she starts walking toward me, and I imagine that's what she was grabbing.

"Ma'am, is there a problem?" I ask. When she stops in front of me, I have to force myself to focus on her face, not her body.

"I want to go with you."

Of all the things I expected her to say, that was not one of them. "What?"

"Please let me come with you," she says again. "Or you can arrest me, I don't care. Just take me with you."

This is not the first time I've had a woman suggest I "arrest" her, but it's the first time it's surprised me. Usually when women ask to be arrested, it's because they want sex. They have a cop kink or something, want to be handcuffed and fucked, but it's never occurred to me to entertain their fantasies. If I am reading her correctly, that doesn't seem the case with this girl.

"I can't arrest you for no reason."

"I just ran a red light," she says, motioning for me to cuff her hands. I simply shrug my hands into my pockets and stare at her, confused as to what the hell is going on here.

"Ma'am—"

"Missy," she cuts in.

"What?"

“Please, call me Missy. My name is Melissa, but you can call me Missy.”

I sigh, unsure why I am entertaining her in the first place. Her eyes are dry now, and it seems she has gotten past whatever was bothering her. I can now go on with my life without worrying about her. “Alright then, Missy, tell me the truth. Are you chasing some kind of thrill? First the red light, and now this?”

“No.” She shakes her head. “I just... This will sound crazy, but I’ve just realized that I came to Valor Springs without much of a plan. The person I was coming to see hasn’t called me back, and I don’t know what to do now.”

“There is a hotel in town that can accommodate—”

“No,” she cries out, stepping forward and into my space. So close that I catch the soft lavender scent that clings to her hair. “You don’t understand. If he can get into my apartment, he’ll find me in a hotel. I don’t want to be alone. Please take me with you. You’re a cop! Protect and serve, right? I’ll be safe with you.”

It takes me a second to clear my head of her scent and my lust-filled thoughts to actually make sense of what she’s talking about. “Are you running from someone?”

“Yes!”

“Who is he?” I ask through clenched teeth, the thought of this girl fleeing from someone sends a fire burning through my gut, and before I can stop myself, I instinctively step closer to her. Not sure what the fuck that is supposed to do, but everything in me calls to protect this girl. My eyes are already scanning the area to look for anything that stands out, maybe a car parked in the distance watching her. “Is it an ex?”

“No,” she says, and something in her voice forces my gaze back to her, and there it is

again, the dazed look in her eyes. She's staring up at me strangely, and I can't make sense of what's going through that pretty head of hers.

"Missy?"

"Huh?" She blinks up at me, her magnetic blues sucking all the air from my lungs. God, she's so fucking beautiful.

"I asked who you are running from."

"I don't know," she responds before quickly adding, "I mean, I don't know who he is, but...sometimes, I feel eyes watching me. My manager says that I'm crazy and thinks that I wrote all the notes I found slipped under my door, but I am not crazy!"

"Threatening letters?"

"Not quite," she says, her eyes dropping to my chest, and I notice her attention waver for a moment. Against my better judgment, I grab her chin and tip it so her eyes are back on mine.

"What did the notes say?"

"Most of them talk about my looks, compliment my body, but not in a lewd manner or anything. I guess that's why no one takes them seriously. Maybe if my stalker wrote something mean and degrading, then they would believe me."

"Have you filed a police report?"

"My manager convinced the cops that I was making the whole thing up for attention, but I wasn't lying. I have more proof now that someone is stalking me."

“Show me.”

Missy digs into her purse and takes out her phone before shoving the screen in my face with a triumphant expression even as fat tears trickle down her cheeks. Does she even realize she’s crying? I push down the need to reach out and swipe my finger over her beautiful lashes, choosing instead to shift my gaze from her gorgeous eyes to the screen.

“See? I told them I was not crazy, but no one would believe me.”

I stare at the image on display. It’s a picture of Missy taken outside what looks like an apartment building. She’s smiling at something on her phone. It doesn’t seem like she knows someone is taking a picture of her.

“When was this taken?”

“Yesterday,” she says, pushing up and nearly bumping my head with hers as she leans in to point at the screen. The shift has her pressing her tits against my arm and exposing more of her cleavage, and fuck if it doesn’t make my cock throb hard behind my pants. “The picture was taken right outside my apartment. You see how creepy it is, right?”

“Is this the only one?”

“I wish,” she sniffs, scrolling, and this time it’s a different image. The picture was taken at a gas station, and from her clothes I can tell it was taken today. Less than an hour ago, judging from the location. This gas station is only a few miles outside of Valor Springs. “He followed me out of the city, took my picture, and then sent it to me along with a message saying he can find me no matter where I go. I don’t even know how he got my number!”

My eyes harden as I scroll through all the pictures sent to her phone from the first one to the very last. They are all taken at different locations, but from her clothing, I count eight different days. Whoever is taking these pictures is clearly obsessed with this girl, and I am surprised it's gone on this long without the man making a move...or has he?

My eyes shoot from the screen to the girl staring up at me with a hopeful look in her gaze. "You believe me, don't you? My manager thinks I'm crazy, but that's proof, right?"

Manager ? Is she some kind of a celebrity? "Someone has been following you alright," I tell her; they probably have her car bugged, and that's how they always seem to know where to find her. "Are you sure no one from your...company hired this man to follow you around?"

She shakes her head. "I don't know. I don't think so..."

"And you are saying you haven't filed a complaint?"

"My manager wouldn't let me file one." She shoves the phone against my chest and looks up at me, her innocent eyes tugging the strings in my heart like no one has ever managed to. "Do you see now? You see why I can't stay alone? I won't be able to get a moment of rest if I stay at a hotel."

"And the friend you were coming to see—"

"He can no longer help me. I was going to meet up with him for advice, but I can't do that now. I risk exposing him and his girlfriend to the stalker too. I didn't think he'd follow me out of the city!"

"Alright. This is what we're going to do. I'll accompany you to file a police report,

and then later to the local hotel. We'll have someone guard your door all night—"

"Can I just go home with you?"

I didn't think the girl could surprise me any further, and yet, here we are. "You don't know me." That I don't immediately turn her down surprises me.

"You are right, I don't know you," she says, chewing on her bottom lip before releasing it. "But I feel safe around you, and it's not just because you are a cop. You are the only one who hasn't dismissed my concerns or made me feel helpless. I know I'll be safe with you, so please let me stay with you. Just for a little while. Please, Officer..."

It's insane, but I realize in that moment that saying no to this girl is not an option. When I noticed the traffic violation, a part of me thought it would be a routine stop. The driver would either be apologetic or an entitled jerk, but I thought it would end with a ticket before going about my day. My shift is almost over anyway, and it's not like I have any real plans for this evening. I figured I would grab a pack of beer and drink one or two on my couch while some inane show played in the background.

Taking my little offender home with me was never in the cards, and yet, that is exactly what is going to happen. I'm taking this girl home with me, and I will protect her. It's what I am good at. It's what I have trained for. Nine years in the military, five years of dealing with the worst of the population, and all of it for this moment.

"Get in the car. And it's Howard. You can call me Howard."

She lights up like a damn Christmas tree, blinking up at me hopefully. "Are you serious? I can go with you?"

"Yes."

“What about my car and the stuff in the back?”

“Right. You can follow me back to the station and park it there.” And leave it parked at the station in case it’s bugged.

“And you won’t leave me at the station or under the care of someone else once I’ve filed the police report?”

“No.”

She’s my problem now. I made her my problem when I stopped her earlier. If her stalker is watching and sees her leave with me, it’s bound to infuriate him. He’ll make a move, and next time he does, it’s me he will have to deal with.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 2:48 am

Missy

Officer Howard's home is as surprising as the man himself. It looks nothing like the house of someone supposedly living off a civil servant's salary.

My jaw is practically on the ground as I take in the unexpected grandeur that stretches in front of me. The house, with its inviting warm tones and well-manicured lawn carries a charm I didn't expect to see from such a man.

A little prejudiced of me, but I am fast learning that there is nothing ordinary about this man. I should have known this when, back at the station, he changed out of his uniform and into a pair of jeans and a short-sleeved shirt that revealed a mosaic of tattoos. Are cops even allowed to have those?

And his house is just as surprising. I marvel at the way the sunlight glints off the large windows. I take in the intricate details from the charming porch swing swaying gently in the breeze and the flower beds neatly trimmed and well taken care of.

Who is this man?

Maybe he's one of those corrupt cops who take bribes, but then again, what bribe could afford someone such a grand home? Okay, now I'm being unfair to someone who is kind enough to let a stranger into his home, but I've been on guard so much lately that my mind automatically jumps to the worst-case scenarios.

"Are you coming in?" I look up to find Howard standing by the door, holding my bag. I take a good look at the him. At a little over six foot three, the man looks even

more intimidating out of the uniform than he did in it. I try not to linger too much on his bulging muscles and those broad shoulders, but I can't help myself. "Missy?"

Right.

"I'm coming," I call out, walking up to him. This was my idea. Coming to his place was my idea, so why the hell am I so nervous about being here? My stomach is fluttering, but that's not the only thing that's quivering. The spot between my legs has been throbbing from the second this man walked up to me and hasn't stopped since.

This is not good. This can't be good!

"You'll be safe here," Howard says, opening his front door and moving aside for me to walk in first. "No one can get into this house unless I let them in."

Before I can question what he means by that, a loud bark echoes through the walls, and then I barely have time to locate the noise before a massive figure comes barreling toward me. My heart leaps into my throat as I catch sight of the largest dog I have ever seen—a hulking beast with a broad back, long legs, and piercing dark eyes that glow with an intensity that sends a chill racing down my spine.

"How-Howie," I whimper, instinctively taking a step back and bumping into a solid wall of muscles. "W-what is that?" I don't even notice at first that I've given my new protector a nickname. He doesn't comment on it though, so I don't think he minds.

"My puppy."

"P-puppy!" I cry out as the dog skids to a halt a few feet away, those eyes watching me, and I bet calculating what to bite first. "Please tell your 'puppy' that I'm all skin and bones. I wouldn't make a very satisfying snack."

Howard chuckles from behind me. “He only bites when I tell him to. And yes, he is a puppy. He’s only eight months old, so not fully grown yet.” Even with his assurance, I don’t move a muscle as his “puppy” and I size each other up. This gigantic beast isn’t even fully grown yet? My initial fear slowly fades as the dog lets his tongue roll out of his mouth and pants happily, and I realize that he’s beautiful. A strikingly black dog with long wiry hair. His size and thick coat make him look more like a wolf than a dog.

“What’s his name? And what breed is he? I’ve never seen a dog like him before.”

“Bear. He’s an Irish wolfhound. They’re not very common around here.”

“And you promise he won’t bite my hand off if I try to pet him?”

“There’s only one way to find out.”

I roll my eyes at his words before slowly stepping forward, my heart still racing, but I’m curious more than anything. I don’t even have to crouch down as I extend my hand slowly, palm turned down and fingers slightly curled, like I’ve seen people do with dogs before. I keep my voice soft and gentle as I speak to him. “Hey, Bear. It’s okay, I don’t bite. You probably do though, so let’s be best friends.”

Howard snickers at my words but says nothing. I ignore the man and focus on his dog. I lean closer and notice the way his ears perk up as the tension in his stance starts to ease. I gently tap my thigh, encouraging him to come closer, and when he takes a tentative step forward, my heart nearly busts out of its cage. Bear’s nose twitches as he sniffs the air, and I hold my breath, waiting for him to make the next move.

And he does.

When he closes the distance between us, I reach out, my fingers brushing against his thick, soft fur. I stroke his back gently, smiling when he leans into my touch, then nearly losing my balance as he presses his weight against my leg.

“He likes you. He doesn’t like most people.”

I giggle at that. “I’m sure you’re just saying that.”

“It’s the truth.”

I look up to find Howard watching me with surprise in his expression. There is something else in those gray eyes as he watches me that brings back the fluttering to my stomach. I quickly shift my attention back to Bear and away from the man who leaves my knees feeling a little wobbly, and what’s up with that? The hopeless romantic in me has always imagined what it would be like when I met a man I was attracted to, but I never imagined it would bring out such intense feelings.

It must be the adrenaline of dealing with my stalker or the exhaustion of the last couple of weeks, and now my body is confused about how to react. Yes, it has got to be something like that.

“So, um, when do you think they’ll catch my stalker?” I ask, in an attempt to shift my thoughts off this man and to the one haunting me.

