



Happy Krampus Xmas & The Meet Not Cute (Angels of Wrath #5)

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Category: LGBT+

Description: Two Xmas Novellas in the Angels of Wrath series.

Happy Krampus Xmas

Happy Krampus Day!

Krampus who? Santa's evil brother, duh.

The horned demon sort of cursed me, and I need to find a way to appease him.

Otherwise, I won't be able to proceed with my donor initiation: blood, torture, death, screams—not in that order.

All I need is to follow my three-step groveling plan.

What could go wrong?

A cussing Santa, a house on fire, donors' accidental deaths, groping spiders, a possessed hen, and pair of bloody itchy, furry shorts.

Xmas holidays suck, and not in the fun way...

The Meet Not Cute

Falling on a jock's lap was definitely not part of my plan.

I'm turning my life around, studying hard and going my own way, when a meet not in the least cute puts me on TJ's path.

Big.

Bigger.

A mountain of a football jock with brown, puppy eyes that unnerve me as much as they suck me in.

We have nothing in common. Not a thing.

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 2:18 am

one

Malls are Hell's waiting rooms

Ah, December. This is the time to be jolly and merry.

It makes me sick.

I slurp loudly on my banana smoothie with extra chocolate sprinkles and a double dollop of whipped cream. It doesn't help my foul mood one bit. The sugar rush is probably fueling the murdering thoughts, while getting me closer to unleashing all my inner demons. And when I say all I mean even the skanky bitch with a screaming disposition.

"Why do you still have the long face?" Michael asks very stupidly.

I hiss at him. Perhaps a tad over the top, but after what I went through, he promised to cheer me up. I went along only to be dragged to this bloody mall—which is the size of Tanzania—to buy presents for the whole Illinois state population.

I can't believe Raph came as well. The rest of the bros—a.k.a. the sausage fest—think he's the boss in the relationship, but Michael just made him carry a hundred and one bags while skipping like a joyful, blitzed spirit from one shop to another.

Raph is buying some burgers and fries—I need my comfort food after what happened...again—while Michael and I are sitting at one of the food court tables

with Offspring and Two, Ash and Ren. They were close by and decided to join us. I should have known they just wanted to fuck with me.

“Come on, Lori. Gabe let you work on his donor after—” Michael’s useless attempt at making me feel better is cut off by Ren.

“His catastrophic inauguration.”

“Initiation, you prick,” I snarl at him, stabbing my to-go cup with the straw.

My initiation in the evil-dispatching family business. I technically already killed a couple of maggots a few months back, but I never did the whole A to Z donor routine. Starting with the maggot’s acquisition, their sedation, and transportation to the base, the torturing bit and then finishing with their death.

“Amateur,” Ash scoffs at me. I’m surrounded by dicks! And not the let’s-do-the-dance-with-no-pants kind, but the I’ll-chop-’em-off kind.

“Kids, earmuffs!” I yell toward the Offsprings. Ash lifts his hands toward his ears, pretending to cover them, but instead flipping me a double middle finger at the last minute. Classy as always.

Hunter and Rami don’t want them to be part of the evil-dispatching family business. But with their triplet brother Dare being a very skilled hacker, they end up knowing everything. Bloody tattletale!

“I couldn’t even go all Lori over the maggot’s arse. I didn’t use the potato peeler.” I whine a little because, fuck, that would have been cool.

I see Ren’s blond eyebrows lift over his mirrored sunglasses. “How do you even use that?”

“Why are you asking him?” Ash shoves at his brother’s shoulder.

“Well, if he sharpens it enough—” Michael stops only to smile at his husband as Raph places two trays filled with food and drinks on the table. Then he continues, “He could use it on the donor’s testicles; the skin there is quite thin and sensitive.”

“Shut it!” Ash yells, covering his groin with a scrunched-up expression.

Raph glowers at him, his inner psycho shines even brighter when defending his husband. Ash doesn’t look scared by him one bit, the devil-may-care moron. I know what Raph does to people that cross him, I have my TRB (torture record book) to remind me.

Just two days ago he impaled—arsehole to head—a donor with a wooden pole. He was a sommelier who had been rude to Michael in a restaurant. He also liked to follow some of the customers home and rob them. He killed two of them when caught in the act. So an excruciating, vampire-slasher-movie death, he got. Probably because of the disrespect he aimed at Michael more than anything else.

Raph pulls Michael off his chair and then drops him on his lap as he sits. “You’ve been huffing all afternoon,” he tells me in his usual bored tone.

“Look around you, Lori. It’s that magical time of the year.” Michael beams at me, waving his arms toward all the Christmas decorations surrounding us. It feels like Santa himself threw up all the way to the several floors stretching above us. Shiny tinsel, metallic stars, red bows, and plastic wreaths cover every inch of the place.

The overly colorful setting is making me feel like vomiting. The absence of windows and fresh air might be increasing my annoyance—it’s like being in a casino in Vegas without all the debauched fun.

“Magical? That’s bonkers. Krampus time is appalling!” I sniff with irritation. Christmas is the worst time ever. The most horrific events in my life happened around this hatefully cheery holiday.

“Krampus?” Ren asks.

“Santa’s evil brother,” Raph clarifies.

“Exactly. Gran used to tell me all about Santa’s demonic-looking bro and how he punishes naughty kids.”

“Because you were the worst,” Ash states.

“I’m the reason Santa has a naughty list.” I nod with a proud, melancholic smile, fingering the little, ball-shaped urn pendant hanging around my neck. Gabe’s most meaningful present because it holds a pinch of my gran’s ashes in it. “So much that Krampus took a wicked liking toward my cunning self and decided to screw with me every year during this very month,” I finish.

“Why?” Michael asks.

“His fun. My curse,” I reply, making a disgusted face at a couple of women passing by, gleefully humming a bloody Christmas song. Thank the Lord, the mall is about to close, only very few people left.

“You’re an idiot,” Ash snorts out, the crass heathen.

“Why do you think he’d do that?” Ren sounds incredulous.

“I sort of summoned him when I was around ten. Ollie and I found a Ouija board.” I take a long sip from my smoothie. We actually found it in the principal’s office. He

had a file cabinet at school filled with confiscated stuff from students. I wanted to get my mother of pearl compact mirror back. And I did. The Ouija board was compensation for the emotional distress I suffered.

“Summoned him,” Ren echoes my words slowly, while checking out a woman’s ass.

“Bullshit,” Ash coughs— not into his fist. He has a new tattoo on his neck and a couple along his arms. His blond hair falls too long on his forehead as he flips it with a quick motion of his head.

I shrug seamlessly. “It’s not hogwash. I was a kid who wanted to meet a real demon and his name was the first one that popped inside my head. Now he comes every December and enjoys fucking my life up, the bellend.”

“Fucking up how?”

“My initiation for one! Kidnapping a maggot should go smoothly with all the tech Rami has equipped us with.”

“I heard the donor’s meeting at the marina was quite...rough.” Ren is trying hard not to laugh. I’m tempted to lift up his glasses, grab his wavy blond hair and punch him right in the face.

“At least he was dead when the shark went at him,” Michael adds.

“I wanted to kill the bloody maggot, not witness him get stabbed in the eye with a speargun,” I grumble.

“The next donor suffered,” Raph drily says.

“Not by my hand. He got electrocuted on his own Christmas tree just before I injected

him with the sedative. And the worst thing? He smelled like barbecue. I'll never eat grilled meat again!" I state before giving my burger a bite. Okay, starting tomorrow. I'll be absolutely disgusted tomorrow.

"Really? Like barbecue, you wacko?" Ash scoffs.

"Smelled like teriyaki meatballs," I clarify.

"The faulty Christmas lights on the tree could be Krampus's style." Ren makes a ghostly voice when he utters the demon's name. "But the speargun? It's all a big, fat coincidence."

"The red and green speargun's brand name was on the side of the barrel: Dark Twin!"

"You're overthinking this," Raph feels the need to once again give his dull insights.

"Third donor? I almost got shot in the arse before that reindeer statue smashed him to the ground. I'm still in almost mourning of my arse! The one after that? She choked on a piece of candy cane. I mean, who does that? I should've shoved it down her throat," I mutter angrily. "I refuse to be Wile E. Coyote!" My fist falls down on the table.

"The cartoon?" Michael covers his full mouth as he talks.

"Every plan I make keeps blowing up in my face. I'm a hot, curly Wile E. Coyote."

"So, in Wile style, just try again," Raph says matter-of-factly.

"It's all in your head," Ren states.

"In the past, a bloke wearing a Santa hat barfed on my brand-new, stupendous, blue

velvet hand-embroidered slingback heels, ruining them forever. I was almost run over by a car when I tripped on some Xmas street decorations. A tray filled with gingerbread man cookies fell on my head from the third-floor window of a building while I was walking back home. A dog wearing elf ears sank his teeth into my coat, making me fall face-first into a filthy puddle of...apple juice—at least that's what I still tell myself to this day. I burned both my eyebrows and half a tablecloth with a spicy Christmas candle. A frozen turkey was thrown at my head during a supermarket brawl between two surprisingly energetic grandmas. A wreath slid?—”

“That's enough. We got the fucking gist. You're a disaster about to happen,” Ash grumbles, dramatically pushing his chair further away from mine.

“Krampus time is horrific!” I cry.

“Is Krampus the reason why you refused to marry Gabe and Bez this month?” Michael stops feeding fries to his husband to question me one more time.

He just reminded me how pissed off my fiancés were at me when I refused to marry them. They turned into possessive, feral animals. My arse took the brunt of it, and I still feel the sting. I love their brand of obsession for me so fucking much, but I won't have a fucked-up wedding because of Krampus.

Michael looks curious; I see no judgment in his gaze in opposition to the rest of the twats sitting around the table. To be fair. Raph looks just as disinterested as usual.

“That and the fact that a Let-It-Go, freezing outdoor wedding is not for me, mate.”

“You know that Santa, and consequently Krampus, doesn't exist.” Raph tilts his head to the side, his eyes empty. How Michael endures that stare is a mystery to me.

“Gran was a Catholic at heart, she believed in Saint Nicholas's tale. But her father

was from a little Alpine village where the Krampus legend resides. I don't believe in Santa, but I do believe in spirits—evil or holy, that is.”

Ash burps loudly, putting down his cup of coke. The brat is so rude, a genius with a tattoo needle, but terrible with manners and social interactions.

“I thought that sitting on the lap was for kids,” Ren suddenly says.

“Kids?” I scoff. “That’s my number one shagging position.”

“Ugh.” Ash lets me know how discontent he is with an incinerating glare.

“Santa’s lap!” Ren clarifies.

“That’s a kink I never understood. A big guy wearing a pointy, fluffy hat? I dig the beard and the giving presents part, but I draw the line at living in the middle of cold-ass nowhere and competing with the dude’s fixation on children.”

“I hope children are not around to hear this.” Ren shakes his head. The mall is about to close, no ankle biters—kids. We will be kicked out soon.

“I think that the kink is more about dirtying up Santa’s goodness, making someone so powerful and pure move to the dark side.” Michael’s medical brain makes a very valid point. Too valid.

“Are you one of Santa’s groupies?” I ask him.

And cue Raph’s growly reply, “The fuck he is.” He tightens his steel arms around his husband.

“I don’t need Santa. I already sit on a bearded man’s lap,” Michael says calmly,

scratching his husband's short, dark stubble. "You should know by now that my type is tall, dark, and psycho." He gives Raph a long kiss, too long and dirty for a public place. It makes me miss my men.

"I was talking about the flesh-and-blood Santa's impostor in the Christmas corner." Ren points to his left.

My eyes turn to the burly bloke sitting on the red throne forty feet from us. He's wearing his Santa costume, complete with the big belt, black boots, and furry hat, while drooling over the skimpily dressed broad sitting on his lap.

I love her high yellow pumps, so much that I want to ask her where she bought them. When my gaze moves to her face, I blink a couple of times. It's Magdalene! Or whatever her name is. The hooker that used to live a couple of floors down in my old apartment building.

Finally, I can get some fun from this trip to jolly hell.

"Um, maybe I should go talk to them," I utter.

"Who?" Michael has come up for air.

"This Santa's minion seems to indulge in naughty stuff; maybe he can help to shed some light on the Krampus nightmare," I explain.

Raph turns his head toward the bloke grinding against Magdalene's butt. "He looks more like a sinner than a jolly fella."

"He's certainly en-joy-ing himself," Michael jokes.

"Jealous, piglet?" Raph asks him, sliding his hand under his husband's butt. I usually

like to watch Miphael's rated R shows. Not tonight, though. I leave my chair and head toward him, followed by Ren and Ash.

"Why are you stalking me?"

Ash sniffs as Ren taunts me, "Stalking? That's your thing."

"Dare needs to stop using his vocal cords, or he'll lose his talking muscle," I mutter.

"Touch him, and you die." Ash sounds serious. Those three are the most different and, at the same time, closest brothers I've ever met. Maybe it's a triplet thing.

"I don't feel very loving toward you at the moment, either of you wankers." I huff.

"We can't miss the show."

I smirk mischievously at Ren. "Show? What do you take me for? A circus act?"

"I'm not answering, because I'm a nice person," Ash has the bloody audacity to say.

I snort as loudly as a pig. "You, Offspring ? Nice? Since when?"

"I'm brutal, but honest," he retorts.

"You're a numpty. Can't even dress yourself. Your t-shirt is on backward." Ash looks down, and I tap his nose while letting out a raspberry. "Oh, to be nineteen and stupidly naive," I mock him.

Then I roll my eyes at his growly, "Don't touch me!"

"Magdalene, sorry to interrupt your Sodom and Gomorra moment," I tell the woman

as I stop a couple of feet from the big throne. There's a long red carpet pointing the way to it and stanchions with velvet ropes along the sides.

"Do I know you?" Her blown pupils and lost expression let me know she's had her daily dose of weed already. Coke as well seeing how she is scratching her nose and sniffing. "You can join us if you want."

What the sodding fuck?

That's the second time I've been offered a threesome this year. Do I scream unicorn to people? I am part of a throuple, so perhaps I let out a bloody distress sign in the sky—Batman style.

"Carla." Santa sounds annoyed as he addresses Magdalene. But his askew glasses and red cheeks dampen the effect. "And I didn't... This was not part of the agreement we had."

"And what kind of agreement was that?" Ash takes a step forward.

"Pray, tell," Ren insists, copying his brother.

Those two argue all the damn time, but when they unite, it turns Shining-scary.

"None of your business." Santa pushes the hooker off his lap, and she obliges him, walking a few feet away. She looks quite taken by the huge Christmas tree hoisted in the main shopping area between the stores lining the edges on either side.

"Prickly. Shouldn't you be all 'ho-ho-ho' and shit?" I raise my brow at Santa's minion.

"He surely had the ho part down to a T." Ash glances at Magdalene.

“Is there something you want?” Santa is glowering at us now.

“From you? Hell no. But I need a private chat with your...boss,” I let him know.

“Boss?”

“The Red Snack Attack?” I offer, but he still looks confused. “Jolly McJingles, Merry McMuffin? Mr. Nice Breaking-and-Entering? The Chimney Hunk!”

“Mistletoe Maverick!” Ren adds to my logorrhea of Santa’s name. “Mr. Cookie Jar.”

“The ho-ho-ho fuck no,” Ash says.

“What the hell is that?” His brother scrunches his nose at him.

“That was utterly terrible!” I agree with Ren.

“And your nicknames were good?” Ash asks derisively.

“Yes!” we both reply.

“Are you talking about Santa Claus?” the minion finally speaks.

“Yesss. Magdalene’s product didn’t fry all your neurons yet.” I stare at my indigo nails, loving the little silver stars on my middle fingers... They add some magical shite when I flip someone off. The sparkling diamond and rubies on my engagement ring distract me for a moment.

“Are you serious?” Santa’s minion’s question brings me back to him.

“Like a heart attack while watching The Ring ,” I deadpan. “You see, I’m cursed.

Tried to contact Krampus many times, but the bloody wanker doesn't carry a phone. Perhaps his goody-too-shoes bro can help."

"Are you fucking with me?"

"Does this mean that he's too low on the pyramid scheme?" I turn to Ren.

"The what?" The minion looks confused and a tad irritated.

"He's probably at the bottom of the pyramid." Ren nods my way.

"So low, he doesn't even know about the pyramid," Ash keeps going. The way they just go with it is splendid.

I glance at Michael and Raph. They are where we left them at the table, snogging like teenagers. "It was worth a try. You can go, old pervert."

"Old...? I've had enough. Chantal," he calls out. A girl wearing an elf costume slides out of the small green tent near the throne. The costume is ridiculously funny, down to the curly, bell-ringing shoes, but she sports it with no fucks given.

"I'm off," the she-elf states, her tone hits the highest levels of boredom.

"Like I give a crap. Take care of these weirdos," the minion says, sliding quickly off the throne before moving toward Magdalene.

"You're the one lying to kids every day, and we are the weirdos?" I scream at the minion's back.

"You can go with that or the hooker bit. Whatever you prefer," Ren utters drily, clicking his tongue a couple of times.

“Let the old fart go. Jeff's the mall owner's cousin. He practically does whatever the fuck he wants here.”

The she-elf is older than I thought, with black nail polish and two hoops on her lower lip and one under her nose. She's looking at Ash with appreciation, and as he glares at her, she smirks.

“Drugs, prostitution, and horrible conduct at work. The guy is precious; whoever gave him this Santa job is a genius. Would really like to shake his hand.” Ren's heavy sarcasm fills the air around us.

“And break all their fingers,” Ash adds.

She-elf doesn't look horrified. On the contrary, she bats her eyes at Ash like a skilled Jessica Rabbit.

“You're wasting your time. My brother is as gay as a peacock,” Ren lets her know.