“Depends.” I look up, and a shiver rolls down my body when I find those stormy gray eyes pinned on me. “It depends on a lot of factors, Missy. If he followed you to Valor Springs, then we’ll have to wait for him to make a mistake. And he will. Valor Springs is a small town; the residents will recognize an outsider. He won’t be able to stay hidden here.”

I blink at the man in confusion. “You are not going to track down the number that

sent me those pictures?”

“The photos were sent from a burner phone. He’s clearly no amateur. Odds are this isn’t his first time doing something like this.” My eyes widen when Howard steps close beside me, petting his dog, but those stormy grays stay firmly on me. God, he’s so close I can smell his cologne. He must’ve freshened up when he went to change out of his uniform because he smells amazing, like cedar and musk. And when he stands and leans toward me, so close I can see the flecks of dark blue in his gray eyes. “You are safe here with me and Bear. You can rest easy now and let me take care of you.”

It’s the adrenaline...or exhaustion. I don’t care which, but it has to be one of them that makes me want to climb into this man’s lap and burrow into his chest, feel those trunks he has for arms band around my body. The way he promises to protect me when all others have shown me the cold shoulder does things to me. His strong presence does things to me.

“I...I...”

“I believe the word you are looking for is thank you.” Not quite, but I don’t say that.

I let him believe that the only thing I feel for him is gratitude. That my sex is not slick with arousal and the dampness between my legs hasn’t stained my favorite panties. I choose to pretend that the fire licking up my body has nothing to do with the man whose lips are only a few inches from mine.

Snap out of it, Missy!

“Yes, thank you. I don’t know what I would have done if you hadn’t agreed to help me.”

He nods, stepping back, and I suddenly miss his closeness. “Come with me, I’ll show you around.”

I pat Bear's head before following the man deeper into his home. The inside is just as grand as the outside, a seamless blend of elegance and coziness that steals my breath away. We stop first in a quaint, sparsely decorated guest room where I leave my bag. Then he takes me through his spacious living room that is dominated by a plush sectional sofa in rich navy blue that contrasts beautifully with the soft cream walls. Large windows draped in sheer curtains allow natural light to flood the space, illuminating the carefully curated art pieces that hang on the wall.

I fall in love with the space immediately. The only other room I have seen so far is the guest room, but I know without question that this right here is my favorite.

“I’m in the wrong career, it seems,” I say, breathing in the subtle hint of sandalwood clinging to the air as I walk to an art piece hanging on the wall.

“We both are.”

I turn to face the man standing behind me with his hands stuffed in his pockets. “This is not your home?”

“It’s not mine alone. I share it and the expense.”

I stop, my eyes widening with horror when I realize that through my panic-driven actions and the lust-filled haze I’ve been riding, I never once considered that this man could be in a relationship. I didn’t see a wedding band on his finger, so I thought... I assumed...

“You’re married!” I gasp, palming my mouth in horror and looking around as if expecting an angry woman to pop out of one of the rooms. I should have known

someone as amazing as Howard could not be single.

“I am not married, Missy.”

“Engaged?”

He sighs. “I co-own this house with my brother. At least on paper, considering he hasn’t been back here since we bought the place.”

“Is he...” Dead? My tone must give away the unspoken word because Howard looks stricken.

“No, Jesus, Missy!” He shakes his head, walking away from me, and I follow him into the kitchen. The open layout connects the kitchen to a cozy dining area where a beautiful wooden table is set and surrounded by mismatched chairs that give it an eclectic feel. I only have a moment to take in the grand granite island before I am reminded of the conversation we were having.

“Does he not live in Valor Springs, then?”

“He’s a race car driver and hasn’t been home in years, too busy touring the circuit.” Howard walks to the fridge and grabs a bottle of water, which he uncaps and offers to me. “When I left the military, we both realized we wanted to return to our roots in Valor Springs, so we pooled our funds and bought this home five years ago. He even shipped those art pieces in the living room here, but hasn’t been back himself.”

The water bottle stays suspended in his grasp as I stare in shock at the man. There is a lot to unpack about what he just said, but I focus on the most surprising thing. “You were in the military?”

“The Marines for almost ten years before I decided to be a cop.”

“Why did you leave the military?” I ask, finally accepting the bottle of water.

“The same reason I went in,” he says, leaning back against the counter and fixing those gray eyes on me. “A sense of duty, I suppose.”

“I don’t understand.”

“It’s quite simple. I was driven to enlist by a personal need to serve and protect my country, and I left for the same reason. I felt I had fulfilled my obligation and wanted to continue serving in a different capacity. I wanted to know the people I was helping. I felt I could protect my community as a cop.” Well, that’s pretty noble of him. I don’t imagine it’s ever crossed my mind to do something so selfless, especially something that would risk my life. “So, what about you? What is it you do for work?” he asks. “You said you have a manager?”

Oh right, Howard was changing while I filled out my personal information on the police report. I’m about to answer him when I am momentarily distracted. Seemingly bored with our conversation, Bear, who had followed us into the kitchen, picks that exact moment to leave with a sense of urgency and apparently no appreciation for his big body. He dashes past me, and I move aside quickly so I’m not plowed over, accidentally spilling the water Howard had given me all over myself, soaking my top.

I hiss at the chill that licks up my body as I quickly place the nearly empty water bottle on the island counter. “Oh God, that’s so cold.”

“Fuck,” Howard curses, stepping forward. He backs me to the counter, and I swallow hard when his eyes drop to my soaked top. My nipples pebble behind the silk bra, poking at the see-through material. The room falls silent and a tension unlike anything I have felt before settles in. “You must be freezing.”

I swallow at the attention my tits are getting. “Yeah.”

“Let me get you a towel.”

“Okay,” I say with a nod, but neither of us moves a muscle. We stand staring at each other, the tension growing thicker by the second, and I try to remind myself that I do not know this man beyond the fact that he’s a cop and has agreed to help with my stalker. Being intimate with him would no doubt make the rest of my stay awkward.

I try so hard to convince myself that it’s a bad idea, but my knees are weak and my feet seem to be glued to the floor, making it impossible for me to move, and it seems he is dealing with the same issue.

This is a bad idea. No, it’s a terrible idea. But terrible has never looked so good.

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Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 2:48 am

Howard

Six hours!

That's how fucking long I've known this girl. It hasn't even been a full day, but that doesn't seem to matter. I knew I wanted her from the moment I saw her. I just had no idea how intense that feeling actually was until there was only an inch of space between us. Until her lips were so close to mine, her breath fanning me.

Control yourself!

And yet, I can't.

Haven't I been doing a good job of that so far? Keeping myself in check and not running my eyes over her sexy form every goddamn minute I've been around her. My cock has been stiff since we left the station, and now, seeing her puckered nipples behind her wet top and nude bra chips at whatever control I thought I had.

I want her!

Anyone would want her, and she clearly has no one looking after her safety if what she's said about her useless manager is anything to go by. It's little wonder she has a stalker with how gorgeous and innocent she is, but that's all over now. Missy has me to protect her, and when I find that sorry excuse for man, he'll wish he never laid eyes on what's mine .

My brain stutters at the thought. Mine? Is that what Missy is? My caveman side

screams that is exactly what she is. She came to me for help. She's put her trust in me.

She's mine now!

"Howie, the towel..."

Howie? Only my mom and brother call me that, but I don't correct her. She can call me whatever the hell she likes as long as she keeps looking at me the way she is. "You should take off your clothes," my mouth blurts before my brain can catch up. I continue quickly, "So you don't catch cold, I mean." I step closer, carefully watching for any indication that she doesn't welcome my proximity. I am done fighting this, done pretending I don't want her more with every breath.

A pretty pink tinge settles on her cheeks at my words. "But then, what will I cover up with? I left my overnight bag in the guest room."

Without taking my eyes off her, I reach behind me and grab the tea towel off the counter before lifting it up for her to see, even though there is no way it will even remotely cover her body. "You can use this to dry off, then I'll find something for you wear." Her cheeks turn a deeper shade of pink, and I have to fight back the urge to lean in and bury my face in her neck. I want to inhale the soft lavender scent clinging to her hair and skin.

"But..." Her eyes drop to the small towel, and the pink stain of her blush spreads to her neck. "The water soaked into my bra."

"Then take it off too. Do you want my help—"

"No, I'll get it," she hurries to say, gabbing the hem of her top and pulling it over her head. I watch as the wet fabric slowly peels off her body, leaving a sheen behind. My

heart hammers in my chest with the need to lean in and run my tongue over it until I've licked away every droplet of water clinging onto her skin.

"The bra too," I remind her.

"You're right. I...I should take it off too."

Missy drops her top to the floor before reaching back to unclasp her bra. I watch with bated breath as she finally gets it undone and tugs off the straps, slowly peeling the wet bra from her pale tits. She's as red as a beet when she finally drops the bra to the floor next to the top, leaving her sexy, creamy tits, rising and falling quickly with every breath. Her rosy nipples are pebbled, greedily straining, and practically begging for my touch.

I drop the towel with the rest of her clothes before backing her to the counter. "I have an even better idea. One that's more effective." I reach up and slowly trail a hand over her neck, feeling her shudder against my fingers as I move it lower, stopping before I can touch her tits.

Her lips puff open with a gasp. "W-what's...the idea?"

"One that won't just dry the wet trail of water on your skin, but get you all warmed up."

"And what's that—"

I drop my mouth down on hers, swallowing her words, which quickly turn into a whimper. A shudder rolls through her body as I slowly brush my mouth over her inexperienced lips. She tries to kiss me back, but it's awkward at best, and fuck if that doesn't have my stiff cock throbbing in my jeans.

She's either a terrible kisser, or she's never been kissed before. Never been touched before, and with the way her body is trembling undermine, my thoughts lean toward the latter. I figured she was innocent, but Jesus Christ, a virgin?

I slide a hand to her nape and hold her still when she attempts to lean in for me. "Let me," I rasp against her lips. "You've never been kissed before, have you?"

"I...I mean... Well, no."

A growl climbs up my throat, but I push it back down. "Then let me show you what it's like to be kissed by a man."

"Yes," she whimpers. I move closer to her, pinning my dick against her jean-clad pussy. Her breath is racing as I roll my hips and grind against her, the move causing my cock to leak endlessly behind my fly.

I've never felt this way about a woman before. At first, I thought the military was the reason I wasn't interested in relationships and assumed that everything would change once I left, but coming to the civilian world changed nothing. I saw beautiful women, I admired them, and sometimes even desired them, but I never once felt this aggressive need in me to possess anyone before. All it took was for my eyes to lock on this little pop princess for my heart to threaten to burst out of its cage. Yes, I know who she is. I finally figured it out at the station, but I haven't confessed as much to her.

For her to tell me that another man is following her sends murderous thoughts surfacing through my mind. I've never needed a woman the way I need her. Never wanted to kiss one as much as I want to kiss Missy.

With a deep growl, I press our lips together, a hunger inside of me pushing for more, and I am an animal as I twist my mouth over hers. She moans, opening up for me,

and I deepen the kiss, sinking my tongue into her sexy little mouth, and fuck, she's so fucking soft and tastes amazing. Her head tips back to allow me more access, making whiny little noises at the back of her throat as I get drunk off the taste of her lips. I rock up against her, completely devouring her sexy mouth until she's mewling under me.

Her eyes are drowsy when I pull back from the kiss, giving us much-needed air. "I want you," I say thickly, our breaths mingling hotly between us. "I want to kiss the droplets clinging to your tits, roll my tongue around your nipples until I've sucked up every bit of moisture on your skin, then kiss the rest of you. Make you feel how a real man ought to." Give you pleasure and not fear. "Tell me you want that too."

"Yes," she responds in a shuddering breath.

Mine!

My eyes drop to the moisture still clinging to her skin before looking back at her magnetic blue eyes. Christ, she's so fucking beautiful. I drop my mouth to her neck, dragging my tongue over the smooth column of her throat, soaking up her taste and scent. She moans, her body trembling as I kiss a path down her collarbone, dragging my tongue over her tits.

"Oh God," she moans when I close my mouth around a rosy bud, rolling my tongue around the bead and losing myself in her intoxicating taste. I knew it would be different with her. From the moment I laid eyes on her, I knew this would be different, and to think that I'm only getting started...

"You are so fucking gorgeous," I growl, the sound muffled against her seductive peaks, turning to give the other the same attention. My hard cock throbs in my jeans from neglect, but I ignore it, my focus on pleasuring this girl that the universe dropped into my world.