“Also, Ash is as rude as an undeserved bitch calling,” I add. And I'm being nice here. He is inconsiderate, insensitive, deliberately offensive, disrespectful, obscene most of the time, and always impolite. I love his irritating face to death—his death, which I'll provide one of these days.

“Too late. I'm fucking hooked, dude,” she shamelessly replies. Ash huffs out all his annoyance while I'm really starting to like this girl.

“Hey, do you know how to contact the King's evil bro?” I ask her.

She turns her brown eyes to me. “Elvis didn't have a bro, man. Did you sniff some of Jeff's snow?”

“He means Santa.” Ash huffs. Is that a small smirk on his lips?

“Remember there’s only one King, dude, and that’s the Hillbilly Cat,” she clarifies, waving her tiny finger at me. She’s even shorter than me, but she’s got balls of steel, facing three blokes without any kind of wariness.

“Amen,” Ash mutters, nodding at her. He hates strangers. He barely stands us. Is this Santa’s doing? Sending some Christmas spirit my way. Improbable, Ash would enjoy Krampus spirit much more..

“The evil bro...you mean Krampus?” A nod is my reply to her. “Why do you want to contact him?”

“He...cursed him,” Ren succinctly replies, his words dripping with mockery.

“I see.” The she-elf doesn’t laugh or tell me to fuck off. She seems to ponder the issue—the little bells on her elf-shoe jingles as she taps her foot on the floor—after a couple of seconds, she utters, “You should...”

“Yessss?” I encourage her.

“I’ll tell you in exchange for Broody’s number.” She smiles at Ash.

Ren laughs while Ash glares at him.

“No,” he growls out.

“No help then,” she singsongs, puckering her lips.

“If what you say will be useful, I’ll tell you where he works,” I try to compromise with her.

“No! What the fuck, man!” Ash turns his murderous glare to me.

“It’s a tattoo shop, Ash. Anybody can walk in.”

“Tattoos? Deal!” She-elf hurriedly says. “Form a groveling plan.”

“A what?” Ren asks.

She rolls her eyes at him, not even remotely attracted by his clean-cut appearance. “Put down a list of things to do to obtain forgiveness. That’s what I’d do anyway. Unless you want to go the witchy-way, cutting rats’ throats and boiling squirrels’ brains.”

That’s not the worst idea. Actually, the more I think about it, the more it makes sense.

“I like you, She-elf.” I smile at her.

“Don’t really know enough about you to say the same,” she retorts boldly. “Broody’s tattoo shop?”

A deal is a deal. I open my mouth, but Ren beats me to it. “Trice&Vice Tattoos.” Ash snarls at him as soon as the words come out.

“Wow. Such a sexy beast.” She puckers her lips at him. “I’ll see you soon, Broody.” She gives him a promising smirk before turning her tinkling shoes around and disappearing inside the tent.

I’m not really into the whole groveling thing. I bloody loathe it. Prefer to be punished, especially if my fiancés use their freakishly long tool on me.

Ugh, this is a never-ending nightmare.

My thoughts change direction as my attention is stolen by the Offsprings and their umpteenth banter.

“Who’s into lizards? Cold-blooded killers!” Ash is hissing at Ren.

“I have a snake! George is a toothless snake.”

“Voldemort had one too.”

Ren sniffs with derision. “You have a demon camping in your bedroom, with retractable claws and long pupils.” Is he talking about Ash’s Sphynx cat?

“I’ve an acquired taste.” Ash shrugs. “While you have none.”

“Fuck you!” Ren gives him a hard shove. “You, too.” He points at me before walking back to Michael and Raph.

What the sodding hell did I do? “Go, you wanker. I’m so glad to see the back of you!” I yell at him.

“This back,” he uses his thumb to gesture at his spine, “or this one?” He grabs his high arse and then flips me off.

Twat! Before I can retaliate, my phone starts ringing.

It’s maggot time.

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 2:18 am

two

Jingle hell, jingle hell, jingle all the way...to Hell.

Blood red nail polish. Check.

Sexy ninja-looking tracksuit. Check.

Nerdy headband lamp. Check.

Syringe filled with tranquilizer. Check.

Narrow vent infested with crawling carriers of viral diseases. Bloody check.

Should have packed smelling salts as well.

“I can’t do it! Can’t infiltrate the spider nest,” I whisper shakily into the microphone inside the band around my wrist while staring at the square entrance of the vent. The beam from the headlamp reveals floating dust moats and shimmering cobwebs decorating the metal trap.

I should have brought Wednesday, my hen; she snacks on spiders like a vampire on sweet virgins.

Ollie’s voice comes out from the earpiece. “Lori, slide in that damn hole already!” His husband Rague grunts in agreement. They are waiting for me in the kidnapping van on a hill near the house.

“And enter this bacteria colony? Have you lost the plot?” I whisper-scream.

“Silence, or someone will hear you,” Rague states. I look around the long corridor of the luxurious home. All the house staff is gone at this time of night.

I’m inside the maggot’s huge home—more a palace if you ask me—and the only way to get to his room undetected is through one of the vents. I have the grave suspicion that this whole crawling nightmare is Rami’s way to pull my leg. In which case, I’ll castrate him and the other bros as well out of accuracy—except my fiancés; I love the feel of their heavy balls hitting my arse too much while they’re having their way with me.

“Lori, all the spiders...went to bed.”

“One could suffer from insomnia,” I suggest. Gabe certainly does.

Ollie continues, disregarding my undeniably valid point, “And the rest... It’s just bacteria, teeny tiny bacteria.”

“Superficially! Bacteria appear to be relatively simple forms of life, when in fact, they’re sophisticated and highly adaptable, teeny tiny suckers.”

“This was Rague’s donor, but since you’re so eager to be moronically initiated, he yielded it to you. How many more times do we need to do this?” my bestie reminds me after a long, exasperated sigh.

“Don’t get your tinsel in a tangle!” I groan. Fuuuck! I need to put on my figurative big boy pants and finally accomplish my initiation tonight—if Krampus stays out of my biz for once—or my name is not Lori Gorgeous Boone.

“Remember what this shithead of a donor did,” Rague utters.

I close my eyes, and the file Rami showed me an hour ago appears. The maggot kills people and steals their identities Mr. Ripley style. He's impersonated five people in the last four years, that we know of. And I can't let a hairy, multi-eyed, fangy, eight-legged creature stop me from instilling justice down his throat.

I kiss the tiny urn around my neck before sliding it back under my shirt. Here we go, Gran.

I take a few fast breaths, lift the sunset purple bandanna around my neck to cover my mouth, and enter the tight, dirty tunnel of hell.

I'll be like Spiderman... Shite, no! No spiders. Like Batman, yeah. The Dark Knight is confident and tenacious and cool as a cucumber. I always wondered about his cucumber. I mean how packed can he be under that heavy utility belt?

Bugger, I need to stay focus. This is not the time for pecker wondering .

Rague—blueprint of the house in hand—is directing me toward the maggot's room through the labyrinth of vents. While Serena is reading all the heat signatures inside the building and will let me know if someone comes my way.

"The donor is in the bathroom, taking a shower," Serena lets me know.

"You can grab him when he comes out," Rague adds.

"How are things? Any unwanted encounters?" Ollie mocks me, and I suddenly feel itchy—bloody power of suggestion. Sari explained it to me, he's been trying to help me overcome my arachnophobia, with no results whatsoever, it seems. The mere mention of visualization of the fangy wankers triggers a subconscious response in my brain, the itchiness. Scratching myself all over is bloody difficult in the narrow metal space even though I'm dainty. I keep bumping against the metal walls.

“I’m sliding in a dusty, coffin-sized container. What do you think, Ollie? Pretty sure Batman never had to go through this shite,” I mutter.

“You’re hardly Batman. More Rodentman.”

“Sod off, Ollie!”

“Focus on your task,” Rague says.

“No shit, KKJ!” But he’s right, I can’t fucking get it wrong this time. I’m roughly sliding through the vent, when I let out a choked gasp at the sight of a belly-up cockroach. Why is he dead? Is there a mortal gas flowing around? Where’s Michael and his coroner’s skills when I need him?

“What now?” Ollie asks, his tone is annoyed, but I can hear a hint of worry in it.

“Just met your ex. Maybe you can revive him with a kiss,” I sarcastically tell him, chucking the idea of picking up the insect corpse and bringing it to Michael.

Rague lets out a growl, idiotic possessive fucker.

It’s December, and I’m sweating like a slag in church. My curls are flattened by the black hood around my head and the headband lamp, and I can only imagine how the toxic pollutants and the grime are attacking my skin. My tight and smooth pores must be yelping in horror.

“Stop. You’re right above the donor’s room.” I freeze at hearing Rague’s words. I glide toward the grate while turning off the headband lamp. The light coming through the bars shows a sumptuous bedroom. Burning wood is crackling inside the fireplace. There’s a round table covered in food, a silver Christmas tree exquisitely trimmed, and a few seasonal decorations.

Does this maggot have Christmas shite in every room of the very house he took from his last victim? The bastard is paying for all this lux with the bloody money he stole.

“Is the maggot still in the shower?” I whisper into the mic.

“Yes. Hurry down and wait for him. Remember your training,” Rague says.

During the last months, the bros have been teaching me the ins and out of the family business. I already knew how to defend myself, but they added more vicious tactics and killing techniques to my expertises, showing me how to use different types of weapons. Even though bats are still my number one choice, I like to add the...unexpected.

I pull a rolling pin out of my Prada fanny pack—the tranquilizer syringe is in a small bag inside it. It takes a few extra seconds since the wooden pin is quite long and keeps getting stuck in the bag’s fabric. When I finally extricate it I place it near my knee against the vent wall.

I’m so excited, my heart could slide out of my ass cheeks if I wasn’t a Kegel exercise enthusiast.

Dear maggot, death is slowly coming to your doorstep. Can you feel it? And I’ll make it so painful and so spectacular, I’ll have to write my name inside my TRB.

I slowly wrap my fingers around the bars of the grate, and with a hard shove, I push. Nothing happens. I push again and again. Stopping myself in case the slight noise warned the maggot of my presence. But I don’t hear anything.

“KKJ, are you sure you loosened the bloody screws?” I whisper-yell into the wrist band.

“Positive,” he succinctly replies.

“Press harder, Lor,” Ollie uselessly suggests. I’m doing it, but the grate doesn’t budge.

I pull down the bandanna from my mouth and take off the headband lamp. Suddenly there’s not enough air around me. It’s so bloody hot. The metal walls are too close to my body, and... Do I feel something crawling on my calf? I gasp as my body turns into a pillar of salt.

In the next second I’m impersonating an angry bull, breath rushes in and out my mouth.

“Lori, are you okay?” Ollie’s voice sounds far away.

“Take the infested hive off me!” I cry, thrashing my arms around.

“Wha...? I need context, Lori.”

“They are climbing me like fucking Mount Everest! I can feel their hairy, groping paws!” I kick my legs and twist my body as wildly as possible in such a narrow space, bumping the walls and making thudding noises.

“Who? What the hell is going on?” Rague hisses in my ear.

I slide further, my elbows dig painfully into the metal bars as I keep wiggling away from whatever is trying to cop a feel of my arse. In slow motion, I see the grate give in and drop down. For a moment, I feel an absence of gravity, only half a second before my body is pulled unforgivingly down, sucked toward the hard wooden surface of the bedroom floor.

As I slide down my bone-breaking fall is abruptly stopped with a sharp jolt—making me hiss in pain—not the grate’s, though. It starts a freaking domino effect. It lands heavily on the festively laid table, the delicious-smelling pasta flies on the floor, splashing and covering it in tomato sauce. The pasta plate bumps the bottle of red wine, which tips over, staining the white and golden tablecloth while dropping in the middle of a two-tier chocolate cake. The little statue of Santa on top jumps down and sinks slowly into the pumpkin soup bowl like the Titanic in North Atlantic waters.

What. The. Sodding. Fuck.

Right about now, the devil on my shoulder is resigning his position, ready to go get shit-faced with the angel placed on the other side.

Why am I being punished? Was I a mass murderer in a past life? A cardio trainer? A politician? Krampus can’t be the only reason.

“Lori, are you okay? What happened?” Ollie’s high-pitched voice almost renders me deaf.

“Shhhh! If there’re going to be any hysterics, they’ll come from me,” I hiss.

“Was it a spider?”

“The size of a helicopter!” I didn’t actually see it. Pretty sure it’s not on me anymore. I think. I hope. Fuck! I try to check myself, but it’s not easy in this awkward position, hanging from the ceiling.

Ollie makes an angry sound, surely directed at me.

“Let me just be dramatic for a while, then I’ll be right as rain.” As soon as I get myself the fuck down.

Noises from the bathroom make me lift my eyes toward my legs again to see what's keeping me hanging like a salami. Christmas lights are tangled around my feet, and I can't reach them.

I'm too short for this shite!

"Lori! Talk to me, or I swear on whatever is holy..."

"Ollie, I'm a tad... tangled at the moment. Bloody hold!" I blow out an irritated breath.

This position is seriously bonkers! I need to add more ab exercises to my daily workout.

I yank the bandanna that keeps falling over my eyes off my neck and try to lose the Christmas lights from around my legs and feet—unsuccessfully. The swinging motion I started is making me nauseated.

I need to cut the cord; it's twisted too tightly around me and it's starting to hurt. From the fanny pack I grab my Swiss knife with the drawing of a golden wasp on the side—a gift from Bez—and I start cutting.

"The donor's coming out." Ollie's words reach me a second before the door on my left opens, and a bloke with round glasses, damp hair, and a lean torso wearing only a towel around his waist comes out. He jerks back at the sight of me dangling from the ceiling and the mess around his room. He looks astonished by what he's seeing.

I'd be too, if I wasn't irritated as fuck.

The cord around my feet decides that's the right moment to snap, and I fall like a sack of potatoes, shoulder first, onto the floor.

Sodding fucking Krampus! He'll be the death of me.

"Who the fuck are you?" the donor hisses my way.

"We're coming. Hang in there," I hear Rague's voice. Oh, no. No more hanging for me!

One of my legs is asleep, while my shoulder is screaming bloody murder.

"Answer me!" the maggot repeats, grabbing the empty bottle of wine from the table. His eyes look cold and cruel. Evil people always have that same emptiness within them. It reflects in their gaze, that deep lack of love.

"Shut up, Mr. Ripley! I'm in pain," I reply, covered in tomato sauce and wine. I tighten the grip on the Swiss knife as I straighten to a sitting position to check on the cord still around my feet. My shoulder is pulsing in agony.

"Doesn't fucking matter," the maggot suddenly mutters, heading toward me. I slide my hand into the fanny pack to grab the syringe. I'll stab him with it and send him to sleep, as soon as he reaches me. But then I hear a rolling sound. I look up just in time to see the wooden pin falling down from the vent and landing right on the maggot's foot.

"Ahhhh!" He drops the bottle, which breaks as it hits the floor. The glass pieces sink into the sole of his bare foot when he starts hopping around. He whimpers some more and then slips in the mix of tomato sauce and wine on the floor, losing his balance and hitting his head on the corner of the table.

I stare, stunned, at his unmoving body. Is he dead?

"No!" I shout. "Nope. Nuh-uh. This can't be fucking happening!"

“We are almost at the gate, Lori. Please—” I cut off Ollie’s worried babbling.

“I’m bloody okay. Don’t come!” I huff.

“What happened?”

I yank the stupid cord away from my feet, the colorful, flashing lights seem to say fuck you, fuck you, fuck you.

I move cautiously toward the body—the floor is obviously bloody slippery. I tear a glove off to hold his wrist. Please be alive. Please. But of course, there’s no pulse. Blood is painting a big red puddle around his head and one of his legs is twisted the wrong way.

“Fuck you, Krampus! You’re a bloody sadist,” I yell.

“Lori, lower your fucking voice or the domestic workers will hear you,” Rague growls.

“What happened?” Ollie asks again.

“He’s dead. The maggot is dead,” I breathe out inconsolably as I look at the cake on the table. Defeated and in need of high sugar I sink a silver spoon in the first chocolate layer—the part not floating in wine—and then stuff it inside my mouth.

“Fuck!” Rague cusses. “We have two options here.”

“I’m listening,” I say, letting my disappointment out of every dirty pore.

“The first is very easy and fucking classy. We burn the body. Really burn the fucker. No bones, no traces, only ashes.” He sounds unhealthily excited about it.

“I like that,” Ollie states.

Well, if Krampus takes me to hell, at least I'll be with all my friends.

“And the second option?” he then asks his husband.

“Lori, can the donor’s death pass for an accident?”

“Yep!” I mumble around more cake. “Because it was a fucking accident!”

I feel so bloody furious. This is the fifth maggot! The fifth to die in front of my eyes and not by my hands. Maybe I should just wait for this month to pass and then try again in January. I waited before, I can wait again.

Ahhhh! Like hell, I will! I grab the first thing I find—a Christmas tree branch and shake it violently before shoving it away.

“You are using gloves, so you left no fingerprints. Which is good news.”

I look at my bare hand holding the spoon. Eh, I’ll take it with me.

“You need to get out of there. Hold on, I’ll ask Serena to find you a clear way out,” Rague says, as I keep demolishing the cake. I’ll get so many pimples. Bez will laugh as Gabe points them out, one by one, just to mess with me, the handsome twats.

The sudden fragrant smell of burning wood makes me turn around. The Christmas tree is leaning on the lit fireplace, enveloped in flames.

“Shite!” I gasp. “I think I’m forced to choose option one.”

“Forced? Why?” Ollie gives me another high-pitched scream.

“Fire! The tree is on fire.” I cough. The smoke is quickly invading the room, and the window doesn’t fucking open. This must be what Hell feels like.

“Nice going!” Rague sounds more excited than anything, the pyromaniac.

“You wanted ashes? Here they come.”