Mine! Fuck, I need to feel the rest of her.

“Howie...” she gasps when I work my free hand between her legs and drag my fingers over the center of her jean-clad pussy. She moans, shyly rocking her hips to ride the friction.

“I bet you’re wet, your pussy trembling with the need for relief, aren’t you, princess?” I growl, licking the spot between her tits before tracing my lips down her body.

“Yes,” she whimpers, gasping when I slide my hands up to the waistband of her jeans and pop open the button. I lower her zipper and yank down her jeans right along with her panties. She sucks in a sharp breath when I slide my fingers back between her legs, groaning deeply when I touch her wet folds.

She’s wet. Practically dripping with how her folds are molded together. My mouth waters with need to taste her hot arousal, and it’s stronger than anything I’ve ever known.

“God, you are so perfect.” My voice is thick with emotion as I yank the jeans the rest of the way down. She steps out of them, which leaves her completely naked, every bit of her exposed to my hungry eyes. “I’ll make you feel good now, baby.” I’ll take care of more than just her safety.

“Howie, I don’t... This is new to me,” she whispers, as if to remind me of her virginity, but I haven’t forgotten the fact that she’s untouched. Innocent. Mine to corrupt.

“I know,” I rasp, raking my hands up her thighs and nudging her hips open wider. She jolts against me when I run my middle finger over her folds, slowly drawing her feminine lips apart. “I’m not about to fuck you for the first time in the kitchen,

princess, but that doesn't mean I can't show you what to expect. Your first orgasm belongs to me."

Her eyes widen in surprise when I lift her onto the island, pressing my hand to her chest to encourage her to lie back before pulling her thighs further apart to reveal her pink heaven. Her lips part with a gasp when I clutch her left knee and bring it to my shoulder, exposing more of her glistening pussy to my hungry eyes. My heart is hammering in my chest as I lean in and brush my lips on her inner thighs, groaning when I catch the soft peachy scent of her pussy. Fuck, she smells so fucking good, I bet she'll taste just as addictive.

"Howie, are you going to kiss me...there?"

"Princess, I'm going to do more than just kiss you," I say before pushing in and sliding the flat of my tongue over her parted flesh. She cries out, a shudder rolling through her body at the move, but I barely register the sound, too far gone as her delicious sweet and salty flavors explode in my mouth. I could get drunk off her taste, I realize. "Fuck!" I groan deeply as I drop my tongue over her swelling bud and bathe it in fast strokes that have her cries growing fevered.

"Howie... Oh God!"

I slide my hands to her back, clutching her supple ass and holding her still as I work my tongue up and down the valley of her sex, gathering her sweet arousal on my tongue. My cock leaks endlessly in my jeans, no doubt staining my boxer briefs, but I can't take my focus off her long enough to give it the attention it craves. Not with Missy's hot, untouched pussy pulsing needily against my tongue.

With her back arched and those tits shaking with every labored breath she exhales, Missy is a sight to behold. One I wish I could capture and frame for the house. Now that's art!

She grows more desperate with every lick, and she begins rolling her hips against my tongue, painting my chin and jaw with her arousal. Broken moans slip past her parted lips with every move, and I can tell she's close. I am about to give this girl the first orgasm she's ever received from a man, and I have every intention of blowing her mind with it.

With a rough growl, I close my mouth over her clit and apply steady suction, making her cry out even as her pussy begins to quiver against my tongue. I apply pressure to her swollen bud, and that sets her off. Her legs stiffen, and a scream tears out of her throat as a rough shudder rocks through her body.

"H-Howard... Oh God... Oh!"

Her tits shake as she heaves, body spasming with beautiful tremors as she chases the feeling, rolling her hips against my mouth and coating it with her arousal. I lap at her sex until the tremors have died down before straightening and pulling her up with me. I comb my fingers into her hair and wrap my hand around it before slamming my mouth down on hers, letting her taste her satisfaction on my tongue.

"Take me out," I growl, my mouth moving feverishly over hers, and I run my free hand over her tits, pinching her puckered nipples between my fingers. "Take my cock out and jerk me off, princess."

Missy does as I instruct, her fingers shaky as she reaches between us and undoes my pants, tugging down the zipper before sliding her hand into my boxer briefs. I hiss when her slender hand wraps around my thick cock. I am panting as she manages to pull it out, using both hands to stroke me. I grunt hard when her finger brushes over the head of my shaft, bringing me to the brink of madness.

"Shit, sorry, did I hurt you?" she asks innocently at my reaction, pushing back to meet my gaze, and there is panic in her beautiful blues. "I...I don't know what I'm

doing.”

“You are doing just fine, baby,” I grunt, dropping my forehead down on hers, our breaths mingling hotly between us as she moves her hand up and down my cock, her innocence and inexperience showing as she strokes me. But fuck if a combination of all that doesn’t send me to the edge.

I come with a rough grunt, shooting white stripes of my spend, painting her hands and stomach with my seed. She gasps in surprise but doesn’t stop, her breathing coming fast in tune with mine as she strokes me until I have unloaded the rest of my come all over my hands and body, marking her with my scent in the way no other man ever has...or will if I have my way.

The tension in my muscles eases, and I lean in, taking her lips with mine again in a dirty, possessive way, seeking to stake my claim. She moans into the kiss, pushing her naked tits against my chest, and my semi-erect cock starts to harden again, but we’re suddenly interrupted by the vibration of a phone. Missy doesn’t seem to notice it as she leans deeper into the kiss, and I am tempted to ignore it as well, but it’s a reminder to back off before I forget myself and take her virginity on my kitchen counter. I promised her I wouldn’t!

Missy whines when I pull back. “W-what?”

“Your phone,” I say, nodding to the pile of clothes on the floor. It must have been stuffed in the back pocket of her jeans, and we both watch it light up under the pile.

“I...I don’t want to look,” she stammers.

“Then you don’t have to,” I tell her, reaching down to grab her phone. I pass it to her to unlock it before snatching it back fast so she doesn’t see the contents on the screen.

It's a different number this time. There are pictures of Missy entering and leaving the police station with me followed by one message.

He can't keep you from me.

I chuckle at the message that is meant to intimidate. "Is it the stalker? What did he send this time?" Missy asks, leaning in to peek at the screen, but I move it away from her reach.

"It's not worth looking at," I tell her, shifting to the settings to remove her passcode. Her phone will stay with me until I get rid of this unwanted pest. "I'll keep this phone with me for the time being," I tell her.

"What about when someone else tries to reach me?"

"I'll let you know if someone does, and I'll get you a burner phone tomorrow," I say, leaning in and brushing my lips over hers, and that is enough to take her focus off the stalker for the moment.

A part of me is looking forward to engaging in his little game. He doesn't know it yet, but the stalker is about to become the prey.

Let's see how he likes being in my crosshairs.

Page 5

Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 2:48 am

Missy

I can't sleep.

Maybe it has something to do with the unfamiliarity of this place, but that doesn't make any sense. I've slept in hotels before, some of which were not half as comfortable as this bed is, and yet, I slept like a log in those beds.

So why can't I sleep in this one that envelops me like a cloud with each layer of softness cradling my body? The sheets are cool and silky against my skin, and the pillows perfectly fluffed. Hell, the room itself is a haven for an insomniac. There is a subtle scent of fresh linen mixed with a hint of eucalyptus, which in any other circumstance would lull me to sleep in seconds.

But I've been up for hours.

Thinking about him. About both of them!

I breathe out a sigh, turning on my back to look up at the ceiling. The room is dimly lit, casting shadows that dance along the walls, but instead of the soft ambiance they are meant to create, all I feel is restless. It doesn't make sense. I am in the same house with a cop who owns a weapon and used to be in the military, not to mention the large guard dog lurking somewhere in the house that would probably jump anyone who tried to sneak in, but that does little to take away the fear.

Maybe what I am feeling has nothing to do with my stalker.

Perhaps the reason I can't relax has everything to do with the man sleeping in the room down the hall. The same man who worshipped my body and made me feel things I never thought anyone could.

I sit up and glance at the alarm clock on the nightstand, groaning when I realize it's only four in the morning. I push off the covers and walk to the window, staring out into the dark and wondering if my stalker is out there, waiting. No, that would be crazy. Even he has to sleep at some point, right?

I sigh, cracking open the bedroom window.

Outside, the gentle rustle of leaves and the distant sound of crickets create a soothing and inviting atmosphere. Movement catches my attention, but the tension eases from my shoulders when I realize it's only Howard's neighbor. I watch the man lace his running shoes and adjust his headphones before jogging down the streets.

The idea to take a morning run after him pops in, but I quickly push it down before it can take root. I chuckle at my own foolishness. Who in their right mind would take a run in a small town when they have a stalker on their tail?

"But it's four in the morning, surely even stalkers take time to rest, right?"

I push away from the window, forcing the thought to the dark corners of my mind. Nope, I am not about to be fodder for a true crime documentary. It would be smarter to stay inside, no matter how badly I want to go out.

With another sigh, I drag my socked feet to the door, figuring I might as well go to the kitchen and grab a glass of water just so I have something to do, except it seems I am not the only one who can't sleep. I open my door to find Bear standing outside, those brown eyes practically glowing in the dark, and the sudden sight of him nearly makes me scream, but I catch the sound just in time.

“Bear, Jesus!” I jump back, slapping my chest as I stare at the dog. “Are you trying to give me a heart attack? I’m just twenty-three!” He doesn’t respond. Shit, of course he doesn’t. It really would give me that heart attack if he actually did. With a shake of my head, I drop down to my knees and pet the dog, running a hand over his massive back. “What’s wrong, sweetheart? Can’t sleep too, or are you just a very early riser?”

My eyes shift to Howard’s door, which is closed, and just then, an idea occurs to me. I could take Bear out for the run and then no one would even think to come close to me with the massive dog in tow. “Wait here, Bear, let me get changed real quick.” I hurry back into my room, digging through the stuff I shoved in my bag. Yoga shorts, tank top, and a hoodie... Well, that will have to do.

Bear and I are quiet as we sneak down the stairs, so we don’t wake Howard up. He mentioned something about having a morning shift last night at dinner, and I would hate to interrupt his sleep. Bear seems all too eager to leave the house, and he’s practically bouncing around, wagging his tail in excitement as I clip on his leash then let us out into the chilly air. I breathe in deeply, the crisp air filling my lungs and clearing my head.

“Which way should we go, Bear?”

Bear takes the same direction the neighbor took earlier on his run, so I assume it’s a trail everyone uses. It’s still fairly dark, but the sky is getting lighter as the sun begins its ascent. I start jogging, feeling the soft thud of my feet against the pavement, each step releasing the tension that has been building up for weeks, and my mind starts clearing. The coolness of the air brushes against my skin, and the slight sting of sweat begins to form on my brows as I follow behind the excited dog.

The world around me comes alive with sounds of rustling leaves in the gentle breeze and the distant chirping of crickets. It’s much more thrilling than the treadmill I run on occasionally back in my apartment building’s gym. I’m not athletic in any sense of

the word, but my vocal coach advised that running would help with my singing, and she was right.

The path winds through a park where moonlight filters through the branches, creating a magical canopy overhead. The dog takes a detour, leading me to a patch of grass where he stops to sniff around, and I take a moment to catch my breath, and that's when it happens.

A heavy arm bands around my waist, and a hand closes over my mouth before I am yanked hard against a solid chest. My eyes widen in horror, and I start to kick, my scream muffled as I try to get Bear's attention, and I do, but only for a moment. He lifts his head to glance up, and I wait for him to scare off the person behind me, but he simply turns his head around, nose on the ground as he walks away from us.

Traitor! Not even a bark? Really?

I have a moment of shock before I start kicking and fighting the strong hold on me again. The man's chest is steel tight when he pulls me hard against it, and I feel the hardness of his stomach too. He's too big, I feel it in the way he easily holds me. A part of me thought my stalker would be a mousy little guy, but this...

"Shhh," hums a deep voice behind me, and I still as familiarity washes over me.

Howard!

I try to turn my head around and glare at the man, but he is a solid wall that keeps me firmly in place. The hand over my mouth stays too, and I'm about to attempt and break free from his steel hold when I suddenly freeze at the feel of his very pronounced bulge pushing against my ass.

"What made you think it was a good idea to run alone in the dark when you have a

stalker watching you?”