I grab the blanket from the bed and throw it on top of the tree trying to put out the flames, but the expensive, organic fabric catches fire quite fast. Then the curtains, the rug, the table...the corpse. The fire sprinklers turn on, but it’s too late.

I cover myself with a sheet and head for the door.

“Get the fuck out of there. Serena will lead you!” Ollie yells in my ear.

The AI proceeds to take me out of the house through the back door without being caught by any of the fleeing house staff on the way.

The cold winter weather welcomes me outside, making me shiver. I drop the wet sheet on the ground and run toward Ollie. He’s waiting for me on top of the concrete perimeter wall. He easily pulls me up and drops me on the other side in a pile of snow, then he jumps into Rague’s arms while I straighten myself up, shaking off the snow and the icy cold. My shoulder fucking hurts, and I keep coughing. I’m wet and freezing.

Time flies when you do something you like, right? Right now it’s falling from the sky...plummeting to its death.

We hear the sirens’ noise, and as people spill out and gather around the front of the house, we run toward the hill. Hidden by some trees is the kidnapping van, and once again, it will go back to the base empty as fuck.

Ollie slides the van's door open and hands me my change of clothes. I undress and put on my fisherman sweater and gray leggings with the green down jacket and scarf. I run my fingers through my damp curls a couple of times and then I let out a long sigh, leaning my body back against the car.

Rague has a maniacal smile on his face, eyes zeroed in on the flames trying to reach the dark sky. The fire is raging, the house looks like a blazing inferno.

"How are you?" Ollie asks.

"I want to crack you open and suck the air out of your lungs." I cough again, but the fresh, clean air on this hill is doing miracles.

"You look like a bag of dicks!" Ollie doesn't try to sugarcoat it.

"The tracksuit took the worst of it." I grab it from the van's floor.

I try very hard to ignore his humming taunt. Even though a tiny part of me really needs to check my messy appearance in a mirror.

Big part now.

Big and fat.

Sod it! I turn the car's side mirror to catch my reflection.

"You're batshit crazy. Even disheveled, I'm spectacular!" I counter.

"Do you feel dizzy or woozy?" Ollie cups my face too dramatically to be real worry.

"Quit fucking with me!" I bat his hand away.

“You are an idiot!” he snaps at me, pointing his finger at my face.

“How dare you!” I clip, swatting his hand. Ollie pinches my arm in retaliation, and I push on his chest. Then we start a sort of smacking battle, twisting and turning our bodies to avoid the light, but stinging hits. I dodge a slap, rolling my aching shoulder back, the jerky movement makes me see stars.

“Stop...whatever this is! I know anger expressed is anger extinguished, but this is embarrassing,” Rague interjects, wrapping a heavy arm around Ollie to lift him up and away from me, while placing his large hand over my head to hold me still while I still try to hit him. Okay, this is embarrassing!

I yank his hand away and huff all my fury. “Don’t recite Gran’s sayings; it’s a low blow.”

“You said that same phrase to me months ago, to help me.” I remember I did; Rague is right. “I’m trying to return the favor now.”

Fuck! I hate how good he is. He kills people and can turn into a blood-thirsty monster, but he is such a decent person.

“You always fight dirty,” Ollie barks at me, while frantically wiggling in his husband’s arms.

I try to defuse the situation with a joke. “How dirty are we talking about...?” An abrupt shiver of disgust runs down my body. “Nope, can’t flirt with you. It’s unnatural.”

“Close to incestuous,” he utters with a scrunched-up face. Then his gaze moves to the red stain on the tracksuit I dropped on the ground. “Are you hurt?”

“It’s tomato sauce.”

“Tomato... And what’s around your mouth?”

“Chocolate cake.” I wipe my lips with my fingers. “What?” I ask defensively, when Ollie continues studying me with a judgmental look. “The maggot was dead. The delicious-looking cake was there screaming to be eaten.”

“Okay, out with it!” he orders me, and I know it’ll end in another pinch fight if I don’t tell him.

After recounting what happened, I huff, “It’s Krampus!”

“Stop that nonsense,” Ollie mumbles, trying to stifle his laugh. Rague doesn’t give me the same courtesy, and his growly, rumble chuckle makes my hair stand with outrage.

“Nonsense?” I repeat in a high-pitched voice this time. “You were there the night we summoned him. You remember the candle blew out.”

“A draft,” Ollie deadpans.

“The door slamming?” I insist.

“A stronger draft.”

“And how do you explain the whisper in your ear?”

“What whisper?” Ollie frowns at me, while a cloud of smoke billows from the maggot’s house as I see firemen running around.

“Ah! You didn’t hear it,” I exclaim.

“Neither did you, Lori. You’re just obsessed with this crazy-as-fuck curse.”

“Do me a favor and from now on, use your inside voice.”

Ollie frowns. “My what?”

“You want me to spell it out? Shut up!”

But of course, he ignores me. “Krampus is Santa’s brother, a fictional character. How can he be causing this mess?” He points at the flames coming from the roof.

“Santa. Move the n at the end of the word and you get Satan. Coincidence? I think not, mate.”

“You’re borderline certifiable. But assuming that you’re right. You’ve been naughty since the day God gave you the gift of talking. Why would Krampus start punishing you after you turned ten?”

“Because we summoned him!” I remind him of this essential piece of information, at which he scoffs. Scoffs! My tragedies are objects of ridicule for my bestie—ex-bestie!

Rague is on the phone when he says, “Rami is listening to the firemen’s radio. They are still trying to put out that flaming beauty. But there are no casualties from the house—except the donor. Everybody is accounted for.”

“That’s a relief!” I breath out, feeling part of the boulder on my shoulders lifting.

“He also said that you’re—and I quote—‘a pending disaster with a never-quitting ass

and hairless legs.” An insult paired with a compliment. After a couple of seconds, Rague adds, “Now Bez is trying to strangle him. Hunter is not there to defend Rami, so I think your fiancé will succeed.”

I raise a fist of encouragement but stop before it reaches my head as my shoulder protests vigorously and achingly. “Fuck!”

Rague passes me his phone.

“Sod off, Reacher. If Bez doesn’t kill you, I will,” I hiss, thinking it’s Rami on the other line.

“How’s my feisty Little Wasp?” Bez’s raspy voice soothes my fury—slightly.

“Enraged and murderous,” I clip.

“Sex on a stick. I’ll pound all that killing fury out of you as soon as you get here,” he rumbles, making my balls shiver with desire. I love when he fucks me in his childhood bedroom, it feels so forbidden and improper. But my aching shoulder is making known its disapproval.

“How about a nice Lori ride?”

“Why?” Gabe’s flat voice has a hint of suspicion in it. I never turn down a pounding from my men, and he knows it.

“I might have hurt my shoulder.” Bez’s angry, rumbly growl makes me add quickly, “Stop that! I’m fine, just need to ice it for a while.”

“Next time, I’ll be there with you,” he says, filling his words with finality.

“No, Gabe. I need to do it by myself.”

“What you need is us... there with you,” Bez snarls. Their protectiveness used to drive me crazy because I thought they didn’t consider me an equal. Now I know it’s just their way of showing me their love. But it still bothers me.

“Rague told us what happened, Lori,” Gabe says.

Fuck! They’ll never let me do this alone now. My eyes find the high flame still engulfing the secluded house.

“Bez and I will help you with the next donor,” he states with his commanding, odious tone. How I find it hot when we are shagging is a mystery to me.

“Listen very, very carefully,” I tell them before abruptly ending the call.

“Did you just hang up on your fiancés?” Ollie smirks at me, seems like he already knows the answer.

“Call got...disconnected,” I mutter. Plus, Gabe always ends calls like this.

“Mm. You have around fifteen minutes,” Rague says cryptically.

“Before you turn into a giant pumpkin again?” I joke.

“Before your fiancés get here and haul you out.”

I make an annoyed sound and roll my eyes to emphasize my irritation, while anticipating the angry sex, or make-up sex, or whatever it is called when you get pinned down and railed like there’s no tomorrow by your men.

“I forgot to bring the popcorn,” Rague declares, as he keeps staring at the fire. “The firemen are taming it.”

Krampus stole another initiation from me. Bez and Gabe are right. I need help.

The thought has just sunk inside my head when a weird feeling wraps around my stomach. It forces me to bend over and puke.

The chocolate cake decided to come back and haunt me as well.

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three

Curses, schmurses

The next morning, my body arches in sweet submission as Bez buries himself inside me. His hand trails up my spine until it grabs my nape. “Fuck, you are loosened up so perfectly. My cum is the best fucking lube.”

I can feel every hard inch of his long, warm cock gliding against my walls, making me full, stuffed with him. I welcome the sting from the stretch, enjoying every second of it.

I want this moment to live forever in my brain, pretty please and sodding thank you.

He starts going at a slow pace. Long, lazy strokes—which tells me it’s Gabe fucking me right now—his cockhead hits my prostate every single time he pushes inside me. My eyes cross in bliss.

“It’s been too long since I had my cock in you,” Bez drawls as his thrusts turn harder, rougher. Fuck yes.

I moan. “Mm, it was six hours ago.” I turn my head back to give him a satisfied smirk, smugness filling my voice. Because, crikey, my fiancés are desperate for me just as deeply as I am for them.

I lost count of how many times they came inside me, and so I have no idea how long they fucked me through the night. But I always sleep better with Gabe’s warm, naked

body next to me—I say Gabe because he’s the one who likes cuddling. Bez is more the lick-my-bussy-clean-and-conk-out type.

When I woke up a few minutes ago, though, I was wet as fuck and with the tip of his softened cock inside me. He was spooning me from behind, and as I wiggled my hips, a rush of cum slid free. Then the world went upside down, and I found myself pinned on the bed under Bez as his stiffened dick entered me.

All my muscles relaxed as he plunged his long shaft into me with zero resistance from my body. He has already claimed a space inside my heart, the one in my arse followed quickly—or was it the other way around? I tilted my hips up, stretching my thighs wider, making more room for his cock.

“You’re squeezing me so good, Little Wasp. Part those slutty, hot lips and take my fingers.” He taps his fingertips on my lower lip, and I oblige him.

I also mewl, fucking mewl ! My fiancés have turned me into a cat. I’m still feral though. I bite the tip of his finger and suck hard. He makes an approving sound and palms one arse cheek, rubbing a proprietary hand over me, pulling me open.

“How do you like being fucked on both ends?” His filthy mouth is a wet dream come true. I can’t answer him, too busy hollowing my cheeks around his fingers while he fucks my mouth with them. But I send him a scorching look that I think summarizes how much I’m enjoying this.

He rams me harder, fingers digging into my skin, balls slapping into mine. My hand moves toward my dick, but he removes his fingers from my mouth to slap it away.

I hiss at him, but he doesn’t stop the merciless rhythm of his pistoning hips.

Bez growls, but it’s Gabe who pants, “I want you to come only from my cock.” The

bossy fucker is a rock star in bed. He continues tugging my body toward his every time he drives his dick inside me, impaling me deliciously, while his lips are on the bruise on my shoulder, brushing the purple skin so delicately.

“Fuck! Ngh, so good! Right there.” I capture his lips. The kiss is sloppy and dirty, but filled with passion and desire. It’s us. I love it.

He pulls back, and then he hammers me to the mattress.

“I’m going to pump you full of my cum as soon as you shoot yours,” Bez states, his hand falling down on my arse, creating a delicious sting. “Fuuuck, this tattoo!” He roars as he spanks my arse cheek again, right on the number five tattoo—their subject number. It’s their mark of possession and the sight of it turns both of them savage every single time.

The fast friction of his shaft inside me is heaven on earth. It starts a hot, twisting sensation inside my guts, and it winds and winds until my vision whites out, and for a moment, that’s all it is. Them. Inside me. All around me. Taking me. Hard.

I scream both their names as I shoot my load on the sheets under me. Soon after, I feel the rush of their cum inside me, and I clench my walls just the way they both like.

“Ahhhh, that greedy hole,” Bez grunts, creaming me good. “Holy shit! This fucking ass, always sucks me so damn fine.” I contract even tighter around him until his last drop.

“Lori!” Gabe groans my name. And I smile, so bloody proud of myself.

He falls on top of me, holding himself on one arm, as his mouth covers my back in wet, open kisses.

His softening cock sliding out of me makes me moan, but Gabe turns us on our sides and runs his thumb over my gaping entrance, dipping inside, soothing the sudden emptiness. He never leaves me empty for long. I sigh contently, savoring the aftermath of our lovemaking. The slurping sounds of his finger pumping shallowly inside me, the sensation of his heavy, spent cock against my thigh, his fragrant skin under my cheek, his strong heart beating against my sweaty back.

I press my thighs together eager to feel the slick of his cum on my skin. I turn into a needy moron when it comes to my men. Needy for their cock, but even more for their nearness. Their acceptance. Their possessive love.

I wink at the little urn pendant on the bedside table. I always give my gran a front row seat to my fiancés' banging abilities. She was an avid reader of erotica and romance. I'm gifting her a dirty afterlife show in case she feels like visiting me.

The pain of losing her is easier these days, but I came to realize that it will never totally be gone, and it's exactly how it should be.

Gabe suddenly pulls his thumb out of me. "Lori?" I can clearly hear the smidge of worry in his voice. After months of cohabitation and hours shared together, I can more easily detect some emotions in his eyes, his tone, and his body language.

He told me once that I was the cause of the crack in his control—little ole fabulous me—and I feel bloody pleased about it.

I entangle our fingers together, the diamond on my engagement ring catches the morning light, creating rainbow drops on the white sheet. It reminds me how much I love to see the rubies on each side shine when I jerk off his long cock—it's an obscene sight that arouses me to the max.

My eyes turn toward Gabe—Bez is probably sleeping again, the lazy sod. His just-

orgasmed face is breathtaking, and I can't resist giving him a long kiss while mussing his blond hair some more.

"Morning," I rasp with a bright smile, breathing in his scent greedily. "Your insomnia didn't pester you last night."

"My body was exhausted after all the sex," he states, silver eyes studying me intensely as his thumb rubs my pucker lightly. "Better?"

"Are you referring to the major maggot failure I suffered yesterday for the umpteenth time? Or to my sore tushy?"

He just stares at me with such concentration, I feel like drowning in those gunmetal orbs, like he can read my bloody thoughts. Which is fucking brilliant in bed. Out of it? A terrible nuisance.

"Stop with the Paddington stare, I'm not one of your clients." I cover his eyes with my hand.

"Lori, tell me," he insists. He's using his condescending tone.

I sigh loudly but let him lower my hand to his lips. He gently kisses my palm, and when I keep silent, he gives my thumb a bite.

"Bugger, you're like a piranha with a piece of fresh meat."

He cups my cheek. "You will tell me."

I snort. "Are you attempting at loosening my tongue with the repetition of your words, counselor? I recall you expressing your deep dislike for redundancy."

His nostrils flare, and his gaze turns blazing; Gabe loves when I speak...lawyer-y to him.

His thumb moves to my lower lip and pries it open, sliding the tip inside. "I'll have to find a better use for this skilled tongue of yours if you refuse to talk to me."

"Is that supposed to be a threat? You know bloody well I love to make your dick weep for me." That makes him growl. Bez is back.

"Tell me, Little Wasp, and I'll fuck your face hard and rough, just the way you like it." He speaks like that would be a selfless act for him. He's lucky I actually love his dick.

I came five minutes ago, but I can feel my balls getting full again. Fuck, it's not fair. I'm a slut for them, and they know it and use it against me every chance they get. Mastermind wankers.

"It's...about Gran's home," I whisper. He blinks, and I see a hint of affection in Gabe's eyes.

"I couldn't set a foot inside her house since she died. And when we went there two weeks ago, it felt surreal. Like time stilled among those four walls. It stayed just the way she left it, down to the open book on the table and the tea kettle on the stove. It was fucking painful not to hear her voice when I passed the threshold, agonizingly so, which made me realize that I will never be able to live there again." My voice breaks, and suddenly my watery eyes find Gabe's collarbone very interesting.

I miss so many things about her. Things that are lost forever.

He moves his hand into my hair as he pushes my face against his neck. The warmth of his body is familiar and so damn comforting. I can feel their love slowly

penetrating my skin, reaching my heart to fill all the cracks.

“You don’t need to, Lori. We have this apartment, and if you want a different place, we can move.”

I let a small smile brush against his skin. “I don’t want to move. I love this apartment. Wednesday would be heartbroken.” Gabe even built a coop for my hen on the large balcony with a little house and a net to avoid a jump to certain death.

“Then why is she trying to destroy it?” He’s talking about all the holes and scratches she leaves around the apartment.

“It’s her way to express her...fondness.” I look up at him.

“Your face is lighting up with that impish glee... You’re actually proud when she makes a mess.”

“Only because it's fun to see your reaction.” I give his lips a rewarding peck, he always cheers me up, and he does it without even trying. His sole presence and his obsession with knowing everything that’s going on with me make me feel cherished and wanted. It makes my heart warm and my body melt.

“I love you.” I sigh contently. “And I-I know what to do with Gran’s house.”

“What, my love?” he drawls. I’m his love. Me. Hearing him say it turns my limbs into butter.

“You’ll see, but for now, I need to fix this curse matter,” I grumble.

“You aren’t cursed. It’s just a chain of unlucky events.”

I push against his chest and scramble to my knees. “Fuck no! I’m no Wile E. Coyote. I’m cursed!”

“You’re using a pop-culture reference to prove your absurd point.”

I ignore his judgmental tone and count on my fingers the maggots’ unlucky events. “Speargun to the face, electrocution, reindeer attack, death by candy and murderous floor. My life is not a cartoon; it’s a sexy, gory movie. I want to see the blood dripping and the maggots suffering.”

Bez huffs.

“Oh, I’m sorry, am I bothering you with the tragedies of my life?” I clip. My teeth snap at him as I shoot him a look that tells him I’m not sorry at all.

“Self-pity is unbecoming on you,” Gabe’s low, mellifluous voice is dipped in haughtiness. Even his position—one hand behind his head, putting on display his superb, lickable torso, the other scratching his lower abdomen—exudes attention and command.

“Do you feel compelled to list all my flaws all the time?” I hiss. If I punch him with my right hand, my engagement ring will probably leave an imprint on his annoyingly gorgeous face. Like my mark of possession. That’s a nice image.

“Yes. It’s like the itch I get when I don’t kill donors,” he deadpans.

“You mean the itch I make disappear with my mere splendid presence?” I give him a self-contented smirk.

“Lori?”

“Yeeees?” I bat my eyes at him.

“I feel itchy all over now.”

I push hard on his chest. “Conceited, lofty, overbearing, know-it-all dick!”

He grabs my hand and yanks me down until I find myself splayed over him. Then his hand smacks my arse three times and squeezes my tattooed cheek, hard.

I feel like purring at him, but outwardly, I have to keep an indignant front.

“You’ll pay for that,” I hiss.

“Not if you want my tongue inside your ass, Little Wasp.” Bez’s fingers start brushing against my slick entrance. Fuck! I love when he does that.

I drag my nails down his sides and follow the perfect waistline around his stomach, teasing the sexy V there. I feel his abs contract under my fingers as he lets out a rumble before crushing my mouth to his.

Wednesday’s screeching pulls our lips apart. I look toward the door where my black Polish hen is standing. Her red eyes zero in on us as she makes slow and deliberate short steps inside the bedroom.

“She’s hungry.”

“She should get a cockblocker of the year award,” Bez grumbles, squeezing my butt cheeks again, one in each hand. The possessive hold sends a shiver down my back. He loves Wednesday, but fucking me is a sacred occurrence for him. Whoever stops it commits a sacrilege in his eyes.

“She’s not a cockblocker. She likes to watch,” I retort.

“That’s actually hot.” Bez’s reply is soon followed by Gabe’s, “That’s even more disturbing.” Gabe, on the other hand, likes to pretend he dislikes her. Maybe he does. Who knows?

My phone beeps, and I sit, straddling his abs as I take a peek at my phone screen. “Fucking Reacher, I want to bust him open like a pi?ata,” I grumble. He keeps joking about my donors’ deaths on the bros’ chat.

“I regrettably happen to know that Hunter fills Rami’s pi?ata every day, so the contents will be?—”

“Same as mine?” I taunt him, earning a buck of his hips. His cock slides between my cheeks brushing against my entrance in a slow, spine-shivering glide. My enjoyment fades as I glance at the beginning of Rami’s text. “He has another donor for me. Perhaps it’s better if I just push pause for now.”

“Maybe you should.”

My head snaps his way. “I should?” I frown at him. He’s a relentless, unstoppable machine, never letting go until he gets what he wants. That’s how he conquered me. He can’t tell me to let go!

“Listen,” Gabe starts, “I’m a veteran of many battles. Sometimes it’s easier to let the enemy think they’ve won a small battle while you find a way to win the war. Find. A. Way.”

He tugs my head down and gives me a long, owning kiss before sliding out from under me to go to the bathroom. I pout for a minute. Then I put on the gray suit jacket Gabe left on the chair yesterday, and after feeding my lady, I return to the bedroom.

He is in the shower, so I focus on my morning princess beauty routine.

When I'm done, I move toward the walk-in closet and choose his suit for today, like I always do. Burgundy jacket, black vest and pants, black shirt. Sexy and all mine to climb when he comes home tonight from the office.

As I start picking my outfit, Gabe's words continue echoing in my head. They add to my infinite frustration. How do I win the sodding war?

Then I remember the she-elf's groveling idea and a plan starts forming in my wicked head.

Gabe comes out of the bathroom naked and ready to be licked. One look at his jacket on me, and I'm forced on my knees and thoroughly face fucked.

Thirty minutes later, I'm sliding the black vest over his shoulders. I like to help him dress. It feels intimate and it makes me happy to take care of him, even in such a small way.

"Come here!" He pulls me in front of him for a kiss. My arse is sore but keeps clenching, looking for his men's dick. It's such a greedy whore.

"Starting class at Stafford today with Spencer?" he asks.

"Yeah. It'll be fun to explore another college."

"While you check on him don't let your explorations become a reason for the dean to call me."

I sniff. I'll never jeopardize my future as a lawyer—much. Gabe created a scholarship for me and Spencer—more specifically he blackmailed me into accepting it.

He met Spencer when he urged me to move to his apartment a few months ago. The boy is fearless, brave, and tough; it's impossible not to have a soft spot for him. So Gabe used it against me, forcing me to take the scholarship in exchange of giving one to Spencer as well.

It's bonkers that I find sexy as hell how crafty he can be.

"I'll miss you." I pat his chest.

"You mean you'll miss my cock."

"Always, so be ready to give it to me tonight, and take Wednesday out for a stroll if you come back earlier."

"No," Gabe simply states.

"I'll do it." Bez smiles at me, surely hoping to get me to ride him afterward. Quid pro quo—or as he calls it something for something—is his only MO.

"Thank you, love you both."

"Behave. Don't get Spencer in trouble." Gabe slaps my bare arse before moving to the door.

"It could be the other way around," I counter.

I hear a derisive snort as he leaves the room.

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 2:18 am

four

A Schadenfreude kind of bloke

“Hey, nutso!” Spencer drops a bag of chips and a banana on the coffee shop table. He looks young and delicate with his wavy dark red hair, cute freckles, and loose jeans hanging on his narrow hips, but he’s tough as nails. I can see it in his slightly crooked nose and light brown, almost yellow eyes. There’s a hardness there, a wariness his difficult past left there.

“Hey, you wank! Late to our appointment, that’s very cosmopolitan of you.”

“Sorry if I was being interviewed for a job at this café.” He huffs, pulling his red knit cap off his head.

“Sorry my plump butt cheeks.”

“Plump? Are we sure?” he mocks me. He always has a comeback ready for me.

“You little shite!” I grab my leather gloves from the table and swat his arm with them. My shoulder aches a bit, thanks to that fucking freefall in the maggot’s house.

“Little?” He tsks. “I’ll give you the number of the guy who begged me for round three a couple of days ago.”

“Please, I can tell when you’re lying,” I tease him. I know he can easily get hookups. His wicked smile can charm the pants—habit—off a nun. I saw him in action. And to

think that when I met him he was a malnourished, lanky boy from a bad neighborhood. His clothes are still loose on him—that's just a fashion choice now—he's filled out quite nicely and has a newly confident air about him that makes me smile proudly. Not that I'd ever tell him that.

"You can't tell shit," he counters. "You look lugubrious, what gives?" He twists off the cap of his Coke to take a long sip.

"It's eight in the bloody morning, give your stomach a chance to survive." His love for everything soda will give him an ulcer one of these days.

I turn around the small café where other people are enjoying a hot drink with muffins or bagels. There's a group of loud girls and hunky blokes on my left, a couple smiling at another table and a guy reading a book. The long counter and the windows are adorned in red garlands and green wreaths. The huge Santa Claus figure near the door keeps staring at me with that odious small smirk on his red, punchable face. I can't stress enough how much I hate this time of the year.

Spencer's hand lifting the banana in front of my face catches my attention. "Eat ass, Dad."

"Mmmm. I had my fair share last night." He winces hearing my satisfied tone. "You need to be less mean and more vicious, Spencer Dancer." I quickly snatch the bag of chips from the table, avoiding his too-slow grabby hand.

"Assface!" he mutters, as I dangle the bag in front of his face and he once more fails to take it from me.

I open the bag with a loud crinkle and smirk at him as I start eating them. I already had my breakfast, this is just a midmorning snack for me, while I bet my new rhinestone jockstrap that Spencer didn't eat anything yet.

“What have you been popping?” he grumbles, peeling his banana aggressively.

“Popping? Is that code? A cry for help?”

“God, you’re an idiot. I’ll tell Gabe what you did to that guy that was ogling him a week ago.” I ignore his long-suffering tone as I toss a chip inside my mouth. I had to scare off that bloke, he wanted what is mine.

“Petty police, I’m reporting my sadist of a friend.” I point at him as I dramatically look around.

“Sadist? I’m a Schadenfreude kind of guy.” He shrugs. Since he started college, if he isn’t studying or working, he’s buried in the library, reading whatever he can get his hands on while learning sophisticated words. It’s sort of funny to hear them in his strong Chicago accent. Funny and kind of sexy.

“Schadefuffde what?”

“Schadenfreude, it’s a German word, it means enjoyment obtained from the troubles of others.”

Ohhh, I like that, not when it’s aimed at me, though. “You’re a tosser. But I’ll let it slip because I need your help.”

He grumbles. “Fuck no. Last time I did was a few weeks ago and I ended up witnessing you forcing open a fire hydrant on that dude.”

“That dude was leering at my Gabe.” I shrug not in the least shameful about my actions.

“I got drenched as well!”

I stifle a laugh, sucking my lips in. He looked like a sewer rat. “Oops?”

“You and your petty revenges are toxic.”

“I’m not toxic! Krampus is, and I need to find a way to appease him.”

“I’m so going to regret this,” he breathes out, rubbing his face. “Who’s Krampus?”

I take a drink of my tea and scrunch up my nose. Chips and tea taste disgusting together.

“Krampus is a horned demon and brother of Santa Claus who is said to accompany the latter on visits to children. In this tradition, Saint Nicholas rewards well-behaved children with small gifts, while Krampus punishes badly behaved ones with his birch rod.” I grab my phone and start typing. “Where the fuck am I going to find a birch rod? In my fiancé’s pants?”

“Hold on a second. Why do you need a rod?”

“A birch rod,” I clarify.

“And what’s the connection with Krampus?”

“I non-accidentally summoned him when I was ten, and since then, the month of December is studded with unlucky events—as Gabe calls them. He’s a holds-a-grudge-forever kind of demon.” I clench my teeth thinking about my initiation attempts.

“So, you want to do what? Summon him again and rod him to death... birch rod him?” he corrects himself before I can.

“No, I want to put a halt to his diabolical curse!” I snap.

“Seriously, Lori, whatever you’re smoking has melted your brain.”

“I was born like this, thankyouveryfuckingmuch. And rodding a demon is ridonkulous.”

“Lori.” Spencer gives me a serious look while taking my hand for a moment. “This whole thing is ridonkulous.”

“Wanker! The birch rod is replaced with a whip in some representations of Krampus. That should be easier to buy. He also has a sack or a basket strapped to his back.”

“Why?” Spencer asks distractedly while glancing to his right.

“To cart off evil children for drowning, eating, or transporting to hell . I don’t think I’m going to need that.”

“He’s a charm. Why do you need to buy the tools he uses?” Spencer tosses the banana peel in the trash near the counter and takes the half-full pack of chips I left on the table.

“I have a plan.” I slide a piece of paper out of my Miu Miu suede Beau bag, and read. “First, the altar. I build an altar in my apartment all dedicated to him: bells, skulls, broken toys.” Bugger! Amazon won’t send the items in time. I need to go shopping. “Second, the spirit. I’ll embrace his dark essence by dressing like him and chant for him. Third, the sacrifice. I’ll give him a gift , hoping he’ll stop haunting me.”

“I need to tell you that each one of those steps is very disturbing. How do you even know this creepy plan of yours will work?” Spencer pushes his back against the chair as he takes another sip from his Coke. His eyes go to his right again for a moment.

“Research. I’ve dived into the occult, black magic, and chatted with demon groupies. Some of them are nutters.” I had to pretend to be one of them on the dark web—Dare helped me getting inside the right places. It was truly bonkers to exchange messages with people who believe in grimoires, moon orgies, vampire encounters, and more. Oh, so much more.

My belief in Krampus is totally different, though. I have proof!

“And you aren’t mad as a box of frogs?” He snorts. “I’m afraid to ask you about the sacrifice. Are you going to Fatal Attraction your hen?”

“Ahhhh!” I suddenly scream, grabbing my chest as I simultaneously get the attention of the whole café. “A bomb just exploded inside me,” I gasp.

“Hope it was an orgasmic explosion.” Spencer rolls his eyes. Fuck, I thought my performance was brilliant, but he doesn’t seem to be taken by my act. He didn’t worry even for a second about me.

“How dare you question my love for her! I’d never hurt a feather on Wednesday’s fluffy black and white head,” I snarl. But he’s not even looking at me. No, he’s once again trying not to get caught as he tosses another look toward a certain table.

“You’re overly dramatic,” he adds after a couple of seconds.

“Side-eye alert! Why are the protein-pumped blokes sitting at that table glaring at you?” I ask him with nonchalance.

His head snaps toward me. “Mm,” he lets out a very equivocal hum. But I notice the faint red painting his cheeks.

“What the fuck happened? The brown-eyed Thor looks particularly taken by you.”

But not in an angry way, he seems more guilty? Annoyed? “Did you graze his hettie dick or something?”

“Or something,” he mumbles.

“What the fuck, Spencer? You know very well I want all the juicy details of your college life!” I scold him.

“This is hardly that.” He shakes his head.

“I’ll be the mighty judge of that. Spill!”

“You know I started the part-time job as a janitor a month ago.”

“Yeah. Even though I told you I’d give you the extra money.” He’s so fucking stubborn, but I’m so in awe of him. He’s twenty years old, but he’s more self-determined and purposeful than most of the thirty- and forty-year-old people I meet every day. He’s the epitome of resolution.

“Fuck that. You and Gabe already do so much.”

I let it go...for now. Only because I admire his strong-willed personality. “Tell me what happened.”

“I was cleaning the showers in the football locker room, and I sprayed some cleaner on the floor. Then you called, and I...” He sighs, running a hand in his hair. “Look, it’s fine. Nothing happened.”

“You can’t stop there. I need more!” I whine. “I remember calling you. I told you about meeting you today, and we hung up. What happened afterward? Did Thor find you with your arse up and couldn’t resist the temptation? Did he catch you using the

cleaner as lube as you oiled your tool? Flashdance your way through the shower butt naked?”

“No! Your mind is fucking sick, Lori.”

“I prefer the word mystical,” I retort, sniffing all my outrage. “Am I close, though? Come on give me a hint, a Lilliputian, minikin one. I bet his abs look like sections of a Hershey bar.”

I witness the confirmation in his darkening hazel eyes. Blimey! Something definitely happened.

“Please, let’s forget about it.”

“But I can’t. Not with the hatred floating toward us from their table.” I wiggle my fingers at the group, which only increases the glaring looks. Homophobic much? “Do you need me to rearrange their faces? I’d do it gladly.”

“I can do that myself.” A street boy against a group of jocks? I’d bet on him every single time. Spencer is fucking hard core. Also, I might have taught him some new moves.

“Thor seems very interested in you—in a serial killer kind of way. He’s leering at you...with contempt or desire? I can’t seem to grasp it.” I wink at the bloke near Thor. He could be the face of a steroid commercial—his muscles have muscles.

“Aha!” Spencer exclaims incredulously, his eyes firmly on me. Too firmly, almost like he’s forcing himself not to glance to Thor’s table again.

“It’s definitely contempt. Let it go. He’s nobody.”

“A nobody who got you fired?” I raise a questioning eyebrow at him.

“How do you know?”

“You’re looking for another job here, so...elementary, Watson,” I say, feeling all smug and shit.

“Actually, this job at the café might be better for me.”

I stare at him, trying to see if there’s more to this. What am I bloody thinking? Of course, there is. Spencer, though, is not used to having people in his corner. He stubbornly does everything by himself. It reminds me of...me, before I found Gabe and Bez and the rest of the sausage fest. Ollie and Sully have always been my family, but I tended to help them not the other way around.

Spencer suddenly pushes his chair back and stands. “Want something else?” he asks, waving his thumb toward the menu board.

I shake my head. “What’s wrong with your leg?” He’s limping slightly.

“Just fell asleep.”

“Ookaay.” I let him go even though I know that’s a lie. There’s no way the pig-headed fool will tell me anything, though.

I look at the jocks again. Thor is following Spencer’s tushy before the very fleshy girl near him grabs his arm, looking for attention. Interesting.

I send a flying kiss to the muscles-plus-muscles bloke. My lips are a shag magnet—Bez and Gabe are evidence enough. His eyes fall on them for a second, but then his murderous gaze goes back to my face. He’s smaller than the rest, the

Capitan? Boss? First liner? Don't know much about football apart from the fact that those uniforms don't leave much to the imagination. Delish!

"If you start trouble—" Spencer comes back to the table with an apple and another bottle of soda.

"You'll burst my bubble?" I chuckle at my rhyme.

"KLM," Spencer mutters and then adds when I frown with confusion at him, "Kill. Me. Now."

"So overly dramatic." I huff, repeating his own previous words. "And FYI they are just a bunch of prejudiced dicks that can all go blow themselves. Up ...blow themselves up. The dick self-sucking is quite impossible to do. Although, I've heard a bloke got two ribs removed and now he can bend down and..."

"I got the picture." He makes an unhappy expression. "Your tastes in conversation are a huge red flag, buddy."

"No red flags here. But a bouquet of entertaining facts."

Spencer gives his apple a bite and chews on it before replying. "A bouquet of entertaining facts? Fuck, you're a lawyer alright."

"Hashtag hottest legal practitioner." I sniff haughtily, Gabe's arrogance is rubbing off on me.

I check my phone screen. There's a couple of texts from Rami about a maggot and one from Bez ordering me to let him know when I'm done. I'll answer on my way to class; Spencer and I have only ten minutes to cross campus and get to Salomon Hall.