Christ, his voice is so rich and deep against my ear, enough to send my heart racing. I want to respond to his question, but his palm stays on my mouth, so I take it for a rhetorical one.

“How much help do you think Bear is away from home? What if the stalker did something before Bear had a chance to attack?” he growls, his voice rough against my ear. “What if there’s more than just one man out there watching you? Watching us right now?”

A shudder runs through my body, and there’s that familiar ache between my legs once more. It starts soft, but it’s quickly growing the longer his hand stays banded around me. There must be something wrong in my head to find this moment hot.

The hand finally falls from my mouth, but his arm stays tight around me. There is a sudden urge to defend myself, but I realize that everything he’s said is true. Coming out here was dangerous on my part, and that could have spelled disaster for me and Bear. I needed the fresh air, but I had no right risking our lives the way I did. “I’m sorry—”

“Don’t be,” he rasps against my ear, and my stomach flutters with butterflies as he trails his free hand over my hip. “I want you to be careful. Safe.”

“I don’t want to get hurt either.”

His right hand slides up under my hoodie, and I bite back a whimper when it brushes across my stomach. “It’s not just you that you should be worried about.” He growls as his massive palm caresses the skin underneath my clothes, leaving a hot trail in its wake. “You should be worried about your safety, but also that of the man following you because there will be little of him left to identify if he so much as lays a finger on

you!”

A shudder rolls through me, not just from his intense words, but in the way he says them. In the receding darkness of the park, it’s intimate, like we are in our own world, there’s only us two out here. “I’ll be careful.”

“Good, because I won’t lose you. I just found you, princess,” he rasps, raking his open mouth over my ear, his warm breath caressing my skin. A flood of heat settles between my thighs, and I dig my teeth into my bottom lip to curb a whimper.

“Howard, we’re in public,” I whisper, needing to remind my handsome cop that his hand all up under my clothes and groping me in the open could lead to our arrest for indecent exposure, but he doesn’t seem all that worried about getting caught. In fact, it almost seems like the thought sets him off as the steel hard cock pressing against my ass cheeks swells further. Wait, we’re not about to have a repeat of the kitchen out here, are we? “Howie—”

“Let me worry about getting caught,” he says, brushing his lips against my ear even as he slides his fingers into the waistband of my yoga shorts. I look around in panic, but white flashes behind my closed lids when his finger grazes that sensitive spot of my sex. I moan, barely able to swallow the sound this time, blushing fiercely when it carries into the trees.

“Howie, we shouldn’t...”

“We shouldn’t what?” he asks roughly, dragging a thick finger through my wet folds. It’s dark, but not completely; anyone walking by might see.

“Howie...”

He spins me to face him, and without warning, lifts me into his arms. My mind is still

reeling as I wrap my legs around his waist. With a whistle for Bear, he turns and carries me back in the direction of the house. I loop my arms around him and tuck my face into the side of his neck, inhaling his masculine scent that sends a fresh ache to my already sensitive core. Tentatively, I kiss his skin, then taste him with my tongue. His response is a low groan and the tightening of his fingers in my ass cheeks.

In what feels like minutes, we're back inside his house, the front door kicked shut behind us with a bang. I barely register the sound of Bear's nails on the floor as he trots off deeper into the house. Our path is a blur as Howard continues to carry me through the house. Before I can even register where we are, he's dropping me onto a bed—his bed.

Splayed out on his bed before him, I can't bring myself to feel any embarrassment as he makes quick work of removing my shorts and underwear. There is none of the teasing from earlier as he buries his spreads my legs and lowers himself between my thighs and licks me. Over the same spot I have never exposed to any other man, my cop drags his tongue, causing more moisture to pool in my sex. I cry out, hot flashes of pleasure nearly blinding me as he flicks his tongue over my clit, making me forget...

I tune out all sounds and thoughts. Everything but this man turns into a pile of dust and blows away. My thoughts turn to mush, and all I can do is feel.

Oh God! Oh! My sex clenches and releases around his tongue as he bathes it in fast strokes. My throat closes as violent tremors shoot through my body as he pleasures me with that sinful tongue of his.

"More," I sob. I want more of whatever this man has to give me.

Howards pulls back to meet my gaze, his gray eyes flashing with heat under the glare of the fading moonlight. "Are you sure?"

I blink at the man, my desire-riddled brain trying to make sense of what he's asking.
“Huh?”

“Are you sure you want more?”

Oh God, did I really say that? And is he offering what I think he is? I haven't even known this man for a full day. Giving him my virginity would be insane, and yet the look in his eyes tells me that this is right. I can't imagine experiencing this for the first time with anyone else.

As my eyes lock with stormy gray ones that threaten to sweep me into their tumult, I realize I want nothing more than to be carried away by this man. As long as it's him, I can let go and know that he'll be there to catch me.

“Yes, I want everything.”

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Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 2:48 am

Howard

There was venom in his eyes.

I could feel it burn through the air as he watched from the shadows. He'd likely been watching her from the moment she left my house, but he had no fucking chance to make his move because my eyes had been firmly on her as well.

Before she could get too far from the safety of my house and give her stalker the opportunity he was hoping for, I grabbed her. I would not lose Missy to anyone, but I decided to take advantage of our little audience and stake my claim. Show him how willingly she accepts my touch, my kiss. That's it me she trusts with her body.

Mine!

I had to rein myself in before I lost control, though. It's one thing to show her stalker that Missy is mine. I wasn't about to expose her to his unworthy gaze. So I scooped her up and rushed her home before I did something that could put us both in danger. Now she's in my bed, right where she belongs.

Missy's eyes stay locked on mine as I climb over her lithe body. Her thighs open to accommodate me, whimpering when I press the hard ridge of my erection against her naked pussy, no doubt staining my pants with her juices, but I can't bring myself to care.

"You are so goddamn beautiful," I say, desire thick in my voice as I slide my hand back under her hoodie and palm her tits, pinching her nipples over her tank top. She

whimpers, arching into my touch as she rubs her bare pussy over the hard ridge pushing against my pants. “I’ve wanted to bury my cock into your tight little center from the moment I saw you. You looked so fucking gorgeous, I wanted to take you out of the car, put you in handcuffs and fuck you right there in the middle of the street while everyone watched me claim you.”

Her eyes widen in surprise. “Y-you did?”

“You belong to me now, princess. I will kill anyone who dares lay a finger on you.”

My mouth slams down on hers, and I groan deeply as she returns the kiss, her tongue the sweetest thing I have ever tasted. I get drunk on her taste and lose myself in her scent, lapping at her mouth like a starved man, and for her, I always will be. My hard cock aches with the need for release, pressing into my zipper as she feverishly rubs her pussy against my hardness.

I break the kiss to trail my lips down her jaw, pushing up her hoodie to reveal her tits. Her puckered nipples push into her tank top, greedily begging for attention, and I am too weak to resist. I lean down and lick her nipples, running my tongue over the rosy buds through her thin top, making her back arch with a sob.

“Oh God,” she whimpers, as I kiss a trail down her body, grazing her belly with my teeth and feeling her spasm under my lips. I catch a scent of her sweet flavor, my mouth watering for another taste. Her legs part for me, practically begging for my tongue, and I waste no time, burying my face between her thighs again with a barely contained growl. “Howie, Oh, God!” she sobs.

I worship her pussy with deep licks, running my tongue through the valley of her sex, groaning deeply at her addictive flavor. “Fuck, baby, you taste like heaven!” Something only I will ever get to experience. Only me, and not the man lurking in the shadows watching her. He’ll never touch her. Never know the kind of heaven that

exists between her thighs, and his will never be the name on her lips as she cries out in pleasure. It's my hair that she grips as she rolls her hips, chasing that delicious feeling only I can give her.

Only I will ever give her!

"H-Howie," she pants, her back arching when I tease her clit with my tongue, stroking the bud lightly as moisture floods her sex. She gets wetter by the second, her slickness only working to make my cock ache fiercely with the need to fuck her. Shit, it needs to happen soon.

"Mine!" I growl, lapping at her sex with quick strokes until I feel her teeter close to the edge before closing my mouth around her clit with hard suction, and that is all it takes. Her mouth parts in a scream she tries to bury behind her hand, yanking hard at my hair with the other as she climaxes. I keep my tongue on her sex, pleasuring her through the violent trembles until they calm down before climbing back up her body.

In seconds, I've stripped her of her remaining clothes and me of mine. I squeeze the base of my cock to stave off my own building orgasm. I'm not about to come until I'm inside her. My shaft is aching and dripping with precum as I guide it to her sex. "Damn, princess, how the fuck have you stayed a virgin this long? I bet you walk into a room, and all the men there want to rut you." I position my cock at the opening of her sex, rubbing the head of my shaft over it and gathering her arousal on the tip. "They must drool at the thought of kissing this body, sucking these perky peaks between their lips, but only I ever will."

"Yes," she breathes, rolling her hips eagerly against me. "Only you."

I push her knee higher on my waist, the beast inside of me clawing with the need to possess her, rut her so hard the neighbors will hear me claim her. They'll know that this gorgeous girl belongs to me.

Will only ever belong to me!

“Mine,” I growl, tucking the head of my cock into her tight entrance, eyes locked on her beautiful gaze as she tries to take me in. She whimpers at the intrusion, the trust in her eyes undoing me, bit by bit tearing at the walls that I thought were permanently erected around my heart. She’s been chipping at them from the moment we met, but in this moment, she slams her way into my heart, easily tearing through the barricades.

“S-so big,” she whimpers, as I work the tip of my head into her heat, my muscles drawn tight as I fight back the need to slam into her, set on taking it slow even if it kills me. I would never hurt her, the thought of causing this girl any pain has my heart wrenching painfully.

She’s mine to protect. To guard from all forms of hurt, and those that I can’t prevent, I’ll do my damndest to ease for her.

But she tests my control, making it hard for me to take it easier on her as she wraps her legs tighter around my waist, locking them behind me, which pushes my cock deeper into her tightness. “Fuck me, baby,” I manage through gritted teeth, forcing deep breaths to control myself. “I don’t want to hurt you, princess.”

“I know, but I want... I need to feel you. All of you!”

Fuck!

I dig my fingers into her hip, eyes locked on hers as I plow into her, tearing through her innocence and burying my thick cock deep in her tight channel. I slam my mouth down on hers, swallowing her cry even as I fight to restrain myself from coming on the spot, her pulsating pussy making it hard not to.

She's tight, but of course she is. I just took her virginity. I've just laid claim to her.

Mine.

"Fuck, baby, are you okay?" I rasp against her lips. I lean back, and my eyes find hers gleaming with tears, but there is something else in those gorgeous blues. "How bad does it hurt?"

"I'm okay," she says with a teary smile, tightening the grip she has around my shoulders. "It hurts a little, but I like it."

My brows furrow in confusion. "The pain?"

"No." She chuckles, the sound light and airy even as the tears spill. "Feeling you inside of me. I like that a lot."

"Fuck, princess. You can't say things like that and expect me not to lose control." I question for the hundredth time what this girl is doing to me. How is it that a man such as myself would turn helpless in her hands? Just one look, and I am ready to worship the very ground she walks on.

"Take me," she whispers. "Make me yours."

And so, I do.

With a deep, guttural growl, I plant a forearm above her shoulder, and with my eyes locked on hers, I start hammering into her. It occurs to me that I'm taking her raw, filling her in fast pumps that could lead to her getting pregnant. The thought of this gorgeous girl swollen with my child is all the fuel I need. "So fucking tight, princess," I grit when the muscles of her pussy flex around my cock. I drink in her flushed expression, eyes glazed with lust, and that beautiful pouty mouth parted on

whimpered moans. “I’ll rut you so hard, bury my seed so deep into you, you get pregnant. Let the whole fucking world know that you belong to me.” A very dangerous man willing to cross all lines to make sure she stays safe.

“Yes,” she whimpers, her hips rolling to meet my fevered thrusts. “Yours. Only yours.”

“Goddamn right!” I growl, my balls heavy as I hammer my cock in and out of her wet pussy, her tits shaking with every thrust. I drink in her expression, and God, she’s so beautiful, so breathtaking. I fuck her like a beast possessed, my thighs slapping against hers with the fervor of a sex-starved animal. The sound of our lovemaking fills the room, adding to the urgency I feel.

Nothing else matters but this girl. This moment we share.

I drop my head to her neck and pound into her harder, faster. I have a death grip on her thigh as I bear down on her. The tempo of her breathing changes, and her nails claw my back as she rocks up to meet my thrusts. “Close,” she whimpers, her thighs beginning to shake. “Oh God, Howie...”

“I’ve got you, princess,” I grind out, dropping my hand between us and stroking her clit with firm circles, my muscles and balls burning with the need to come, aiming to get us off at the same time. I don’t think it’ll happen—it’s never happened before—and yet, I can feel it. I can almost grasp it with the tips of my fingers.

“Howie!” she pants, her breathing choppy as her pussy begins to quiver. I pour everything into her, punching my hips forward and violently pounding her into the mattress, feeling my muscles strain painfully, and when she orgasms, I let go. She comes with a scream, one that tears through the air, drowning out my roar as I spill into her.

“Fuck!” I yell, pounding furiously into her as her pussy clenches around me, squeezing my cock rhythmically as I spill my release into her womb, marking her as mine.

They take forever to ease, the spasms rocking her body and the shudders that roll through mine. It’s a first for both of us. I have never experienced anything so intimate. So...consuming.

My muscles turn to jelly, and I collapse, bracing myself before I crush her, but she allows none of that, pulling me down firmly on top of her body. I brush my lips over her temple and bury my face in her hair, inhaling her sweet scent that I am beginning to believe is her natural scent. “Are you okay, baby?”

“Hmm,” she hums, running her hands over my shoulders and down my back. “I don’t think you have an ounce of fat on your body,” she mumbles. “I’ve seen the tattoos, but I wonder how many you have. And do any cover scars from your time in the military?”

“I’d let you count them, but I can’t move my muscles.”

“Yeah, that can wait,” she agrees, tightening her grip around me once more. “I don’t want you moving either. It’s cold, and your body is like a furnace.”

I lift my head and glance at the window, wondering if her stalker is still out there, if he’d followed us back here. I don’t have to see his face to guess he’s fuming. I would be too if someone touched the woman I wanted, but he can’t have Missy. She’s mine.

And now he knows that she’s taken. Protected.

If he ever tries to get close to her again, Valor Springs PD will have to enlist outside forces to find what’s left of his body.

We lay in each other's arms for long minutes, but at some point, we sit up in bed to watch the sunrise, and it's quite a sight. As breathtaking as it is, it doesn't come close to the girl in my arms. It's not until Bear finds his way back to us once more that I decide to get up and start preparing for work. Missy burrows under the covers, and by the time I'm ready to leave for my shift, she is out like a light with her head on my pillow. I take a moment to watch her sleeping form. I don't want to leave her, but I know she'll be safe inside my home with my loyal dog at her side.

"Don't let her out your sight," I tell Bear, who is lying at the foot of the bed. He gives a low woof in response, and I bend to scratch his ears. "Good boy. Protect our girl."

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Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 2:48 am

Missy

I wake up to the sound of barking echoing through the stillness of the house. My eyes flutter open, and I am momentarily disoriented, trying to make sense of where I am. The barking grows louder, more insistent, and I groan.

I bury my face deeper into the pillow, trying to drown out the barking, and just then, I catch a warm cedar scent clinging to the pillow. Slowly, everything starts filtering through my muddled brain.

His delicious scent is everywhere. On the sheets, in the air, and God, it's on my skin.

I sit up slowly, the sheets slipping from my shoulders as I try to shake off the remnants of sleep. The room is still, save for the echo of that barking, and I can still feel a slight chill in the air as I swing my legs over the edge of the bed. My feet touch the cool floor, and I shiver slightly at the contact. The sound of the dog barking is relentless, something that compels me to leave the warm bed.

With a yawn, I push myself off the bed, the mattress creaking softly beneath me. I look around for something to wear, and my lips stretch into a grin when I spot the t-shirt Howard was wearing this morning, so I slip into it.

“Bear?” I call out, walking down the hallway as I try to locate where the bark is coming from. It gets louder as I approach the living room. “Bear, what’s wrong? Are you hungry?”

I yawn again as I finally locate him by the window facing the front of the house. As I

approach the dog, I notice him standing rigid, his nose pressed against the glass, eyes intensely locked on something outside.

A sense of unease settles in as I stop next to him, kneeling beside the big dog and patting his back even as I follow his gaze outside.

My heart lunges into my throat when I spot a man standing just beyond the front yard and staring right at the house. My stalker . It's the only explanation for the chill that comes over me when I see him.

I have never met the man that I know of, but the second I spot him, I feel it. He is wearing a dark hoodie, the hood obscuring his face, but I don't need to see his eyes for me to tell that it's the same ones that have been tracking me for weeks, maybe even more.

He followed me to Valor Springs. I knew this. He sent the pictures to prove it, but knowing he is in the area and actually seeing him so close are two different things.

The dog lets out a low growl, stepping protectively in front of me, and I instinctively reach to pat his head, seeking comfort in his presence even as my pulse races. "It's okay," I whisper. "He can't get to us in here." At least I hope he can't.

Shit, maybe he has a weapon. What if he finds a way to get in or forces his way into the house? No, I can't leave all the protecting to Bear. It would kill me if he got hurt. I need to show this creep that he can't get to me, that I'm not scared of him.

"Wait here, Bear," I say, jumping to my feet, and with a sudden surge of adrenaline, I am sprinting toward the kitchen. My mind races with thoughts of what I might find when I get back. What if he's still there? What if I find him trying to break in? I frantically scan the kitchen for anything that might serve as a weapon, opening and closing drawers. I reach inside of one and my fingers grasp something cool and

metallic, and that's all I need before I run back to Bear. My breath comes in quick gasps when I make it back, but I am hit with an unsettling silence.

The man is gone.

"Did he leave?" I whisper, kneeling next to Bear again and squinting my eyes as I scan around for the figure, but something tells me he's long gone. A mix of relief settles in, and I fall back as all the adrenaline comes crashing down. "He's gone," I whisper to myself, but the words bring me little comfort.

He'll be back. He always comes back.

The first time I realized I had a stalker was way before I even started receiving those weird little notes. I often felt eyes on me in the middle of the day, but I'd look around, and everyone around me would be minding their own business. I figured I was just being paranoid or that it was the paparazzi following me until the first note arrived.

Seeing you was love at first sight, read the first note. The rest that followed were compliments on my hair, my body, and even the clothes I'd worn that day. My manager had argued if there was indeed someone leaving me notes, then I should be flattered. That he was not a dangerous stalker, just an admirer.

I wanted so badly to believe him.

Bear and I sit in silence, watching the window for a long time, as if expecting the man to spring from some hiding spot, but that never happens. My stomach picks that moment to remind me that I haven't had anything to eat all day, and Bear turns to look at me, judgment clear as day in his brown eyes.

"Hey, don't look at me like that when I'm holding a weapon," I say, lifting my hand,

but as I look down, my heart drops for a completely different reason. I stare in disbelief at what I'm holding—a shiny metal cookie cutter with a handle.

I could have sworn I had a knife when I left the kitchen, so why the hell am I holding a cookie cutter? I could have grabbed anything—a skillet, a pot, hell even a fork would have done more damage than a freaking cookie cutter!

Why the hell does Howard even have a cookie cutter?

I rise to my feet with a sigh, ready to go to the kitchen, when Bear barks, sending blood chilling in my veins. I turn around so fast, nearly giving myself whiplash. My panicked gaze shoots back to the window, half expecting to see the dark figure once more, but crossing the front walkway is the man who makes my heartbeat for an entirely different reason.

He's in his uniform, and there is a dark look in his expression that sends a shiver racking my body.

He looks angry.

No, anger doesn't begin to cover it. He looks murderous as he struts toward the door, but Bear doesn't notice the dark mood surrounding the man as he wags his tail happily and rushes to the door. I stay put, waiting for him by the window, and when he walks in, those gray eyes scan the place before landing on me, and I notice his shoulders lose most of their tension.

Time freezes as we lock eyes, and I see the anger in his expression melt into worry. His brows furrow, and for a long moment, neither of us speaks. Bear finally notices the mood and turns his nose up as he walks away, unwilling to deal with the drama, and I would laugh if the room wasn't so tense.

I don't know what to make of Howard's attitude. Is he angry at me? Is he going to ask me to leave? I should have known this was too good to be true, that a man like Howard wouldn't want me for the long haul. I'd already suspected that whatever this thing between us is would end as soon as my stalker was caught. I'd hoped it would last at least that long, but it looks like I might have been wrong.

Finally, I break the silence, my voice coming out awkwardly as I try to defuse the tension that's settled in the room. "So, um, do you bake cookies?" He barely reacts to my question, my effort to lighten the mood failing miserably. His eyes simply drop to the cookie cutter in my hand before shifting back to me. "It was the first thing I could grab. What are you doing home?" In his uniform no less. Did he leave in the middle of his shift?

"A neighbor called me about Bear's barking."

"Oh, I'm sorry—"

"He was here, wasn't he?" he cuts me off, eyes turning murderous once more. "That fucker was here!"

"Howie..."

"After the stunt he pulled last night, I didn't think he would show up again this soon. He's fucking crazy, and he's escalating, taking more risks. Probably running on nothing but caffeine or God knows what!"

I blink at the man in confusion. What is he talking about? "Howie..."

He shakes his head, unwilling to explain any of what he just said as he crosses the distance between us, his arms wrapping around me in a tight embrace. "That bastard won't get to you," he grinds out, but I barely register his words as I bury my face in

his neck, feeling the warmth of his body against mine and the familiar scent of his cologne soothing me. All the tension and fear melt away as I sink into his hug, the feel of his heartbeat steadying mine. “You belong to me. He knows that now,” he growls into my ear, sending my heart racing from the possessiveness in his voice. The arm around my waist tightens as he massages my hip, reminding me that I only have Howard’s t-shirt on.

I suck in a sharp breath when his hand slides beneath the shirt and fondles my naked ass, making me whimper as heat settles over the private spot between my legs. I’m a little sore from our lovemaking this morning and should not encourage another round, but it feels too good to ask him to stop.

My eyes start to flutter when he slides his fingers lower, and I jerk hard in his arms when he grazes the sensitive bundle of nerves between my legs. The hand on my waist keeps me firmly in place as he strokes the swelling bud with the other, and I find myself parting my legs wider for him, my breathing hitching as he rubs the enlivening spot in torturously slow circles.

“You must have been scared, princess,” he says into my ear as his finger moves faster, expertly strumming my clit, making my sex grow slicker by the second. “I messed up, baby. I shouldn’t have left you alone here.”

“It’s... Oh God, it’s not your fault,” I pant.

“I’ll take better care of you,” he promises, gathering moisture onto his middle finger before pressing it inside of me. I whimper at the soreness that quickly fades when he starts thrusting his finger in and out of me in slow motions until the obscene sounds of our lovemaking fill the air.

“Oh God,” I cry out, burying my fingers in his shoulders as he slowly brings me closer and closer to an orgasm with his finger, making my thighs quiver. I claw his

shoulders, bracing for the sweet release, and when it comes, I sob at the intensity of it, my sex clenching hard around his thick digit as a shudder rolls down my body, but I don't get a chance to drop from the high as I am quickly lifted off the ground and my legs immediately go around his hips.

I gasp when he slams my back up against the same window I was watching earlier. He sits me on the small sill as he works on his belt, dropping it to the floor with a loud clang when he manages to get it off. His mouth slams down on mine, and the kiss turns wet and fevered as I drop my hands between us to help him strip, and soon, I have my hand wrapped around his massive cock. A deep guttural groan slips out of his mouth as I stroke his hardness, and he breaks the kiss to trail his hot mouth down my neck, tugging at the t-shirt to kiss any exposed skin he can reach.

"I've been thinking about this since I left the house," he says between kisses, his left hand fondling my tits and causing the nipples to pebble and ache with need. "I couldn't wait to come back home to you."

Home. To me? His words floor me, rendering me speechless. Sometime during our time together, the lines blurred, and we shifted from strangers to...more. A whole lot more than people who only met a day ago. But does he really feel it too, or is he just saying it in the heat of the moment?

"Kiss me," I breathe, and when our lips meet once more, we're animals. Licking into each other's mouths with desperation, the wet glide of tongues is so carnal, it's sinful. I need to feel my heartbeat in tune with his strong one, so I give him everything. I let him take everything!

"I need to fuck you, baby," he growls, leaning down and sucking my pebbled nipple through the t-shirt, and I cry out as he runs his tongue over the peaked bud, drawing on it and leaving my sex pulsing with need. "Tell me if you're too sore for this—"

“No,” I cry out, wiggling closer to his shaft and guiding it to my entrance. I’m already too desperate to think about stopping. I need him more than I ever thought I could, and after everything that has happened, I need him more now. “I want you. Need you.”