“Remember safe-mate protocol,” I tell him, which is a slight revisitation of the safe-bestie protocol I created with Ollie. I send a glance to the jocks’ table. Thor is the only one staring at us leaving. And that look means trouble. Hopefully the kind that leaves Spencer with slick underwear. “If you need me, just ring me once.”

He nods as we get outside. The white snow peppering our surroundings is a stark background for all the colorful wool hats and fleece scarves worn by the other students strolling on campus.

“I hate the cold. It forces me to cover my fabulous body!” I complain, snuggling deeper in my green down jacket. Spencer hums noncommittally.

I get lost in my thoughts as we start heading south. I’m back to my list. I need to buy a few things for the altar and the spirit parts. The preparation is going to be fun—I pat my jacket, feeling the bump underneath, the tiny urn hanging around my neck.

And what did Gran use to say about fun? It needs to be shared.

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five

Is foodporn a kink?

I walk slowly down the aisle—of the costume shop—brushing the dresses hanging right and left with my fingertips as Ollie huffs once again.

Sari follows us closely as he utters, “Although Krampus appears in many variations, most share some common physical characteristics. He’s hairy, usually brown or black, and has one cloven hoof and the horns of a goat. He also has fangs and a long, pointed tongue that drops out in most portrayals.”

He did complete research on the demon. His dedication doesn’t surprise me, since he’s a medical researcher. I’m glad he’s coming out with us today. Since Meg was poisoned and fell into a coma, he’s shut himself from the outside world, working day and night. He took it hard. It’s good to see him out and about.

I hum. “So, I’m looking for curly horns, fangs, and a furry coat—Chewbacca style.”

“Who?” Sari asks, fumbling with the long braid falling over his shoulder.

“A movie character. He looks like a six-foot, six-inch-tall teddy bear.” I grab two different kinds of plastic fangs, and after a few seconds, I toss the smaller ones into the cart. The horns are not as equally easy to pick. And after too many minutes, I decide to take one of each.

“Some blood of a newt and the paw of a hare, and voilà, you think you’ll be on his

good side?” I ignore Ollie’s disdainful question and glance back at Sari with a small smile.

“What else, Angel?”

“Mm, you also need chains to thrash for dramatic effect. Krampus carries them, thought to symbolize the binding of the Devil. The chains are sometimes accompanied with bells of various sizes. Krampus will also carry a bundle of birch branches, with which he occasionally swats children.”

“Birch branches are too hard to find, so a whip it is.” There are some on the shelf on my right, but Sari’s next words stop my hand midair.

“I can give you mine...if... I mean, uhm...” Sari starts stuttering as both Ollie and I turn to look at him with confused expressions.

“You have a whip?” Ollie asks. “What for?”

“What kind of stupid question is that?” I glance at my bestie with an exasperated sigh. “The right one is: do you use it or let someone else do the honors, Angel?”

Sari’s face has turned as red as the Satan costume hanging behind him. “I never... It was a present. I’ll bring it to your apartment today.”

“A present?” Ollie frowns at him. I can see he’s worried—we all tend to want to protect Sari. He’s such a sweetie. But right now, I am trying to stifle the smirk on my lips. I know Sari is not the pure saint everybody thinks. I mean, wasn’t the Devil an angel before falling?

I’ve been keeping an eye on him and Uri. And I’ve learned a few interesting things about them—since I have a bet to win against my fiancés. But now is it not the time

for this. I have an altar to make and a demon to impress.

“A present from one of his many suitors, I presume.” I wink at Sari, and he looks down as he wipes his palms on his white, silk pants. In the last months he has found his own style—thanks to moi ! He enjoys soft fabrics, comfy but classy shapes, gentle colors, and delicate tones. His elegant appearance and graceful moves turn him into sex on a stick—not that he wasn’t before. He’s just more alluring now, looks more comfortable in his skin. I’d die to get my hands on the long camel coat he’s wearing.

“Who—?” Ollie starts to ask, but I interrupt him.

“Bestie, back off. Now...is not the time.” I stare at Ollie, widening my eyes a little while trying to silently communicate to let it go.

He glances at Sari for a couple of seconds before turning toward the cart. “This is crazy, Lor! I can’t keep enabling you,” Ollie declares.

“You have to help me!” I counter, feeling annoyed by his negative attitude. Sully is having more panic attacks lately, and Ollie is worried about letting him go to college next semester. Hence his venting on me.

“It’s, as you’d say, bonkers,” he states blatantly.

“Come on! I didn’t ask you to...donate a testicle,” I tell him. “But since we are on the subject, would you?”

“Would I what?”

“Donate one of your testicles,” Sari explains, and I nod.

“A treasure sack, for me.”

Ollie raises his arms toward the sky, looking all irked about what? I really don't understand.

“What the hell does it have to do with this?”

“Mm, that's a no then. That hurts. You think you know somebody...” I shake my head. “Is Rague the issue here? You think he wouldn't love a one nut dude. That's bonkers! He'd adore you even if you were a eunuch.”

“Motherfucker, you're impossible,” he hisses. “Of course, I'd give you one of my balls.”

“Awwww!” As I jump on him—koala-style—I notice a couple of women gawking at us. “My best mate just confessed he'd chop off one of his balls for me. Isn't that unconditional love?”

They gasp and mumble something I really don't give a shit about.

“This is the highest and purest form of love, the gift of one of your juice nuts,” I say loudly, sighing longingly for dramatic effect.

“You are nuts!” Ollie replies. Is the pun intended?

“Your ball is just a metaphor! It means you'll do anything for me.” I wipe an imaginary tear off the corner of my eye.

“Okay, Okay. Let's get this over with!” Ollie pushes me unceremoniously off him, but I can see his curled-up lips. He loves me.

“Uri is right, your relationship is the most comical I've ever witnessed.” Sari beams at us, light blue eyes sparkling with mirth.

I wink at him while Ollie rolls his eyes. Fifteen minutes later, we are moving to the cashier.

“This cart is overflowing with crap. Are we done here?” Ollie asks.

“Wait. We need one more thing,” I say. “Two, maybe three,” I add, grabbing more costumes.

“Fuck no!” My bestie shakes his head vigorously, taking a step back. His green eyes narrowing on me.

But I state, “This is the chopping-off-a-nut part, bestie!”

A couple of hours later, I’m in my living room surrounded by very grumpy people.

The grumpiness might be caused by the fact that they’re standing in front of the Krampus altar, wearing costumes. Wednesday seems to be the only one enjoying her cute red horns and cape that matches the color of her eyes. She keeps flapping her black wings around like a witch dancing at a sabbath.

I’d smile at that, but I’m looking around the kitchen for an essential item. “My black lippy, has anyone seen it?”

“Your what?” Sari asks me; the white skirt of his angel costume makes a shhh sound every time he takes a step.

“My lipstick, I can’t... Oh, got it!” I can’t summon a demon again without looking my best. Maybe that’s why Krampus started haunting me. The previous, characterless evocation offended him!

I push back the heavy horns that have slipped down my forehead and start applying

the final touch to my makeup. Black eyeshadow and eyeliner, red mascara, and gray blush. A little Morticia—and I look fabulous.

The furry shorts I'm wearing are a bit itchy, while the vest isn't, inexplicably so. I couldn't find a Krampus outfit, so I settled for a faun one, half goat, half man. This particular one is horrific, but the only furry one I could get with such short notice. The red fishnets give it a spicy twist I dig very much.

Ominous classical music is playing from my phone as I look at the satanic altar. Sari and I did our best, but we don't have the sadistic heart a follower of demons should possess, so the effect is not that dark.

The black and gold tablecloth is covered in red splatters—strawberry syrup—that have turned the two dolls posed in odd positions on one side a tad sticky. The Grinch is on the right, smiling evilly with melted candies—accidentally left by me too close to the fireplace—on his lap, while Jack Skellington is standing on the left with knives taped to both his hands—courtesy of Gabe. In the middle there's a frame with a pic of me and Ollie in skeleton costumes from a lifetime-ago Halloween party, to which I taped a drawing of Krampus—I might have made his long tongue reach Ollie's groin...oops. Scattered around the tables are small bells, tiny paper skull and bone cutouts.

It kind of looks like a lame fifteen-year-old's attempt to practice black magic to turn their ex into a toad. But it'll have to do.

“Ollie! Hurry up!” I scream. My horn bumps one of the leather ropes hanging from the ceiling, and I swat at it.

He yells back from the bathroom, “I'm fucking coming. Peeing in this costume is a damn nightmare!”

“You are the nightmare, Satan!” I scream back, as he makes his way to the living room again.

“Do they always shout?” I hear Gabe ask KKJ, to which he responds, “It’s their way to express their love for each other.”

“Bloody get a move on!” I shout.

“You are such a butthole!” Ollie snarls at me with his arms crossed on his devil outfit-clad chest, refuting Rague’s words. The long trident he’s holding embellishes the close-fitting costume that includes a long red mantel.

“The tightest butthole,” I say slyly, not looking at Ollie but instead winking at Gabe. He refused to dress up, but his usual three-piece suit looks fantastic. While the dark brown fur covering my body is turning me into a boiled wiener.

“I don’t understand what we are doing here,” Rague says, looking bloody amazing in his Santa costume. He rejected the hat, and his dark curly hair doesn’t really fit with the white beard, but he’s the hottest Saint Nicholas I’ve ever seen.

“What don’t you understand?” I reply, annoyed by their negative reactions. Only Sari didn’t complain, hence the angel outfit.

“Every single thought firing inside your head,” Ollie feels the need to tell me.

“Is it because your head is only for decoration? Like a Christmas tree?” My bestie is really getting on my nerves today. I need to talk to him as soon as I resolve this nightmare.

He pinches me. “Ow!” I grab Sari’s whip from the counter and make it crack on the floor close to his red boots. Rague growls at me. Bez snarls at him.

“Quit the Neanderthal posturing!” I scold the two brothers.

“Why isn’t Gabe wearing a costume?” Ollie asks with a frown.

“He’s your lawyer,” I state. “The Devil’s advocate.” It’s supposed to be a joke, but it’s quite perfect for my ritual.

Ollie opens his mouth again, but I cut him off. “I know you find all this to be madness since you didn’t miss a single chance to express your unwanted and close-minded opinions. So, let’s chant together and put an end to this. Krampus will show his presence, I’ll continue with my groveling plan, and I’ll be free.”

Everybody nods reluctantly and takes a look at the pieces of paper I handed out before. It’s a ritual in Latin to summon Krampus—I printed it off the Internet from a website called Devil Rebel.

“Oi, U fudn’t fing.”

“Lose the fangs.” Bez snorts at me as his hand palms my furry ass.

Bollocks! I spit them out.

“Ollie, you just read. No need to chant.”

“Why?” He narrows his eyes at me.

“Because your singing should be a special event you perform only in your shower...alone,” I shamelessly explain. Rague covers his smiling mouth, while Sari open his lips in shock.

“That's a pathetic, subtle way to tell me I’m a terrible singer!” Ollie retorts with

gritted teeth.

“Subtle? I’ve told you a thousand times your voice reminds me of a cat choking on shattered glass.”

“Okay, this is the day where I’m going to kill you. You’ll meet Krampus face-to-face in hell. Problem solved.” Ollie takes a step toward me.

Sari talks before I can. “Where are the hooved shoes?” He stares at my red fishnets-clad feet. The black cherry nail polish looks absolutely stunning.

“The only way you’d get me in a pair of shoes as heinous as hooves is if you’re wedging them onto my corpse,” I explain.

“So tempting!” Ollie lets out a mock grunt.

“I’ll come back to haunt you. I’ll add you to the afterlife list of pricks I want to terrorize,” I counter.

“Let’s just get this over with.” Rague yanks Ollie into his arms. Santa hugging the Devil, that’s a sight you don’t see every day—it’s sort of hot and kinky as shit.

I brush Gran’s tiny urn around my neck. She would’ve loved this, or perhaps not. The uncertainty hurts, because I can’t ever know.

Gabe reaches for me as we start chanting, pressing his palm on my lower back. Ollie sings as well, unfortunately. If Krampus doesn’t come to hear me out, he’ll do it to shut him up.

“ Te iterum humiliter voco, O domine. Nostram deprecationem audi. Oro ne sinas hanc pestem manere. Te remunerabo cum novam damnatam sanguinem. ”

We repeat the chant six times—the number of Satan. Wednesday—in horror movie fashion—suddenly flaps her wings until she gets to the highest roost, staring down at us. Looming, with her red, unblinking eyes on me. The air around me feels suddenly too thick and heavy the more her unwavering gaze focuses on me.

“ Libera me. Libera me. Libera me.” I recite the freeing words alone, raising my hands above my head—as the black magic guru on the Internet told me to do. Is Krampus listening to this?

I lower my paper near the—pumpkin spice—candle and let it catch fire. It burns quickly when I drop it in the small plate on the altar.

When it turns to ashes, the flame of the candle suddenly trembles.

“Look!” I whisper, smacking Ollie’s chest with the back of my hand. “Just like last time.”

“Pretty sure it was my husband panting. He’s frying like a sunny-side-up egg under the heavy Santa costume.”

Rague’s face looks red. I thought it was his way to get in character. I even praised him a few minutes before, when it was all a physical reaction. So disappointed.

“Lori turned up the thermostat,” Gabe tells them.

“Blabber mouth,” I mutter. “I don’t like feeling cold.”

“Cover yourself, then,” Rague states, starting to take off the outfit, followed by Ollie.

“Oh, wait!” Sari suddenly exclaims, jogging to the kitchen. He comes back with a red velvet cake on a plate. It has a couple of skeleton sugar figures on top and what looks

like a little brown bear.

“They didn’t have a Krampus sugar doll. The bear was the closest thing to it,” Sari clarifies. “I painted some blood and fangs on him though.”

I squint at it, and yeah, there they are. Perfectly drawn on the tiny, hairy face.

“I thought we could leave a slice for Krampus, as an offering,” Sari adds.

“Well done, Angel.” His beaming smile is contagious. He’s the fucking best.

All the bros love sweets. It’s kind of a family tradition. A tradition Meg started and that now they don’t follow as much anymore.

Sari and Ollie cut and distribute the cake, leaving the piece with the bear figure on the altar. We are eating around the kitchen counter since Gabe and I don’t have a table in here.

“This beauty is foodporn. I think I just cheated on you,” I tell Bez, moaning around a bite.

“The fuck you did.” He frowns at me, but he’s already finished his. His plate is empty.

“Give me that cake,” Gabe orders me, attempting to grab my plate.

I slide it away from him. “Back off! This is mine.”

“What if I tell you, you can have at it from a more delicious...surface?” Gabe quirks a brow at me in challenge. We haven’t tried food play yet. It sounds fun and hot.

“Sitophilia describes sexual arousal involving food. It is arguably the most socially acceptable type of paraphilia,” Sari declares with an enthusiastic nod.

“You can suck the cake off my dick,” Bez feels the need to crassly say as he hoists me up, legs around his waist. I wrap my hand around his nape, while the other keeps a tight grasp on the cake plate.

“And we are leaving,” Ollie states, grabbing his things, and the Santa costume as well. “We’ll borrow this.”

Rague lets out a deep growl—his turned-on growl. I’ve heard it many times before since they like to canoodle...anywhere. Not that I’m any different with my fiancés.

I still scrunch up my nose at my bestie. “Keep it!” I call over my shoulder as Bez carries me toward the bedroom. “Thank you for your help with step one and two of my groveling plan!” I finish hurriedly.

“You’re welcome,” Sari is the only one to reply as I hear the click of the front door closing.

Wednesday continues peering at me. It unsettles me a little.

I still feel her empty gaze on me when Bez closes the bedroom door behind us.

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six

The art of stalking

A couple of hours later, I'm on the sofa, head on Gabe's bare chest, arm back, fingers running through the soft hair on his nape, sated body snuggling against his. I feel like a cat purring all over his owner. And Gabe did own my arse tonight, very thoroughly with Bez's help.

A bowl of caramel popcorn is half full on the coffee table, and the flames in the fireplace are slowly dancing. My eyes are on Wednesday, still perching on her roost. She hasn't moved for a long time, which is not like her. And that leery look is still there in her red eyes.

A scream comes from the TV as Gabe says, "Don't you think you're overdoing it?"

"Uhm?"

"Your hen is wearing horns and you decorated our living room with chains and leather cords." He points at them hanging from the ceiling.

"I wanted Krampus to feel at home. I'm trying to get on his good side." If he even has one. "He needs to un-jinx me."

"Krampus doesn't jinx, he punishes naughty kids," Gabe annoyingly states.

"Hello! Naughty kid here!" I wave at my body covered only in furry shorts. "Stop

being so pedantic for once!”

“When you stop being unreasonable and start thinking,” Gabe has the gall to say to me.

I push off his body and sit on the opposite side of the sofa. “What the fuck, Gabe! Can’t you just support me? This is important to me.”

“We did. We listened to your incomprehensible blabbering.” Bez decides to get involved.

“Latin ritual,” Gabe corrects him.

“For an eternity,” Bez grumbles.

“For a few minutes,” Gabe interjects again. I love when they both interact with me, but hate when they do it to prove a point.

“I needed to invoke his spirit,” I remind them.

“Look at our apartment. It’s like we entered a scene from one of your horror movies.” Gabe gestures at the one on the TV.

“Fucking creepy, if stupid,” Bez confesses.

“You are insufferable when you unite against me!” I stand up and skitter to the window wall. My eyes fall on the sideboard, noticing a plastic bag near the liquor bottles. “What’s this?” I grab it and shake it toward them.

“A microchip.” Gabe stands up and rounds the sofa, stalking slowly toward me.

“You mean the microchip you want to insert behind my ear to keep your Big Brother eye on me.” I feel anger boiling up inside me. I told him I’d think about this microchip shite. He promised he’d talk to me before doing something. I hate when he makes decisions without asking me first. Like when he paid off all my debts or he transferred me near his office. Both things he did—as well as many others after that—for my well-being. But I’m not a child, and I want us to sit down and talk about life-altering decisions.

“Yes,” Bez says simply.

“You maddening, obstinate blockhead, do you hear yourself? I told you I needed to think about it.”

“I know.” Gabe’s placating reply has the opposite effect on me.

“So why?” I yell. “You know what? It doesn’t matter. I won’t be microchipped so that you can follow every step I take. I refuse to do it!”

“Do you?” Gabe’s icy voice timbre is almost threatening. I hate when he uses that superior tone with me.

“Stop that! Both of you!” I hiss, my heart is jackhammering inside my chest, and I feel so bloody murderous right now.

“What? We are just talking,” Gabe keeps going, taking another forceful step my way.

“Not for long,” Bez drawls.

“You aren’t. You with that raspy, growly voice, and Gabe with that I’ll-fuck-a-yes-out-of-you stare.”

“Is it working?” Bez dares to ask me.

Unbearable, insufferable, bull-headed, cocksure dickheads!

“We all have trackers.” Gabe’s flat voice irritates me even more. He’s going to try another angle. I’ve worked on so many cases with him, I know all his methods of persuasion. The fact that he thinks he can use them on me makes me see red. “Even Ollie and Sully.”

I scoff, throwing the plastic bag on the white kitchen counter. “This is about the control freak inside you not letting me make a decision! You’re unbelievable.” I stomp angrily toward the entrance feeling the sudden need for fresh air.

“Where are you going? It’s snowing!” Bez takes one step toward me as Gabe’s phone starts to ring from somewhere near the sofa.

I look at the white flakes falling slowly out of the window. Wednesday decides this is the right moment to land at my feet. I take it as a sign. “For a stroll with Wednesday.” I wear Gabe’s black down jacket and over it, the dog carrier I use to take my hen outside.

“Little Wasp, stop!” Bez snarls; there’s an angry tic in his jaw and his hands are balled into fists. He does that when he’s having an inner kerfuffle with Gabe.

I place Wednesday in the carrier wrapped around my chest.

“Listen to Gabe. Don’t follow me, Bez. I need some me-time.” I grab my phone and the plastic horns next to it as well, pushing them down on my curls. As I slip on my stiletto pumps, the phone keeps ringing. “You should answer that. It could be one of your brothers.”

I hear Bez and Gabe arguing as I take my rainbow umbrella, and slip out of the apartment and into the elevator. I know they'll come after me sooner than later. So, when the doors slide open, I move quickly through the foyer—waving absently at Silas at the desk—and hurry outside the building.

I open the umbrella to stop the snowflakes from turning my curls into a wet mess. It's bloody glacial. I'm glad Wednesday is still wearing the red cape. I adjust it so it engulfs her body as I keep walking aimlessly.

I pat my chest, not feeling the round urn pendent underneath the jacket. Fuck! I was so angry I forgot it at home. I always take it off when I do the dirty with my men. And now I feel bare, like I'm missing an essential part of me. And that gets me even more infuriated.

I'm not against the tracker, per se. I mean I wouldn't be if Gabe and Bez had asked me and not forced it on me. Such an uncomplicated topic has turned into a fight, but my voice needs to be heard. They still think they can order me around. The fact that I like to be submissive- ish in bed doesn't mean I want to be babied in every area of my life. I thought they got it, but from time to time, they slip into old habits—and I let them. Not this time!

I can't feel my legs anymore—fishnet stockings are sexy but inadequate for icy temperatures—just like my gloveless hands. It has stopped snowing, so I hang the umbrella on my arm by the handle and flex and wiggle my fingers, trying to stimulate the blood circulation. My attention goes to my engagement ring, to the two rubies. They symbolize my men, there to shield and worship the diamond in the middle. Me

I let out a long, defeated sigh. I know I have a big chip on my shoulder. I constantly feel the need to prove I'm strong enough. Good enough. That I'm worthy.

Was I too harsh with them? Since Meg fell into a coma, all the brothers have turned

more protective. And for good reason. Phoenix—aka Bird Turd—is still out there. Eight as well. We still don't know which side Uri's brother is on.

Maybe I exaggerated a little with Bez and Gabe. Look at what they let me do to the apartment with the altar, the decorations, the whole ritual. They always go along with my crazy plans or just smirk at my petty revenges—which I don't pull in the office anymore. The underground garage and the first-floor lobby don't count, though.

They do so much for me. They make me feel so loved and cherished every day. When they prepare my favorite breakfast, turn on the radio on a rock station while I take a shower, crush their lips to mine and give me a warning spank every time we part, growl at whomever looks at me wrong, never fail to keep me safe and satisfied.

Bloody, twat, bellend, sodding fuckers! I'm going to let Sari put that stupid microchip behind my ear because I'm irremediably in love with them. Simple as that.

But right now? Right now, it's time to find a maggot. I have enough wrath inside me to wreck a dozen of them. Need to vent.

I take my phone out of the jacket pocket, the sparkly rainbow middle finger on the cover shimmers proudly under the streetlamp. I call Rami as I turn around and make my way back home.

“Yello!” he answers.

“I want to fucking paint this town red!” I clip.

“And green?” he adds.

“What?”

“It’s Christmas time.” His statement has that duh inflection at the end, which urges me to strangle him—after slugging him hard.

“Not what I meant!” I snarl.

“Trouble in hell?” he asks, sounding unaffected by my ferocious tone.

“Your bloody brothers and that fucking microchip,” I mutter. “Which is just the tip of the iceberg.”

“So what’s hiding underwater?”

“Two controlling arseholes!” Rami bursts out laughing hearing my reply.

I’m coming out of a narrow alley when Wednesday’s head snaps to the left. I hear a small whimper in the same direction, and I see a woman holding a kid’s arm as she opens a car door and sternly tells the boy to get inside.

It’s not the first time that a mother lost patience with her son. It’s not ideal, but Lord knows how many days I drove my gran mad. I’m about to look the other way when I get a glance at the kid’s face. Fathomless terror fills his big dark eyes. A child would never look at his mother that way, unless...

The woman is getting in the driver’s seat when I raise my arm and tell her to wait. She frowns as her small eyes move from my horns, to my hen, my furry shorts, and fishnets and stiletto shoes. Without checking the side mirrors, she slams her foot on the gas pedal and almost leaves skid marks on the street as she drives away.

As the car passes by me, the kid pushes his palm against the window, mouth open in a silent scream, tears running down his pale face.

“Shite!”

“What now?”

“I think I saw... I don’t know what I saw.” Wednesday screeches as she turns her head to the right. A taxi is coming that way, so I raise my arm to stop it. “But I have a bad feeling.”

“Tell me,” Rami says.

“Wait, I’m getting inside a taxi.” As I slide on the purple back seat, a strong whiff of pumpkin latte hits my nose.

“Hello, horned friend and feathery pet. Where are we going this cold, dark evening?” The driver is a young woman with black and bright red hair styled in braids on both sides of her head, a beaky nose, and big round glasses. Her lacy black shirt and fingerless gloves give out a witchy vibe, but the white fabric flowers in her hair hippie style to me.

I’m intrigued by her fashion choices, but now is not the time to ask questions. “Follow that car!” It’s sort of a déjà vu, a pity Ollie is not here to share this with me.

“Oh, Goddess. On it! Petunia is my name, and today is your lucky day. I’m the most discreet driver in Chicago,” she exclaims. I love a good stalking, not when there’s a frightened child in the mix.

I give Rami the car’s plate. “I’m tailing it. There’s a woman inside with a kid. I think she’s going to hurt him.”

“Did you witness any kind of abuse on the kid? Did she kidnap him?” Rami asks over the phone.

“No. I’m not sure. But the kid looked terrified.”

“Alright. I’ll call Gabe and see who else is closer to you. Leave your phone on so Serena can keep tracking you. I’ll call you as soon as I get information on the car.” He hangs up.

“So, you’re trying to save a kid in imminent danger. You don’t look like a cop. A P.I.? Bounty hunter in disguise?” Petunia asks, her eyes slide down my weird ensemble, lingering on my red high heels. Petunias were Gran’s favorite flowers. Such an odd coincidence.

“No to all of your questions. I’m just a concerned citizen. The costume I’m wearing was for a party of sorts.” The car takes a left, so I add, “She’s turning right.”

“I see her, no worries. It’s not the first time a client asked me to tail someone. But usually, they are jealous partners or worried mothers. This sounds serious. Do you mind keeping me out of any police report if that’s where this is heading?” She doesn’t seem concerned about the probable danger we are getting ourselves into. The fact that she wants to stay on the down-low with the boys and girls in blue can be caused by numerous reasons—like my five unpaid parking tickets.

“No police. That I can promise you,” I assure her. If that woman hurts that boy, she’ll be all mine.

“You talk my language then. Hold on,” she suddenly warns me before making a hard right. “This broad is the embodiment of insanity behind the wheel.”

If only she saw me driving.

Wednesday moves inside the dog carrier, and I pet her head absently as I keep my eye on the blue car ahead.

We've left the Futon River District behind and are heading west toward Garfield Park when my phone goes off.

"Talk to me, Reacher."

"The car is registered to a Milly Gordon. I sent you a picture. Is she the same woman you saw?" Rami asks.

I look at my phone screen and quickly access my email to look at the picture. "No, this woman is too old. But there's something about her... her eyes, they look similar to the one I'm tailing."

"Okay. Let's see. Milly has a daughter. Martha. Here."

"It's definitely her," I tell him, as I get a look at the new photo.

"Forty-five, unemployed. She started young with shoplifting then she was arrested for auto theft, and fraud. She seems to have changed lines of work now. She was accused of impersonating a law enforcement officer a couple of years ago, but released for lack of evidence."

I don't think there's a place on the Internet that Rami can't hack.

"I might have seen a blue uniform under her coat," I tell him. "It didn't look like a police one."

He hums in contemplation. "She is single and has no kids."

"Fuck!" I exclaim, feeling angrier by the second.

"Raph is coming your way from Austin," Rami informs me. Where's Gabe? "Serena

has her eyes on you. Could you give me a description of the kid? I can see if there's a missing report or something in the police database."

I close my eyes and tune out the rest of the world, focusing only on the image of the boy inside my mind. "Around seven or eight. Blond hair, bowl cut, brown eyes. Missing one front tooth, wearing a red jacket and a blue backpack with a big yellow, round keychain."

"Not bad. Linda's training meditation?"

"Yes." Linda has taught me some tricks on how to shuffle through my memories and then halt and concentrate on the one I need. We train when I go see Meg at the hospital. It helps Linda to keep her mind busy.

"We are turning on Jackson Boulevard," Petunia exclaims. "If your pet bird lays an egg, it's mine."

"Who's that?" Rami asks.

"Petunia. The best taxi driver in Chicago," I reply, winking at her in the rearview mirror.

"In Illinois, baby!" she retorts.

"I'll get a background on her." Rami's is very protective of the family business. Nobody can know what we do obviously. "Raph is ten seconds away. And should appear behind youuuu...now!"

I look back, and Bully Boy's black motorcycle is following us. Wow!

"I see him."

“Check your emails again and tell me if that’s the boy Miss Gordon has in her car.” Rami’s tone sounds grave, which is rare for his forever-teasing attitude. I do as he says.

“Yes, it’s him. I’m a hundred and one percent sure.”

“Damn it! The kid’s name is Irving Weiss, gone missing two hours ago from an arcade a mile from your apartment.”

“The kidnapper is mine!” I growl.

“Kidnapper?” Petunia’s eyes widen before she curls her black lips over her teeth. She leans toward the steering wheel, looking even more invested in the tailing now.

“All yours. Call Raph,” Rami replies before ending the call.

My phone starts ringing before I can. It’s Bully Boy. “The kid was kidnapped. The maggot is mine,” I clarify before the blood-loving dude can get any claim.

“Noted. I’ll take care of the rest then.”

“The rest?”

“Isn’t it obvious?” I have no patience for his superior act right now.

“The donor impersonated law enforcement to get kids to follow her and kidnap them. It’s not the first time I’ve heard it. I’ll ask Rami to check for witness statements in old missing children reports to see if they saw a policewoman around the time of the kidnappings.”

“That’s fucking awful.” Snatching children while using their compliance toward an

authority figure is despicable. It makes me fucking sick.

“There’s something else,” Raph says, not sharing my disgust, but psychos are not known for being empathic people. “I don’t like kids. You have to take care of it.”

“Me?” I don’t think so. I turn to the taxi driver. “Hey, Petunia? Any good with kids?”

“I have four younger sisters, what do you think?”

“It’s settled then,” Raph says before hanging up.

“What are your sisters’ names?” I ask her, curious to find out if her parents gave old-fashioned names to the rest of their kids.

“Azalea, Camellia, Dahlia, and Magnolia. My mother is a botanist.” That explains the garden-variety names. Lovely—bordering odd.

“The kidnapper is parking her car in front of that house,” she declares a moment later.

The suburban area looks deserted. There’re just two more houses around, which seem abandoned.

“Perfect place to bring a kidnapped child.” Petunia reads my mind. “What’s she planning to do with him? You’re going to stop her, right? And fuck her up a little?” She sounds hopeful.

I take Wednesday out of the dog carrier and leave her on the seat. “A little,” I reply. The torture bit will come later at the base.

I can feel it. It’s initiation time! Finally.

As soon as I see the kidnapper getting out of the car, I shout, “Stop here.” The taxi immediately halts. I open the door and scream, “Get the fuck away from that kid or you’ll lose your hand!”

The kidnapper spins my way as I slowly walk toward her. My grip tightens on the umbrella curved wooden handle.

Raph’s bike stops behind her car, making her take a step back. He keeps the helmet on; the revving of his motorcycle sounds threatening. Ominous.

“Who are you?” she asks as she continues to move backward, swinging her eyes from me to Raph.

Bully Boy ignores her question and asks one of his own, “Anybody in there?” He points the blade of the knife he’s holding at the house.

“Fuck you,” the kidnapper—M...something, her name is bloody inconsequential—snarls, glaring at us.

“Serena, let me know how many people are in the house,” I hear Raph asking the A.I. as he smoothly leaves his bike and stalks slowly toward the old porch.

There’s a pause of silence, and then Raph snarls back. He turns his helmeted head to me. “I’ll take care of the three fuckers inside.”

The kidnapper gasps, surprised. She flexes her right hand subconsciously signaling she has a weapon hidden under that side of her jacket. Linda’s training comes in handy again.

“Stealing children, such a Krampus thing to do,” I chide her, keeping a tight grip on my umbrella. I’m petite and sassy—my mouth gets me in trouble seventy percent of

the time—usually my attackers are bigger and stronger than me, so learning to use whichever tools are available is a must. Hence Bartitsu and umbrellas used as a blunt weapon.

Bartitsu is a traditional English combat form. It isn't all tweed and top hats, but it derived from a fusion of jiu-jitsu, bare knuckle boxing, and savate, a French form of kickboxing. It's fun and a great self-defense technique.

I move into a low guard position holding the umbrella slightly up almost parallel to my right leg, point dropped. My free hand is over my chest in a defensive pose.

I'm three feet from her now. "Here is a serious question: did your mom not love you?"

"You don't know shit, you crazy fuck!" She sneers, looking me up and down as she slides her hand inside the right side of her jacket and takes out a long knife. A classic bowie, around sixteen inches, tang, brass guard, wood handle—my fiancé loves blades, it's rubbed off on me. I bet he'd like this one for his collection.

"Better crazy than ugly," I retort with a scoff at the end. My statement earns a furious hiss from her. In my defense sporting shaggy bangs with such a short forehead is an insult to good taste, therefore should be illegal—not that this bitch would care.

This close I can clearly see the security guard uniform underneath her jacket, probably from the arcade where the kid was snatched. Raph was right, she impersonates people with authority so children feel safe and compelled to follow her. Heartless bitch!

"You and your biker friend are dead," she barks, moving from one foot to the other.

Being underestimated is the story of my life. It actually helps. It lowers the attacker's

guard which consequently fuels my confidence in my ability to deal with dangerous situations when I drop them flat on their backs.

“Guess the answer to my question is no. Your mom couldn’t stand your ugly face, ah?”

“Shut up!” she screams angrily. If a look could kill, I’d be dinner for the rats right now.

I might have hit a big nerve there. Her reaction only urges me to poke it more. “Crikey! You’re in serious need of a psychiatrist. Even better, would your mother be interested in couple’s therapy?”

“I’ll cut out that tongue and give it to my dog as a treat.”

“I’ll pass. Don’t want to give your Fido indigestion. My tongue is quite the sharp tool.”

“I got the kid!” I hear Petunia yelling from behind me.

I smirk cockily at the kidnapper . “Come on. Stab me with that big knife. Show your mommy how mean you can be,” I taunt her, and she doesn’t let me repeat it twice.

With a battle scream she takes a step forward and pushes the blade toward my guts. I deflect the knife by gripping the umbrella with both hands—holding the two separate ends of the shaft—and using it to halt her forearm, moving the trajectory of the blade to the left. Then I level the point of the umbrella with her chin and hit it hard, propelling her head back. She stumbles trying to regain her balance but I don’t let her. I turn the umbrella around so that the butt—the handle—is aiming at her body and land it on her right boob twice as I sink my red stiletto heel hard into her foot. She drops the knife and whimpers. It’s the best sound in the whole world. So good,

I'll be dreaming about it for years to come.

Rague once told me he doesn't hit women. I think it's because he could kill one with a mere slap. Me? I'm all for equality—vicious bitches included. No exceptions.

I hear a crashing sound from inside the house, but I'm not worried in the least. Raph is a cold-blooded killing machine.

I move to the kidnapper's back and slide the umbrella over her neck, holding both ends between my fingers. My knees are bent, weight evenly distributed.