“Then you’ll have me.”

Howard's hands both slide to my ass cheeks and take hold of my backside before slamming into my sex. My breath releases in a hot rush when he fills me, and he shudders violently, his heated grays watching me with so much intensity as he starts grinding into me. It’s awfully intimate, the way his eyes stay on mine as he rocks into me, panting against each other’s lips. “I never thought it could feel this way,” I whisper, running my fingers over his broad chest, feeling his muscles shift under the uniform. “I wasn’t sure I would ever feel anything remotely close to this with anyone.”

That I would ever fall in love. I have written so many love songs that my label turned down, and now I realize it’s because I had no idea what I was writing about. How I thought I could sing and write about love when I’d never experienced it myself floors me. I know better now.

I feel it in the way Howard looks at and touches me. I feel it in the way he makes love to me.

In the way he calls me his, claiming me for himself.

I only ever want to belong to him, I realize. When all this is over and my stalker has been caught, I want to stay with Howard. The thought of going back to my old life, a life in which he does not exist, sends my heart wrenching painfully.

“You are not going anywhere, neither one of us is,” he says gruffly, almost as if he

can tell what I am thinking, and I don't bother questioning it as I lean in and bury my face in his neck, bracing myself as he hammers his thickness into me, the friction sparking the fire back inside of me. My vision blurs as he moves faster, and I arch into him, desperate for release.

God, I love him.

It's at the tip of my lips to say it, but I am terrified out of my mind that he might not feel the same way, so I bury myself deeper into him. Let my body do all the talking, surrendering to his touch, and when the storm comes flooding in, it sweeps us both out to sea.

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Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 2:48 am

Howard

It's my business to know everyone that enters and leaves my goddamned town.

His name is Michael Bodley. Thirty-one. Never been married and used to work as an accountant until a few months ago when he resigned out of nowhere. What I've gathered so far from his social media is that he was a quiet man without much of a social life until he somehow crossed paths with Missy.

Up until a month ago, his social media was largely inactive until he started posting pictures of her. Photos that do not exist anywhere else on the internet. All this has gone unnoticed for weeks.

The man quit his job right around the time Missy's name graced the tabloids. I couldn't place her the first time we met, but I'd eventually made the connection when we were at the station. And as soon as I saw her red-carpet pictures, I realized why her name was so familiar. Heck, I've heard her music on the radio a couple of times and always thought it was a little overdone with the instrumentals. Maybe that's what people are into these days, but the production didn't appeal to me much.

Her singing voice is as sweet as her talking voice, but whoever is managing her music career is doing a shit job of it and doing no justice to this sweet girl.

It seems she blew up overnight after the rumors of her dating Sebastian Foster came to light. I turn to the girl asleep next to me and wonder if that is who she was coming to see in Valor Springs before I pulled her over. There haven't been any new calls or messages to her phone, other than her manager, whose number I blocked after his

fifth scathing voicemail. He'll have to be dealt with eventually, but it can wait. I wonder why Sebastian hasn't tried to reach out to Missy yet.

"He can't help me now. I was going to meet up with him for advice, but I can't do that now. I risk exposing him and his girlfriend to the stalker too."

If I didn't fully believe that she and Sebastian had never been together, it would send me into a jealous rage. I still don't like that their names were connected by dating rumors, still whatever it is they shared is what brought her to Valor Springs—to me.

And now I'm learning that she has no connection whatsoever to this Michael guy either. Not that I can find at least.

Missy stirs, mumbling something in her sleep. I reach out and run a hand over her hair in a soothing motion until she settles. It's only nine, but after everything that's happened, she is way overdue for rest.

I turn back to my laptop, scrolling through this guy's information. He doesn't look a day over twenty with his baby face, bushy brows, and badly cropped hair. None of his features stand out, and if I ran into him on the streets, I would never have noticed him with his mousy frame. He just fades into the background, and I can see why it would be easy for him to follow Missy around with her none the wiser.

But he's obsessed with the wrong woman.

My woman.

A dumbass too, or maybe just bold. Taking pictures of Missy in public places in clear view of the security cameras, thinking no one would catch him was a foolish move, or maybe he was banking on no one believing that she had a stalker.

If the manager and the other cops had done their fucking jobs, then Missy wouldn't have been forced to run. All it took was a screenshot of his face from the security cameras facing the station's parking lot to find him and run a background check on the man.

And for him to show up here?

Oh, he's getting bold. Or desperate.

Perhaps he knows the most she can get out of this is a restraining order against him, and that's not enough of a consequence to keep him away. But that's why she has me now.

I will be the consequence he'll have to deal with when I catch up with him.

I grab her phone, ready to scroll once more through the latest pictures he sent when it lights up with a call. I stare at the name flashing on the screen for a long time before finally deciding I might as well answer it. I glance at the sleeping girl as I slowly climb off the bed so as not to wake her before quietly leaving the room.

I answer the call once I have closed the door behind me, making my way down the hall and heading for the kitchen. "I was just thinking about you," I say in greeting. There is silence at the other end of the line, and I smirk, joining Bear, who is waiting at door to the kitchen, wagging his tail excitedly at me.

"I'm sorry, I must have dialed the wrong number."

"No, it's the right number," I say, patting the dog on the head before walking into the kitchen where he follows me, giving me that pitiful look that always earns him a treat. "You are looking for Missy, aren't you?"

Another long silence before the voice at the end of the line speaks. “Who are you? Why do you have her phone?”

“I’ll cut to the chase, Sebastian. Did you know Missy was on her way to meet you here in Valor Springs?” I ask, heading for the pantry. I keep it locked, so Bear doesn’t cause havoc in there looking for a snack. I learned my mischievous dog can pull the handle down and open the door himself the hard way.

Sebastian is quiet for a long time, and I almost think he’s hung up before his voice breaks through the speaker again. “Howard? Is that you? God, I thought I recognized your voice,” he says before hurriedly adding, “What are you doing with Missy’s phone, and what do you mean she was on her way to Valor Springs? Is she with you? Did something happen to her?”

“Something happened alright, but I don’t have time to explain it over the phone. Are you not the one who invited her to Valor Springs?”

“I did, but I mean, it was more of an open invitation. The media had been hounding her for weeks after the rumor we were dating, so I told her she was welcome to hide out in Valor Springs. That Lizzy and I would be happy to host her for as long as she needed.” There is another slight pause as he connects the dots. “Wait, is that why she tried calling? Lizzy and I were out of town, and we both had our phones switched off.” I catch worry and guilt in his voice when he speaks next. “Is she okay?”

“She’s with me,” I respond as I walk into the pantry with Bear on my heels, his tail wagging fiercely when I reach up to grab his snack box. “So, you two were never in a relationship, right?”

“Of course not, it was just something the label concocted to get her more publicity. She wasn’t fond of the idea either, but her manager is a real piece of work, so she didn’t really have a say in any of it.”

And it's because of that meathead Missy still has a stalker. There is no way in hell I am letting her go back to someone who risks her life the way her manager did. I don't care what it takes, I am staying by her side and vetting the people that come into her life. I am not going to let anyone use her again. I take a treat from the box, and Bear grabs it out of my hand, nearly biting off my fingers.

"Missy is safe with me now," I say into the phone. "She'll be fine, I'll make sure of it."

"Do you mean with you or with you?" His voice has a mischievous note, and I can already see the smirk on the singer's face. However, I also catch the relief in his tone.

"Both."

"Well, I guess I don't have to be worried then. I panicked when I saw how many times she'd tried to reach me. I figured something happened with her manager or the media, and I was worried, but I'm glad you found her."

Well, she found me, but I don't correct him on that. Instead, I focus on feeding Bear another snack before tucking the box back in its place. "I'll take care of her."

"I'm sure you will."

I hang up, and I have no doubt he's laughing at my expense. Valor Springs is a very small town, and I have no doubt he'll take immense joy in spreading the news about Missy and me to the other residents. All he needs to do is tell his girlfriend, who'll tell her friends, and soon, we will be the topic of the town.

Shaking my head, I walk out of the pantry with Bear, but he quickly loses interest in me when I lock the door to the pantry. I lean back against it and scroll through the pictures from the stalker, trying to get a sense of what he likes. All the photos were

taken to highlight the features of her body. I grit my teeth when I notice a cropped photo of her cleavage, questioning when the fuck he got close enough to take a shot of her fucking chest, but nothing drives me to near insanity like when I see the silhouetted image of her in the shower, which was clearly taken from inside the bathroom.

He got so close.

So fucking close, it makes me see red.

“Who were you talking to? You look furious.”

My gaze lifts from the screen to the girl taking a seat at the kitchen counter and playing with a half-empty water bottle. Fuck, she looks so damn sexy dressed in another one of my t-shirts, her tits poking at the fabric and sending all blood rushing south to my groin. “I was on a call with your ex-boyfriend,” I say, switching off the phone and walking over to her.

“I don’t have an ex,” she says, her brows furrowing adorably in confusion.

“Sebastian Foster?”

“Oh.” She chuckles as her expression clears. “He’s a friend. More like a mentor in an industry full of creeps. Did he finally return my calls?”

“Yes,” I say, stepping between her thighs. I wrap an arm around her waist and yank her hard against me. I bite back a guttural groan when she presses her pussy against my erection, rolling her hips and nearly distracting me from what we are talking about. “Sebastian is very worried about you,” I manage.

“Oh, I’ll have to apologize to him for calling as much as I did. I panicked, and I

didn't know who else to call—”

“Hey,” I cut her off, dropping my forehead to hers. “He’s not angry at you. He knows you wouldn’t call unless you had to, but he was out of town.”

“Do you guys know each other?”

I nod. “Valor Springs is such a small town, princess. It would be surprising if we didn’t. He and I went to high school together, ran in the same crowds and everything.”

“I bet it was the popular crowd,” she says, trailing a finger down my naked chest and tracing the tattoos, leaving a fiery wake everywhere she touches. “All the pretty girls probably followed you everywhere.”

I chuckle, the sound pained as she tortures me with her curious fingers. “I look nothing like I did back in high school. I wasn’t popular one bit.”

“Liar,” she whispers, raking her nails down my shoulders as she leans in to kiss me, planting kisses all over my jaw and throat. The press of her mouth is gentle against my skin, quickly fueling my desire and waking the beast in me. “I would have fallen on my ass back in high school trying to get you to notice me.” She slides her hands slowly down my body to my firm stomach, fingering the ridges of my abs before she clasps the waistband of my gray sweats. “I wouldn’t have had to wait this long to have you if I’d met you earlier.”

“Baby, there’s a whole fucking decade between us, this is when it was meant to happen.”

“You’re right,” she hums, sliding her fingers into my sweats, and I groan when she fists my cock, taking me out and using my precum to stroke me. Her eyes stay firmly

on my cock, and I can practically read the desire in her eyes. “We should make up for lost time then.”

Fuck! She was a blushing virgin a mere day ago, and now she’s transformed into this siren. Christ, something tells me there is going to be a lot of making up to do, and just thinking about it sends a thrill through me. “I can’t fucking wait.”

I snap, dropping my hands to her ass and pulling her to the very edge of her stool. My eyes stay locked on hers as I guide my shaft to her drenched pussy, rubbing my cock over the valley of her sex until she’s writhing and moaning for my cock, and only then do I give her what we both want.

I slam my mouth hard on hers as I drive my cock into her pussy, muffling her cry with my mouth. Her channel ripples hard around me, and I am helpless, a man taken body and soul by this girl. My body, mind, and soul belong to only her.

“Mine,” I breathe against her mouth as I slam forward, rutting her hard, her back pressed to the kitchen counter. I’m an animal, feral in the way I take her, seeking her pleasure as desperately as I crave my own. She rakes my shoulders with her nails, sobbing with pleasure as she lets me take her in brutal thrusts in my kitchen, a place that will hold more of our memories for years to come. “I will only ever see you, princess. Popular or not, you’re the only girl I will ever see.”

Mine!

Our lovemaking turns brutal, and she’s like a damn wild cat as she scratches a trail down my shoulders, her pussy growing slicker with every violent thrust. Her sobs mingle with my groans as I piston in and out of her hot pussy, feeling her move closer and closer to the edge, and when she orgasms, it’s a breathtaking sight. She screams into my shoulder, her back arching as her inner walls lock hard around my cock, triggering my orgasm.