"You've been Lored!" I whisper in her ear as I pull the shaft just enough against her throat to put her to sleep. Don't want to fucking kill her...yet.

She's fighting me, rotating her body, hitting the umbrella—I'd turn extremely pissed if she breaks it—blindly attempting at grabbing my hair. She grips my horns instead, pulling them off. I push my knee on her back and yank harder, my fingers turning white around the smooth wood and colorful fabric.

"You're a naughty one. Need to be punished," I pant. "Santa is really disappointed in you... if you care what an old judgy dude with a penchant for cavity-inducing tidbits thinks."

Wednesday's shriek makes me shift to my left to check on her just as the bitch drops my horns and pulls a taser out of her pocket, shoving it back toward my groin. The loud crackling noise and bright pulsing light makes me jump back sliding the umbrella off her neck. She turns toward me, taser high in front of her—did she use it on the kids she kidnapped? She has her glaring eyes focused on me while she keeps coughing.

This is not going to end up like my last maggots. This is my final initiation, and I'm

going to kidnap the kidnapper!

I'm trying to find the best way to go about this when Wednesday comes to my help once again. My fearless lady jumps on the house railing and then flaps her wings, landing on the bitch's shoulder. The woman screams like a banshee, letting go of the taser. I toss the umbrella in the air, grab it again from the point with both hands and with a hard swing—which would have produced an ovation in a baseball stadium—I thrust the wooden handle right into her face. Blood and spit fly out of her mouth as she loses her balance.

The blow is so well-placed she drops on the dried grass like a wall of bricks. But to me it looks like the most spectacular sight in the world.

“That’s all she wrote, folks!” I exclaim with satisfaction to...no one.

The maggot's chest is still moving. She's out, but alive. Alive! I soundly kiss my umbrella, “smack” and take a spin of victory. Seems like the curse is finally fucking broken. Right?

I grab my horns from the ground and slide them over my head as I pocket the bitch's knife. Then I taser her—she deserves it! Once is not enough so I enjoy the fifty-thousand-volt electric shock going through her jolting body another time.

Then I turn to my hen with a beaming smile and find her on the porch railing, again giving me that strange look. I take a step toward her, and I see something flashing in her red eyes...flames? I blink, and they are gone. But the feeling of wrongness is still there.

“Krampus?” I whisper hesitantly. “Are you inside my hen?” Okay, that came out wrong.

Raph appears on the house porch, halting my conversation with a demon. He's holding his bloodied helmet under his arm, and his jeans are ripped at the knee, but otherwise, he looks his arrogant, psycho self.

"Opal and Hunter are coming to get the kid; they will take him to the police. They'll make up a story. Rami is on his way to help you with the donor."

"The people in the house?"

"They were human traffickers. Turns out, your donor is well known around pedophiles, child pimps, and black-market organ sellers," he informs me.

I feel bile trying to reach my throat as I glare at her body on the ground. How long has this been going on? How many other children did she kidnap? I taser her again, pressing the device harder on her chest. This maggot has to die a slow, agonizing death. And I have just the right way. Need to ask Ash for a favor, though. Fuck!

Raph waits for me to finish before he adds, "Rague will take care of the cleaning."

He will probably use fire to get rid of all the evidence—in other words the blood and gore Bully Boy left inside the house.

"I need to pick up Michael from work and get the fuck out of this hellhole. Here." Raph throws me a rope. "For the donor. Gag her as well, just in case she's a screamer." He then mounts his bike and drives away, leaving a wave of dust behind.

"Does he know there's blood on his helmet?" Petunia's question suddenly reminds me she's here.

"Uhm, pretty sure he wants to show it to his husband." Michael shares Raph's love for gore. "He's a medical examiner."

“Oh. No vampires, pity.” She really looks disappointed. “Irving, the child, is fine. He conked out in the taxi. Too much crying, poor kid.”

That’s a relief. I walk to Petunia’s car to check on him. He’s asleep in the back seat just like she said.

“Are the police coming?” she asks me, as I proceed to tie up the kidnapper, she even helps me to gag the maggot.

I shake my head. “Problems with the people in blue?” I lift an eyebrow at her.

“The Smurfs?” She smiles jokingly. “Let’s just say the dislike is well reciprocated.” It’s a vague reply that turns her smile into a mischievous smirk.

“So, can I count on your discretion then, flowery Petunia?” I give her my best Gabe-intensive stare.

“Are you kidding me? What you did here was freaking amazing! You’re like a gentleman ninja. That umbrella stuff? Pow. Bam. Bada boom,” she exclaims with enthusiasm. “I need to learn that. And-and your pet bird with her little cape flying behind her? She is like-like your side kick!” Wednesday is still staring from the porch railing. I bow my head at her...him?

“Then again, your friend with the helmet is the scariest dude I’ve ever seen.”

I snort. She has no idea.

“But I’ll sleep better tonight. And it’s all thanks to you guys.” She nods. “So, hell yeah, you can count on me.”

“Brilliant! How much do I owe for the ride?”

“That depends. Are you rich?”

This girl is fun.

I hear a car approaching. It’s the kidnapping van, followed by Hunter’s car.

Before the van makes a complete stop in front of the house, the passenger’s door opens and Gabe jumps out, stalking toward me.

“The curse is broken!” I yell happily, forgetting about our earlier fight for a moment. But the cold, threatening look on his face is a quick reminder.

I open my mouth, ready to give him another bloody piece of my mind, when his lips crash on mine before I can let out a single word. His hands palm my arse, and he hoists me up, pushing my legs around his hips, red stilettos crossing behind his back, as his lips ravage my mouth without mercy. I drop the umbrella and the taser. All thoughts disappear from my mind as he keeps dominating me, body and soul.

I let out a whimper when he breaks the kiss and try to follow his mouth, but Bez growls at me, and then I find my back against the side of the house. His burning gaze engulfs me, and my heart stutters a beat.

“Where were you?” I ask him. I expected them to rush to help me. Instead they just arrived.

“You wanted to do this yourself,” Gabe replies.

They listened to me? Is this some kind of Krampus’s miracle? My eyes move to find Wednesday but Gabe takes something out of his coat pocket and slides it around my neck. It’s Gran’s urn pendant. The familiar weight on my chest makes me breathe easily again. And fuck, I think I’m falling in love with my men all over again.

“Don’t you ever, ever leave us like that ever again!” Bez snarls, but underneath the anger, I can see his distress.

His tongue invades my mouth once again, and I bite and suck on it hard. When are they going to understand that I will always come back to them?

“Uhm, Bez, can you let the Gremlin breathe?” I hear Rami saying. “This is his... initiation. He needs to do the honors here.”

And I will, in a minute. Or two.

“Rise and shine, sleepy head, I need to turn someone dead,” I singsong near the maggot’s ear. I’m in the FUNS room at the base, still wearing the itchy-as-fuck Krampus shorts. But it doesn’t matter, because this is my show.

I’m going solo here, baby!

Well, technically Wednesday is in the room with me, but only because I’m certain Krampus possessed her. And I need him to see I’ll keep going with the groveling plan—step three, the sacrifice.

Gabe is on the other side of the glass wall with Uri. I haven’t seen much of the Super Model lately. Not since he dropped the bomb of having a brother. He looks tired, I can clearly see the dark shadows under his eyes. He’s talking to Gabe, but with the intercom off, I can’t hear what they are saying. When Uri turns his gaze toward Sari, working in the lab, his body tenses, leaving me confused once again about what the hell is going on between those two.

I need to push up my Suri plan—Sari plus Uri, my ship name for them—and push them into each other’s arms. Can’t lose a bet to Gabe and Bez, even though time is running out.

“Why the fuck are you wearing that ridiculous outfit? Is it a new fashion statement?” Uri asks brusquely, and I flip him off, showing the little golden skull on my black polished nail.

“I brought you a change,” Gabe lets me know. He needs to stop being this amazing, or I’ll ride him right here in front of everybody.

“I’ll burn these rash-inducing shorts as soon as I’m done here.”

“No, keep them,” Bez growls low, letting me know his intentions.

“Now who’s the freak?” Uri turns toward my fiancés. They both ignore him.

“Happy initiation, Lori,” Gabe tells me, and I beam at him. I lick the dip in the middle of my lower lip, to guide his eyes to it. He loves my sexy mouth, and I just secured a hard fuck as soon as I’m done here.

The maggot moans as she finally wakes up, turning up my excitement exponentially. My eyes sparkle as I run what I’m going to do to her inside my head one more time.

She’s tied, hands and feet, to a metal chair, wearing only a bra and her horrific grandma panties—nobody is interested in her assets here. The room is covered in purple plastic with torture tools hanging from the ceiling and a hen walking around.

The maggot’s frightened reaction is quite average. She recognizes me, screams, cusses, and fights fruitlessly against the ropes around her wrists and ankles, then begs and tries to bribe me. Nothing I haven’t heard before—I’ve witnessed my share of maggots’ deaths. And I’m overly bored already.

I thought the bitch was a mean one. Especially after Rami found a file on her laptop with a list of all the children she’s kidnapped and sold, and another one of her clients.

And let me tell you, they are both too long.

Instead, she's just a typical evil twat, cold-hearted and ruthless in deciding innocent kids' fates, while wailing like a baby when it's her turn.

I slide both my index and middle fingers between my lips and blow out a whistle. A high-pitched, warbling sound pierces the air, silencing the maggot.

"No one wants to hear your rumbling, psycho speech, so shut up and listen, fleabag!" I hiss at her. "I thought about making a nice filet out of you. The secret for a good, tender one is the pounding part." I move toward the bat hanging from the ceiling and brush my fingers over the rounded wooden edge. I hear her sharp gasp, and that's another sound I'll dream about tonight—stiffening a tad under the sheets, too. Kinky, I know.

"You are..." she starts saying, but I gag her again since she can't follow the simplest command.

"I will tenderize you, and maybe let the bros have a go at you, as well. You see, they hate people who hurt children." I hear growls and snarls coming from behind the glass wall. "But first, you see, I need to appease my demon. I promised him a sacrifice." I let the word float into the air for a while as I grab the tattoo gun from the small table. "That honor belongs to you. I just need to be sure the other demons know that without a doubt when you drop your tushy in hell."

The maggot is mumbling something behind the gag. Her face is bruised from the umbrella blow, and I sheared off her bangs while she was out. I was bored, surrounded by sharp tools, with a human-sized Barbie right in front of me. Fucking up her hair was only natural.

Wednesday/Krampus is near my feet now, and she/he seems to want to...watch.

I lift them up and place them on the chair, to give them a front-row seat to what I'm doing.

Am I crackers? I can debate that. Tolerant and acquiescent are words that better encapsulate my essence. Sometimes things don't have a clear explanation. They just need to be accepted as they are. And I'm fine with it.

Right now, I'm taking a page from Uri's torture book. Although carving is not really my thing. So I veered toward something more artistic. Ash gave me an old tattoo gun of his—which I'll have to pay for in some embarrassing way. I'm using the thickest needle—that I might have washed in toilet water. No health concerns here whatsoever.

"Now stay still...or not. Actually, please don't, much more fun if you move." I chuckle, enjoying the horror forming on her face. I turn the gun on, the buzzing sound fills the room. The maggot's eyes widen and sweat starts rolling down her face as I lean toward her forehead.

"Can someone tell me how to spell Krampus's bitch?" I ask the bros, just to fuck with the maggot. And she buys it splendidly with a loud muffled scream and a frantic shake of her head. I feel bloody euphoric.

Gabe's rare, hot, raspy laugh from the other side of the glass wall steals all my attention for three beats of my heart. I love that man.

"Who fucking cares? Disfigure the fucker, Little Wasp." Bez snorts at the donor's frightened whimper.

Love both men so bloody much.

Now, let's push aside all this mushy thinking and focus on Krampus's sacrifice.

I smile. Wednesday seems to lean toward me to get a better look as I utter, “This will hurt...so fucking much.”

The wait was worth it. Best initiation ever.

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epilogue

K Day

“It’s called an in-verbal communication,” I tell Gabe.

“You mean non -verbal communication,” he points out. Now I know why Bez hates when Gabe corrects him.

I wrinkle my nose in distaste. “You’re being arrogant and haughty again.”

“And you’re spending too much time with Bez, your English is getting atrocious!”

“Atrocious? Are you jealous of Bez again? I still literally have cum leaking out of me after I gave your cock another out-of-this-world ride it’ll never forget,” I state.

We are sitting on the sofa in the living room. I’m butt naked, while he’s only wearing a shirt open on his chest.

“I’m not jealous,” he deadpans, trying to fix the Korean collar of his black shirt for some bloody reason. Tough luck, I wrinkled it with my hands when I was impaling myself on his long shaft. I’m actually still impaled on it.

And yes, he is jealous . “Yes, you are.” I lace my hands behind his neck. “I need to double my efforts to prove you wrong, then.” My voice has turned sultry. Though, not enough it seems.

“Lori, let’s focus.”

I huff, letting my arms drop. “Why are you ruining my Krampus Day afterglow?”

“Your petty revenges. You promised you would stop them in the office.”

“I never did such a thing.”

He grabs the hair on my nape and tilts my head slightly upward. It’s a dominant move, to show me who’s in command. Love his long, manhandling fingers and large palms.

“I had my tongue inside your ass as you screamed it.” The reminder pushes a long and delicious shudder down my spine.

“That was coerced out of me. You know you can make me sing the whole church hymnbook when your hands are on me,” I retort, grinding my ass as his dick is slowly hardening inside me again. Sodding fucking yes! “And I didn’t cover Randall’s office in LGBTQ+ stickers.”

Gabe tightens his grip. Mmm! More.

“But, but, but...I might have suggested the idea to a poor soul who has been unjustly used as an emotional punching bag.”

“Lori, you are my fiancé, you need to act respectably. As much as possible—for you,” he adds at the end. It makes me scoff.

“I suggested the idea outside the office!” I feel the need to remind him how respectable he is, as well. “And you killed two people because they put their hands on me!”

“That was different. They hurt you. You , Love.” His fingers dig deeper into my hair, and combined with the Love endearment, it’s my kryptonite. “Nobody dares do that and deserves to see another sunrise.”

And that’s the last nail in my coffin. I kiss him like I need air and he’s the only one who can provide it to me. My hips start moving again, and for another hour, we are lost to the world.

“So, will you really try to behave when you come to the office?” he asks me as I’m splayed on top of him on the soft rug in front of the lit fireplace.

He won’t just bloody let it go.

“Lori?”

“Oh, so sorry I completely forgot about your existence for a second,” I lie shamelessly, because there’s no way my head, my heart, and my soul don’t feel my soulmates when they are near.

“Come on, Gabe. That was hilarious. You got that big fat check from a new client because of that show,” Bez confesses.

“What am I hearing, now? You lying wanker! You didn’t tell me anything about a fat check! And a new client.” I punch his chest.

He sighs, and his long, sexy, expert fingers stop brushing my back. Fuck, I don’t want that. It’s time for some fake compliance.

“I’ll try to keep my marvelous advice for myself in the office,” I offer him. Out of the office, all is fair , though , I add inside my head. His fingers resume the brushing, and I purr on top of him.

“I miss working with you,” I confess after a few minutes. I really do. I’m too busy with classes and studying to focus on any cases right now. Gabe asks my opinion at times, but it’s not the same.

“It seems to me that you had ample time for Santa’s evil twin.” He palms my sore arse, pretty sure the imprint of his hand near my tattoo will never go away.

“Don’t you like your Krampus slippers?” They are my hideous and funny Christmas present to him, among other things. He did love the maggot’s knife for his collection. Giving him my first donor’s trophy meant the world to him, hence our morning jolly ride on the sofa.

“I clearly said fuck no, Little Wasp.” Bez is never diplomatic with his answers.

“They have horns that Wednesday can’t stop clawing and picking at,” Gabe states. He bought her a small water fountain so she can always drink fresh water. He really loves her.

My little lady is herself again. She just hates everything Krampus now. My theory is that being unwillingly possessed by a demon made her murderous toward him.

“When are you going to remove the altar?” Gabe asks.

“End of the month. And I’ll make a new one every year because December is Krampus time, so all the evil souls I take will be his.”

“Will you wear that furry outfit again?” Bez rumbles. He bloody loves it. He kept fucking me for hours, pulling on my horns. Should I be worried? Nah. Who hasn’t dreamed of being fucked by a fangy demon? I certainly did.

“For you? Everything,” I whisper darkly.

“Everything, right,” Gabe mutters.

“I put that bloody microchip behind my ear for you, didn’t I?” I touch the bump under the skin. It felt weird at first. But I forget about it most of the time.

Gabe’s hand curls around my nape as he lifts my head up. “You did it because I threatened to tranquilize you and put it there myself.”

“Fear of having a permanent scar near my pretty face was an essential factor in my decision-making, yes. The need to get my beauty sleep another.”

“Lori. I think it’s time we talk about rules.”

“Rules? No, no rules. I vote we chuck the rules.”

“You can’t. That’s against the rules.”

“What rules?”

“The rules we need to talk about.”

This could go on for hours, which we don’t have. “Ugh, you are lucky I love you, or...” I start.

“Or what?” Bez growls. “You will never leave us, Little Wasp.”

I look upward, asking the whole chorus of angels to give me strength. “Open your hairy ears because this is the last time I say it. I will never leave you. Either of you. Ever!” I spell out.

“I told you.” Gabe sounds a smidge smug.

“Shut it!” is Bez’s annoyed reply.

My phone buzzes, and I turn a glance to see Petunia texted me. Since that night two weeks ago, we’ve been chatting over the phone, and she even helped me buy some presents—Krampus slippers included. She’s fun to be with, and I think I will use her driving, stalking services again in the future.

My eyes focus on the time displayed on my phone, and I scramble into a sitting position.

“Bugger! We’re going to be late.”