I come with a roar, one that tears out of my throat and leaves me hoarse. My muscles tense and release as I shoot my seed into her womb, black spots blooming behind my eyes and blurring my vision for long seconds. Her tight pussy pulses hotly around my cock, milking me to my last drop as I punch my hips forward, burying my seed deeper into her.

She's still shaking in my arms when the storm calms, her breathing as labored as mine. Neither of us says a word for long moments as her head remains on my shoulder, and it's not until my heart has ceased hammering in my chest that I push back to look at her, those beautiful blue eyes drowsy when they lock with mine.

"I've never felt anything remotely close to how I feel about you," I confess. "I burn with the need to be around you, claim you in front of everyone so the entire world can see that you belong to me, and Christ, the jealousy. I hate every man that has ever looked your way. Anyone that has ever desired you."

"Am I allowed to feel the same about all the girls that have done the same with you?"

"Yes," I rasp, pushing a strand behind her ear. "But my attention, my focus will only ever belong to you. I will, without fail, get rid of anyone who gets in the way of that." It isn't a love confession, but it's the closest I can come to one while so much remains uncertain. She's in my arms now, but once the danger of her stalker is dealt with, will she want to leave me to return to her life in the city? A life that doubtless has little room for a man like me?

There's only one way to know. First, I'll have to deal with her stalker. Then we can talk about the future. But whatever happens, I know one thing beyond a doubt: I'm not letting her go.

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Source Creation Date: July 24, 2025, 2:48 am

Missy

I yank the curtains open with a grin, the morning sun spilling its golden light across the front yard. I haven't had sleep this good in a long time, and one look at the bright sky tells me it's going to be a beautiful day. I blush at the memories Howard and I made last night, the intensity of our connection, and how Howard brought me back to his bedroom and we made love again and again.

My heart flutters at the thought, and I can't help but wonder what this means for us. We didn't exactly confess our love for each other last night, but we came close. The connection I have with him is unlike anything else I have ever experienced, and I don't want it to end. Will it? Once my stalker is taken care of, I have a career to get back to. I hope I do anyway. I haven't dared to contact my manager yet, and Howard hasn't mentioned any calls from the man. When I do speak with him, I'm sure he will be angry. The question is, will he cancel my contract with the label?

If I do have a career to return to, how will I keep Howard in my life while pursuing my dreams? He has his own career in Valor Springs. He wouldn't want to follow me, would he?

No. I am not going to allow myself to overthink this. I'm just going to have breakfast with the man I love and spend the rest of the day with him. I don't care that we'll be locked in all day. It's enough that he'll be here. Whatever the future holds, I'm determined to enjoy the present.

I'm practically skipping down the hall, and my grin widens when I smell pancakes. My mouth waters at the thought of fluffy stacks drizzled with syrup.

I'm so caught up in my excitement that I don't notice the slight chill in the air as I hurry toward the kitchen. But I skid to a halt when I reach the front room, my heart dropping like a stone when I spot Howard by the open front door, clipping a leash to Bear's collar. Confusion washes over me, and my smile falters.

When I woke up this morning, I envisioned us together in his kitchen, sipping coffee and enjoying a lazy morning, but instead, he's preparing to leave. "Hey," I call out, leaning against the wall. "Going somewhere?"

He looks up and flashes me a smile, but there is something in his expression that puts me on edge, and it occurs to me that he might regret last night. Did the intensity of our connection scare him, maybe? Is he... God, is he tired of me already?

"I can practically see your mind running, princess. Slow down."

He's right. I'm jumping the gun here. I force in a deep breath and return his smile. "So, um, where are you going?"

"I'm taking Bear to the vet," he says, confirming that he's leaving.

"I'll come with if you give me a moment to get changed—"

"No need, we're already late for his appointment," he cuts me off, and my stomach twists in disappointment. I wasn't just looking forward to having breakfast together but to spending time with him. I don't care if it's at home or at the vet's...

"I'll be quick," I manage to say, my voice barely above a whisper, excitement completely draining from my face. "I've had to get ready in record time when I have shows, so I can be fast."

He gives me that apologetic smile, one that makes my heart flutter despite the

moment. There is something in those gray eyes that leaves me unsettled, questioning again if something changed overnight.

Howard gets to his feet, crossing the distance between us, and his mouth is down on mine before I can say a word. “Nothing’s changed since last night, princess,” he rasps between kisses, and I wonder not for the first time if indeed he can read my mind. “You are still the only woman I want. The only one I need. I’m just taking Bear for a routine vet visit, and we’ll be back before you know it. I didn’t want to wake you up, princess. Just relax and enjoy some breakfast while you wait for us to get back. We’ll talk when I get home.”

Then what’s with the guilty look in your eyes ? I want to ask, but I push it back. It’s probably my insecurities talking, so I refuse to show them. “Okay, I’ll be waiting.”

“I promise, we’ll be back soon,” he says, pushing back to look at me. There’s affection in his eyes when they lock with mine, but it doesn’t quite ease the sinking feeling in my chest. I watch as he grabs the leash and slips out the door with Bear. I walk to the window and watch them climb into his truck before driving off.

With a sigh, I head to the kitchen. I might as well enjoy the pancakes while they’re still hot. I’m probably overthinking, and maybe the guilty look in his eyes was because he was taking Bear to the vet and leaving me home alone. Now that makes more sense. I would have loved to be there with them, but we’ll have the rest of the day to spend together.

Feeling better already, I pour myself a glass of orange juice and fix a plate, hopping onto the counter and digging a fork into my syrup-covered pancakes. I moan as it practically melts in my mouth, and the heartache from earlier eases. If I didn’t already love Howard, his pancakes might be the thing to do it. I dig into the stack until I’m stuffed before pushing the plate away with a happy sigh.

“I could get used to this,” I hum, climbing off the counter to clean the dishes, figuring I’ll probably vacuum the house next or something. I need to make myself useful while I’m here. I put everything away once I’m done with the dishes, and I’m about to figure out what I need to do next when my thoughts are disrupted by the doorbell.

That really was fast. Howard must have forgotten his keys or something.

The skip in my step is back as I make my way to the front door, but my face falls when I peek out to see a delivery man standing on the porch. Howard just left, of course he isn’t back yet, and what are the chances he’d forget his keys?

Get a grip, Missy!

I open the door, forcing a smile to my face to greet the delivery man, but my face freezes when he speaks. “Hello, Missy,” the man says with a wide grin, and it takes a little too long for me to snap out of my stupor, and by the time I go to slam the door, it’s already too late. He jumps toward me and forces his way into the house. His eyes drop to my body, and I shiver with fear when I realize I am yet again dressed in nothing but Howard’s t-shirt, one that barely reaches mid-thigh, exposing my legs. It was an outfit choice that was meant only for Howard’s eyes.

My heart sinks to my stomach, and I tremble. God, I shouldn’t have opened the door.

I notice the man is momentarily distracted by what I’m wearing, and I take that chance to sprint down the hall, running straight to the bathroom, heart pounding in my chest. I slam the door behind me seconds before he crashes straight into it. I press my back against it, my hands trembling as I fumble with the lock, feeling the cool metal against my skin. He curses from the other side, kicking the door and making me jump away from it in fear.

“Missy, open the door!”

I glance around the small room, searching for something to use as a barricade if he tries to get in, and I know he will. There is not much I can use in the bathroom, and I doubt the toilet tank lid will be of much help in blocking the door, but that doesn't mean I can't use it as a weapon. Maybe I can smash it over his head if he manages to break through.

"Missy!"

I don't respond, drooping to the floor and hugging my knees to my chest as I realize how dumb I've been. It's the kid from the gas station, I suddenly realize. There was something off about him, but I was too jumpy and scared to pick up on all the clues that spelled trouble.

I missed it.

"Melissa Sullivan, open this fucking door before I find something to break it down!"

Shit, that's not good. If he leaves, there is no telling what he'll find in Howard's home, maybe even one of the guns he keeps in his closet. I bet breaking the door down wouldn't be hard either with enough force. No, my silence won't do. My best chance right now is to engage him and hope my cop gets home in time to save me.

"Who are you? Why the hell have you been stalk—following me?" I call out, pushing down the panic that threatens to choke me. "What do you want?"

"Open the door, and we'll talk." His voice comes through deceptively gentle, and it takes me by surprise for a moment. He's not the beastly figure I'd pictured in my head. I remember his baby face and bushy brows, things that made me drop my guard around him.

"No," I whisper, hoping my voice carries to his side. "I...I want to know you first and

your intentions for me. Don't you think you'd lock this door if you were in my place too?"

Long beats of silence pass before he finally decides to speak. "You have no idea how long I've wanted you, Missy. Watching you has saved my life."

Then why didn't he approach me like a normal person? I figure asking that out loud might set him off. "How?" I humor him.

"My life was so mundane and pointless, and then one day, your face popped up in a video online. It was a clip from one of your shows, and I couldn't take my eyes off you. I wanted to know you, but then I found out you were dating that bastard, Sebastian Foster."

"How did you find out where I live?"

"Weeks of following you around like a love-sick puppy led me to your place. When I saw you in person for the first time, I knew it was you I wanted just as certainly as I knew I'm the best man for you," he says, and it's almost romantic—in a sick, twisted way. "Then you let him touch you!"

My head whips up at his words. "What do you mean?"

"I was there in the woods when you let that beast touch you, and you were moaning like a bitch in heat!" he rages, kicking the door, and I jump, my back hitting the cupboard. "In the middle of a fucking park, you let him touch you!"

He was there? Oh God! My mind races with all the possible scenarios that could have happened that night. He was so close, and Howard and I had been too wrapped up in each other to be on our guard.

I gasp, replaying that morning and Howard's possessive words. Had Howard realized we were being watched?

"You ran away from the city and into the arms of a monster. You need to pay for that. For spitting on my love by letting that animal touch you."

I jump again, pressing further back when he kicks the door, and I can see the frame splinter. I stand and grab the lid of the toilet tank and hold it up like a baseball bat, ready to swing the moment he breaks through the door. He kicks the door again, and I watch with horror as the frame gives way. I brace myself for whatever is coming, but rather than my stalker coming through the broken door, I hear a ferocious growl followed by a scream.

I cower in the corner, my eyes locked on the door. I strain my hearing and catch a series of pained groans and low snarls. I cry out when I hear a loud thud followed by rough grunts as something hits the floor.

Then there's silence for several long minutes. A whimper climbs up my throat when I catch the sound of someone trying to pull away the broken door.

Is this it?

Is this how I die? I've been running for so long, and this feels like the end of the road for me. God, I should have told Howard I love him when I had the chance.

I brace myself for whatever the stalker is going to do, but I hear it, that familiar voice that I love so much.

"Missy? Princess, are you okay? Talk to me!"

Before I can utter a word, a set of strong arms wraps around my body, and I catch the

warm scent of cedar. I sob with relief and slump against those strong arms, boneless, letting him take all of my weight.

He's here!

"I'm sorry, princess," he rasps into my neck. "I'm so fucking sorry."

God, he's here! "It's not your fault," I whimper, burrowing into his arms.

"It is," he says thickly, and I catch the pain in his tone. "It's my fucking fault he got so close, but it's the only way I could catch him. The only way I could put an end to everything."

The meaning of his words doesn't immediately register, and when it does, I push back from the embrace, my eyes wide with shock. There is remorse in his eyes, and I break our eye contact to look past him to where a man is lying unconscious just outside the room. "You set me up," I choke out, jumping to my feet, and he follows, stepping in front of me and blocking my view of the guy on the floor. "You used me as bait to lure him out." I don't know how to feel, and the conflicted feeling intensifies when he doesn't immediately deny it.

The guilty expression I read on his face before he left makes sense now. "I am so fucking sorry, baby. I wanted to catch him. I knew he was watching the house, waiting for me to leave. I wanted to be rid of him so he'd stop torturing you!" he says gruffly, stepping into my space and backing me to the sink. "I love you, Missy. It killed me that this was the only way I could catch the bastard once and for all. It killed me leaving you vulnerable in this house, but I had to do it. I had to stop him."

That murderous look on his face is back as he talks about my stalker, and a part of me is scared for the man lying on the floor. "You should have told me, then at least I would have been prepared." At the very least, I would have been ready to defend

myself.

“I wasn’t sure you’d agree to my plan.” He’s probably right, and I want to be mad at him for blindsiding me the way he did. There is no telling what the man on the floor would have done to me if I hadn’t managed to escape or if he’d gotten through the door before Howard returned. “I wouldn’t have let him touch a hair on your head,” he says, once again reading my mind. Or maybe I’m just that easy for him to understand. “I was right behind him when he walked in, and when you locked yourself in the bathroom and he started talking, I wanted to record what he said, get his confession on record so there’s no denying he has been the one stalking you.”

“He said he did it because he was in love with me.”

“That isn’t love,” Howard says, sliding his hand around my waist, and I gasp when he lifts me onto the counter. “If it was, it would never have occurred to him to hurt you or scare you as much as he did.”

My eyes briefly stray to the door. “Where’s Bear?”

Howard lets out a chuckle. “He’s out in the hall, standing guard. I called it in, and my partner will be here soon to arrest that bastard. In the meantime, Bear is making sure he doesn’t try to make a run for it.”

“Howie...” I gasp when his mouth drops to my neck, licking the pulse drumming against my skin. My panicked eyes move to the man on the floor again, and my stomach lurches at what might have happened. Howard must sense my distress because he straightens and pulls me in tight to his chest, wrapping me up in a hug. I feel him drop a kiss to the top of my head. “I swear to you, Missy, I would never have let anything happen to you.” I can hear the truth in his words, and I’m about to respond when there’s a commotion from the front of the house.

A moment later, Bear gives an excited yip and a uniformed cop pokes his head into the bathroom. "Sorry to interrupt," he says, "but I heard there's some trash here that needs taking out?"

Howard laughs as he pulls away from me. "Yeah, Danny. Thanks for getting here so fast."

The next couple of hours are a whirlwind of activity as Danny takes our statements and hauls my stalker away. My relief is immense. The nightmare is finally over. But as Howard and I settle into the quiet of the living room, a new worry settles like a weight in my stomach. Now what? Where does this leave Howard and me?

Howard drops down next to me on the couch and pulls me onto his lap. I drop my head onto his shoulder as I straddle him, molding our bodies together. "I love you," I whisper, deciding in the moment to lay it all on the line. Whatever happens, Howard needs to know how I feel. "I love you, Howie. You saved me, and for that, I will only ever belong to you."

My throat closes up as I wait for his reply. His body relaxes, and he falls forward against me, tucking his face into my neck as he speaks against my skin. "I love you, Melissa," he breathes into my neck. "In a short few days, you've become my life."

"I love you," I say again, wrapping my arms around his shoulders. "I was terrified you had a change of heart this morning."

"Let me show you then just how sure I am about my feelings for you."

"Oh!" I gasp when he pulls me hard over the hard bulge in his pants, and I barely have time to respond before he slips his tongue between my lips. We lose ourselves in the kiss, breaking apart only long enough to shed our clothes. When we're finally bare, he lays me back on the couch and begins to work his way down my body.

“Howie!” My back arches with a sob when he closes his mouth over my aching clit as my hands flap about, looking for something to grasp. My sex grows slick with arousal as he laps at it like a horny beast. “God... Howie... Oh!”

I cry out when he tracks his tongue hungrily over the valley of my sex, lapping at my arousal with such hunger it sends moisture pooling in my sex. A sob climbs up my throat when his middle finger enters me, making obscene wet noises as he slides it in and out of me, grunting as he licks at the juices coating my inner thighs.

My body is strung tight, inching dangerously close to a storm that only he is able to rouse inside of me.

I whine when he pulls away, leaving his thick digit inside of me as he settles back between my thighs. “Fuck, baby, I love the way you react to my touch. One kiss, and you’re already dripping for me,” he says gruffly, taking his cock in hand.

I whimper when he pulls his thick digit from my pulsing sex, and I moan when he inches his thick cock into me, slowly stretching me. “You belong to me, Missy. Only me!”

His mouth slams down on mine, and I sob as he starts hammering into me, his massive hands digging into my thighs as he takes me with violent thrusts that send my toes curling. The crude sounds of our lovemaking fill the room, and I try to restrain my cries, but it turns impossible as his rough grunts mingle with my pleased moans. I feel him everywhere, the loud beat of his heart matching my own.

We’re animals, feeding on each other’s desire.

“I’m going to flood this tight little pussy,” he growls. “Breed you until you’re swollen with my child. Every inch of this perfect little body belongs to me!”

“Oh God, yes,” I sob, wrapping my arms around his shoulders and arching into his thrusts, my breathing growing labored as I feel that familiar tightening deep in my tummy grow stronger. “Yours. Only yours.”

“Goddamn right you are!” He drops his finger between us and strums my clit in firm strokes, sending me closer to the edge. “Come for me, baby. Want to feel your pussy come all over my cock!”

A strong current sweeps through my system, and everything tightens at once. My mouth parts with a scream as my sex clenches hard around his cock before releasing with an explosion that sends bright stars shooting behind my eyelids. I sob as he continues to pound me through the rough tremors, intensifying the orgasm. I claw his shoulders, rough shudders rocking my body, and he’s not too far behind as his muscles tighten before he fills me with his seed, roaring as he buries his release in my womb, thrusting wildly into me until I’ve milked him off every drop.

Once we’ve caught our breath, still tangled together on the couch, I can’t help but ask, “Will it always be like this?”

“I don’t think I’ll live to see a day when I don’t want you. When my body and heart don’t desperately crave you. You belong to me.”

I smile, sniffing back the tears that threaten to choke me. “You belong to me too. No more bringing damsels in distress home with you.”

His lip tugs upward as he fights a smirk. “You were the exception, princess. Always will be.”

“What happens now?”

“Well, your stalker is in jail, charged with stalking, breaking and entering, and

attempted assault, along with whatever other crimes the DA can think of,” he says, pulling back to look at me. “It’s nothing you need to worry about.”

I nod, trusting him like I never have anyone else. “And us? What do we do now?” I ask.

“We live, princess. We’ll get married, you’ll become the superstar you are meant to be, and we’ll be happy. Together. Always.”

Six Years Later

Howard

“Some bodyguard you are!”

Sebastian mocks me, but I don't bother even glaring at him. It's bad enough that I have to deal with the man for the rest of my life now it seems. He was one of my closest friends back in high school, but we lost contact when I joined the Marines and he went on to become some music bigshot. Now my wife has brought us back together. We might be grown with families of our own, but it almost feels like we're back in high school.

“Shut the fuck up, I am trying to listen to my wife sing.”

“Aren't bodyguards supposed to be looking around for potential danger? You haven't once taken your eyes off her since she walked on the stage.”

“Shut up!”

“Are you sure you don't want to hire someone else to act as her bodyguard so that you can watch her all you want?” I turn to Sebastian, and he must read the venomous look in my eyes because he raises his hands in surrender. “Jesus, it was just a suggestion. Don't kill me over it!”

“No one protects my family but me,” I growl, my eyes shifting back to my lovely wife. Her long blonde hair is styled to fall over her shoulders, catching the light and

shimmering like spun gold. She radiates such beauty, it still stuns me that someone so beautiful is my wife.

She's seated on the stage with a guitar, strumming as she sings into the mike. I could listen to her sing all day without all the background noise her previous label pushed on her. She sounds like an angel and looks like one too—absolutely breathtaking.

I will always be grateful to Sebastian for signing her to his label and giving her the spotlight to shine, although I would never tell him that to his face. The cocky bastard's ego is inflated enough as is.

“I get you, man, I wouldn't let anyone near my Lizzy either,” he says, slapping my shoulder before we both fall into silence, watching the magnificent woman on stage performing for nearly two hundred people. This is the smallest stage she's performed on in a while, but Valor Springs is a small town, and after touring for months in major cities, she wanted to end the tour where it all started.

Home.

Six years ago, she sought refuge in Valor Springs, and it became home. No matter how many cities we travel to and how beautiful they are, we always come back to Valor Springs. It's where we intend to raise our kids.

The crowd breaks into a loud cheer as the song ends. Missy bows at the crowd, the smile on her face bright as people clap and cheer for her. Her eyes sweep over the crowd, and the smile widens when her eyes lock on mine. I don't rush to her as I typically would if we were in a different city. This is home, and the people here know her, so they don't rush to mob her, instead giving her space as she climbs off stage and walks over to me.

“How was it?” she asks when she stops in front of me.

“Perfect,” I say, wrapping my arm around her and pulling her against me. “You are always perfect.”

“Aaand that’s my cue to leave,” Sebastian says, turning around and leaving us alone. Well, not alone since we have a lot of eyes on us—on my lovely wife. The focus slowly shifts as someone else steps on the stage to perform.

“Do you want to stay back and mingle, or do you want me to steal you away?”

She looks at the people around us, and I see the guilt in her eyes. She’s had a busy couple of months, and I bet she wants nothing more than to go back home to our kids, but we both know they won’t be there. Our two girls are having a sleepover at Lizzy and Sebastian’s with their kids, so we’ll have the house to ourselves if we head straight home.

“I could use a break,” she whispers. “But only for a little while, and then I’ll come back to mingle.”

“A walk it is,” I say, sliding an arm over her shoulders as we walk away from the crowd who’ve turned their attention back to the stage.

We walk in companionable silence before she stops me next to an alley, looking around to make sure no one’s watching, but most of the shops are closed and everyone is at the live music show Sebastian’s label is hosting. “I’ve been thinking about this for a while,” Missy whispers. “We’ve been on the road for months. I want to take a break from the big stages and make music without going on these long tours. I think I want to stay home until Whitney is at least ten.”

“That sounds perfect, princess.”

Her eyebrows draw at my words. “B—but what about you? What do you want?”

I chuckle, pulling her away from the sidewalk and into the alley. She gasps when I back her to the wall, but she doesn't protest the move. "I want whatever you want," I say. "I go wherever you go. The best decision I made was quitting the police force to be with you and protect our family. The girls love traveling as much as they love staying at home. Whatever it is you want to do, then you have my complete support. It doesn't matter as long as we're together."

She blinks up at me, her beautiful blue eyes welling with tears. "How did I find such a perfect husband as you?" She sniffs. "I must have been a saint in my previous life to deserve you."

I lean down and brush my lips along the side of her neck, nudging her to tilt her head back and allow me access. "I'm the lucky one," I rasp, tracing my mouth over the perfect slope of her neck. "I get to be with the sexiest girl, who only has eyes for me."

"I do," she whispers, snaking her hand up to my nape before threading her fingers through my hair and grabbing a fistful, pulling my head from her neck so my eyes are locked on hers. "I only see you." Our lips meet in a slow kiss, and she makes a low mewling sound in her throat as our tongues wind together. "I love you," she whispers, releasing my hair to wrap her arms tightly around me. "I don't know what I would have done if you hadn't stopped me that day."

A loud cheer breaks through the air as another song starts playing. "Think of it as fate."

"But you don't believe in such things."

I brush my lips over hers, tracing a hand up the back of her thighs before cupping her ass and fondling her perfect mounds. "A man is allowed to change his mind."

"Does that mean you'll finally start meditating with me?"

“Hey, you don’t push a new believer into the hard stuff,” I say, and she giggles, which turns into a moan when I slide my hand under her dress, slipping a finger into the waistband of her panties before tugging them down.

“We shouldn’t do this here,” she argues, even as her hands drop to my belt buckle. Her eyes shift to the entrance of the alley to make sure no one’s watching as she tugs open the button on my jeans before pulling down the zipper. “Someone could walk by and see us.”

As if on cue, another cheer tears through the air, startling her. “Hey, focus on me,” I say, grabbing her chin and forcing those gorgeous eyes back on me. My dick is swollen and throbbing with the need to be inside my wife. I’ve been hard from the second she stepped on the stage, and it hasn’t gone down since. “If we’re going to stay home for a while, what do you say we give the girls a sibling?”

She chuckles. “Howard Westwood, are you trying to get me pregnant?”

“Care to give it a go, Missy Westwood?”

I grip her ass and lift her up the wall, groaning when she immediately wraps her legs around me. My eyes are locked on hers as I position my cock at her sodden entrance before slamming into her wetness with a deep growl.

“You are so fucking beautiful, princess,” I grind out. Even in the dim lighting, she’s a fucking star, brightening my entire world. “Mine.” Missy belongs to me, and as I make love to her, our breaths mingling between us, I vow as I did on our wedding day to protect her with my life. To love my bright little star and make her happy.

I’ve never broken a promise before, and this is the most important one I intend to keep.

~The End