“When we come back it’s rule time.” I roll my eyes at his persistence.

An hour later, we are entering Rami and Hunter’s home when a cacophony of kabooms, fizzes, and swooshes fills the air.

“Gabriz is here!” Rami cheers—his ship name for Gabe, Bez, and me.

“Merry Christmas and congrats on your initiation!” Michael yells with Sari, followed by the less enthusiastic rest of the sausage fest with the triplets and Opal. Wow, everybody is here, except Linda. She decided to stay at the hospital with Meg.

We’ll go see them later.

I pat Gabe’s chest, silently telling him to let me go. He wrapped me in his arms and shielded me as soon as the firecracker noises started. I feel so fucking cherished and, at the same time, bloody irritated by his overprotectiveness. Nevertheless, I remind myself this is a difficult time for all of us, with Meg still in the hospital with no signs of getting better. So, I let it slide.

“Cheers, mates. I’m touched.” I smile at everybody. The room is filled with Christmas decorations. A tall, trimmed tree is looming over the room far away from the fireplace—good call—and the table is dressed with food and drinks. Rami is quite the cook. I’m looking forward to eating.

“Happy Krampus Day!”

“Are you still going with that?” Ren clicks his disdainful tongue at me. But I don’t care. I’m free of my curse, and my tushy is delightfully stingy. I’m utterly satisfied...until tonight. A boy’s gotta keep eating.

“You owe me,” Ash feels the need to remind me every time I see him. He’s referring to the old tattoo gun he gave me, but he hasn’t asked me for anything in return yet. Brat. I’m dreading that day.

I wave at Opal and Hunter talking in the kitchen, then I’m suddenly enveloped by a huge, hard body.

“Hugs are painkillers,” Rami whispers too close to my ear.

“This is overmedication,” I mutter. “Are you asking for my boot in your arse?”

“So feisty, I bet Bez loves that.” He winks at my fiancé, earning an angry “back off” from him.

“Like I would hit on Gremlin.” Rami makes it sound ridiculous. I stomp on his foot, pressing hard with my high heel into his sneaker for a second too long before stepping back.

“Oops.” I stifle a smile behind my hand as he hops toward his boyfriend, whining like a baby. I sigh contently, petty revenges are so fulfilling!

“Ren, George was in my room,” Dare addresses his brother as he walks into the crowded living room with the black snake around his arm and his blind squirrel hanging from his neck.

“He likes your damn cookies-and-cream scented candle for some reason.” Ash scoffs and then oomphs as Ren elbows him in the gut.

Don’t know what’s weirder, a snake that likes to sniff candles or Dare buying a cookies-and-cream one.

“Your dog farts like a minigun.” Raph glares at Hunter as he moves Michael and him from the sofa to the armchair.

“I’ll happily kill him,” Uri offers, earning glowers from a few people in the room. He’s insufferable lately.

“It wouldn’t help,” Michael says. “The canine body is capable of being flatulent for hours after death.”

Sari adds, “The human body as well.”

Not wanting to hear more, I go hug Sully and Ollie and give Rague a pat on his mountainous pec.

“Gabriz, not bad,” I hear Opal telling Rami.

“By the way, we’ve changed our ship name to Ralie,” Rague announces. Rague plus Ollie. Ralie.

“What’s wrong with Ollague?” Rami asks, annoyed.

“It’s crap,” Uri replies. He’s not wrong.

I leave the presents Gabe and I brought near the piles under the tree. I guess we’ll exchange them later.

The bracelet Bez and Gabe gave me for Christmas feels cold on my wrist, but I’ll never take it off. For now, there’s only one ruby on it. Gabe will add a new one every year we are together, and since we’ll never part, I’m going to be covered in gems one day like a bloody maharaja. Maybe I can even get myself a tiger—only if Wednesday likes her.

For now, I have to think about the biggest present I brought. It fits in my velvet dress pocket, and I feel like it’s making a hole in it.

“What’s with all the fidgeting?” Ollie asks me as I make my way back to them.

“What?” I fake ignorance, even though I know it’s useless with my bloodhound of a bestie...and his brother.

“You’re doing the duck dance.” Sully nods, confirming his sniffing skill.

“Rubbish. I’m perfectly still. Like an iguana waiting for its prey to get close.” I describe the perfect picture, at which Sully laughs.

“Do you feel a fiery sensation in your pants? Liar liar!” Ollie’s joke is not funny.

“You did something, and you need to tell us before you pop. What is it?” Sully asks. He tries to lean against the wall without measuring the distance well. Ollie and I grab him before he smashes his head against the hard surface.

“Alright?” I ask him. He nods a couple of times, embarrassment coloring his cheeks.

“Yo, want some?” Ren comes up with a bottle of Coke and a bunch of paper cups. We nod, and he starts pouring. Need to add some rum to it, though. It’s Krampus Day, and I need to celebrate.

“I said I wanted one!” Ash clips at his brother, reaching us.

“I didn’t hear you, asshole,” Ren replies, handing each of us a filled cup.

“Yes, you did, douchebag!”

“You’re always muttering away. Can’t expect me to listen to whatever you say. Plus, not even Dare heard you, and he was right next to you. Right, Dare?”

Dare wisely decides not to reply and instead takes a sip from his glass. The hoodie he’s wearing is gray and it barely holds his muscular torso in.

“Dirtbag!” Ash grumbles.

Dear vengeful God of the past, please shatter my eardrums to spare me this torture. And since you’re here, I just want to thank you for Jamie Dornan, you did a very fine job there.

“Boys, are you still trying to exceed your daily cursing quota?” Gabe’s monotone question comes from behind me. I feel his front pressing against my back. His arm wraps around my chest, and I lean back as I lace my fingers with his.

“It’s still disturbing seeing you together.” Ash purses his lips at us. He’s such a contrary arse.

“Is it because you imagine us fornicating?” I taunt him while Gabe steals a sip from my cup.

“Nobody wants to imagine that!” Ren replies with a hint of disgust. His sunglasses are new, probably a Christmas present.

I roll my eyes. “Gabe, I changed my mind.”

“About?” Ollie, the noisy wanker, asks.

“About giving my biggest gift to the Offsprings.” I wave at the triplets.

“A present,” Ash echoes with no enthusiasm whatsoever.

“A big one?” Ren adds.

“Why?” Dare inquires.

I let out a nervous sigh but instantly relax when I feel Gabe pushing me firmer against him. I brush my fingers over the little urn around my neck as I look at the boys, and I know. It’s time to let go.

“I have a house. Gran left it to me. It has a nice, spacious garden and an even nicer neighbor.” I pause to find the right words. “It’s been rotting there for two years now, and I can’t possibly think of a better way to use it than give it to you brats. You can turn it into another pet shelter, a tattoo shop, a hacker cave. Whatever. Gabe and I can help you with the legal side, and Rami...”

Ash cusses, interrupting my amazing speech. “Fuuuck! I had you by the balls after I gave you that tattoo gun. By. The. Balls.” He purses his lips, and I feel Gabe tensing behind me. I wrap my hand around his nape to soothe Bez’s feral response.

“I just finished planning the most tortuous and devious way for you to repay me. And then you come and do this?” Ash hisses at me. “You ruined it now!”

I smirk at him. “Sorry, I’m not sorry?”

“Lori.” Hunter’s voice is filled with warmth. He gives me a grateful look. He’s a silent grump, but he loves these boys deeply. Rami nods at me with the same look in his eyes,

Dare grabs Ash’s shoulder, silencing him, as he tells me, “What Ash meant to say is, do you have any idea how much that means to us?”

I open my mouth, but Ren cuts me off, “Are you sure?”

Ollie and Sully have big smiles on their faces. They know how hard it has been for me having Gran’s place and not being able to be there anymore. She loved that house, and she would’ve wanted for someone to live in it. I nod. “More certain with every passing second.”

Ren lets out a short laugh. “This is yet another sign of your lunacy.” The mirrored glasses cover his gaze, hiding his emotions. But he adds in a choked voice, “Thank you.”

“Fuck!” Ash breathes out, but it sounds like another thank you to my ears.

I grab the keys from my dress pocket and toss them at Dare. “I have a copy. We can go when you’re free, and you can help me with the moving? Gran had a lot of stuff, and I don’t want strangers putting their fingers on any of it.”

“Damn, I knew it. This is just the beginning,” Ash grumbles.

“Count me and Hunter in!” Rami exclaims, reminding me we have an audience.

“Me three.” Opal makes herself available as well. Her long braids look fabulous

falling down her shoulders.

“Can’t!” Uri mutters.

“Nobody asked you,” I counter.

“Good,” he grumbles, his eyes focused on Sari as he taps on his phone. Is he texting that sexy teacher?

“I can rent a truck from the company I usually use for work,” Rague lets me know, earning a kiss on the pec from his husband.

Michael also gives me his availability and Raph’s reluctant one.

Everybody starts moving toward the table as Hunter announces that the feast is ready.

“Good?” Gabe asks me. I turn in his arms, flattening my palms on his chest. He’s wearing a black cashmere sweater, a pair of gray jeans, and leather boots. He’s sexy as hell, but it’s the way he undresses me with his eyes that makes my body shiver under my green, baby doll dress. The short skirt ends at the middle of my thighs, and the top of the bodice is strapless, revealing some skin. Thick wool socks wrap the edge of the brown, knee-high boots Bez loves to fuck me in.

I nod at him.

“I have something to show you.” He grabs his phone, and after tapping on the screen, he turns it toward me.

It’s a picture of his office. I can see the fabulous view from the wide glass wall, the sofa with the cute purple cushions I bought recently, his desk, and another desk. Wait! Another desk?

“Is that my name on the silver plate on that cute desk?” It says “Lori Boone, attorney at law.”

“Yes . On your cute desk. Merry Christmas or...Krampus Day.”

I look at him, too stunned to properly think. “I don’t understand.”

His fingers flex on my hips. “A little premature since you’re still studying, but I don’t see why we have to be in two different offices when you come back to work since mine is big enough for two.”

“We will also have an extra surface to bend you over,” Bez adds.

I bite my inner cheek as I will my tears to stop.

These men, they are all I knew I wanted and everything else I wasn’t aware I needed.

“All those lame excuses you gave me these past few days, they were to keep me out of the office. I thought you didn’t trust my promise about the petty revenges.” I poke his pec.

“I love those revenges,” Bez chuckles.

“I don’t trust that promise. That’s why we need rules,” Gabe declares.

“That hurts right here,” I joke, pointing at my chest.

His answer is a quick, hard kiss.

But my heart truly aches since I fell in love with them.

Perhaps because it grew, two sizes too big.

THE END

Page 8

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 2:18 am

one

Paradox: a situation that seems self-contradictory or absurd

SPENCER

The stench of sweat, dirt, grass, and stale air is only partly covered by the lemony scent of the floor cleaner.

The messy pile of filthy football uniforms scattered around is the main cause of the unbearable odor. Cleaning the Wolves' locker room is one of the most disgusting jobs on campus. But at this time in the late evening, the building is quiet. The silence allows me to listen to the recordings of my lessons undisturbed while I'm mopping.

I don't get paid enough for this crap, though. People can really be repellant with little effort. This level of carelessness says a lot about the jocks that were here an hour ago. Entitled, spoiled, rich jerks who have never worked one day in their lives. Not all of them of course, but most.

Professor Corder's voice is clear through my earphones as he talks on and on about the importance of social stratification and deviance. I move all the damp towels in the basket and then go spray the all-purpose cleaner on the shower floors and walls. I check the time on my phone. It's late. I need to finish up quickly; luckily the gym is already done—another fetid, virus-crawling nightmare that was.

My cell starts ringing, halting the professor's lecture. I smile when Lori's name appears on the screen.

“Nutso,” I greet him.

“You are a mean one, Mister Grinch,” his singsong voice answers back.

“ You are the meanest.”

“Apparently it’s because I’m short. I’m closer to hell.” How he can say that in a serious tone is beyond me.

“You’re ridiculous,” I scoff.

“Hey, attitude!” he scolds me, then in a cheery voice he asks, “What are you up to?”

“Working,” I reply, while gathering the stinky uniforms.

“Take five, mate. I’m sure you’ve earned a break.” Lori is such a roguish dude and a great friend. Thanks to him, my life changed radically. He’d say that it was mostly me who did it, but Gabe, one of Lori’s fiancés, made it actually happen.

“I’m behind already...” I start saying, but he interrupts me.

“Then take two. Get out of that foul-smelling, glow-killing, ghoul-infested room and take a big breath while we talk.”

I sigh. Ghoul-infested? “I guess I can take the uniforms and towels to the laundry room while on the phone.” And then come back to rinse the showers.

“I hope you’re wearing gloves, a mask, and a hazmat suit!”

I chuckle as I push the laundry cart out of the locker room—wishing I really had a biohazard suit. “I’m sporting the rainbow headband you gave me for my birthday.

Does that count?"

"Take a picture! Take a picture! I want to see how it looks."

"You're wasting your two minutes."

He blows a raspberry. "You work too hard, Spencer-Dancer. You need to chill more, and coincidentally, I have the best solution."

"You do?" I ask suspiciously. Lori is a mischievous force of nature. His mind is rarely still, always planning something.

"As a matter of fact, I do. I'll start the social psychology class with you in two days," he screams in my ear.

"A cognate course?"

"Yes!"

Lori goes to the Kent College of Law, while I'm at Safford. I'm studying to become a social worker, Lori to be a lawyer.

"Every Wednesday for three months. Which means that I'll help you find some...fun while I'm on campus grounds."

"Fun," I deadpan. "What makes you think I don't get my fun already?"

"Your overly stiff shoulders and the downturn of your mouth. You need more snogging and shagging and less wanking."

The way he talks is amusing and confusing at times. He's older than me, even though

he looks twenty at best. I don't know his precise age; I don't think anybody does or ever will.

"I get enough...shagging," I grunt, as I tip the cart and let the dirty clothes fall inside the huge baskets in the laundry room.

"Mediocre fucks. You need a proper one. I have an eye for it. I'll help you." He sounds excited about it, the complete opposite of what I'm feeling right now. I know how persistent and relentless he can be when he gets an idea in his head—fuck the consequences.

I do believe him when he says he has an eye for it . Gabe is fucking gorgeous and kind of scary with his unfazed demeanor and cold stare. Pretty sure he's fireworks in bed. The silent ones usually are. Bez on the other hand is crass and brusque. I interacted with him only a couple of times when he possessively warned me off Lori—like I'd ever hit on that bag of crazy.

But I find multiplicity fascinating—two or more personalities sharing one body. Next year I'd like to check the seminar on identity disorders hosted in the psychology department. It sounds captivating to me.

I make my way back to the locker room. "I'll save a spot for you in class on Wednesday. We can compare notes afterward and study together."

"Brilliant. Looking forward to it. You'll need to help me out as well."

"With?" I ask. Need to be cautious with Lori. Never know what he's cooking up.

"A Krampus intervention!" Before I can question him much more, he hurriedly adds, "We'll be revisiting the topic of your hookups then, too. Cheerio."

When he hangs up, yesterday's lesson recording resumes in my ears, and I sigh before pushing through the locker room door. When I reach the benches, I frown at the dirty uniform on the floor. I must have dropped it while I was talking to Lori. I'll bring it to the laundry room on my way out.

I put the cart back near the wall and grab a couple of rags before moving toward the showers. The recording ends, and instead of being greeted by silence, I hear the sound of water falling in the showers. Before I can ask myself if I left it open there's a hard thud, followed by a painful grunt.

Is someone there? Fuuuck! I haven't rinsed the cleaner yet and it sounded like someone slipped on the slick floor.

I drop the rags and quickly round the wall that divides the room from the showers. I have only a second to glance at the naked blond god lying on the floor before my sneakers lose traction and I land face-first on a smooth, warm, wet chest.

His pec is certainly softer than the floor tiles, but it still hurts like a bitch when my nose smashes against it.

He lets out an "oomph" as I utter a "shit!" I fell on a mountain of wet muscles that smell like sweat and soil and cinnamon.

My elbow is stuck under me, spearing his belly, and I'm trying to straighten myself, but my shoes keep sliding on the slippery floor. I manage to move my lower body and straddle his very defined abs, my legs stretched out painfully on both sides of his waist. He's huge. My uniform pants are rapidly getting soaked at the knees.

Panting and aching, I lift my head from his chest and meet the brownest eyes I've ever seen. They're filled with confusion and shock. The latter must be reflected in mine as well.

“Who are you?” he asks in a raspy voice.

“Who are you?” I echo his words.

“I’m a football player, clearly.” He lifts his hands, and I remember once again that I’m on top of him. “Can you move?” It’s more an order than a question.

“I’m fucking trying, man!” I flatten my palms on his golden pecs—nice ink he has there—and slide my torso down, attempting again to push my hips up to no avail. The soles of my shoes can’t stop gliding on the wet tiles. Fucking hell, I might have sprayed an exaggerated amount of cleaner on the floor.

“Stop!” The jock suddenly grabs on my hips, fingers to skin since my wet shirt rose up over my belly. I look into his widening eyes. Something flashes across his face as a pink hue starts forming on his cheeks.

Is he embarrassed or turned on? Maybe a little bit of both. I feel a hard muscle plumping against my ass—a very, very, very promising muscle. I’m dying to get a peek.

I smirk at him and wiggle my butt right over the stiff, big, bare cock under me. His calloused fingers dig into my skin, so deep I’m sure they will leave bruises.

His jaw clenches and his features are twisted in anger—hunger? I can see interest in his eyes, but also wariness. Pity, I’d have enjoyed a hard fuck in the shower. Lori is right in wanting to help me since I’m considering being fucked by a repressed jock. I sigh and shift my body to my left.

He tenses even more under me, lifting his head from the floor for a moment to glare at me.

“Calm down, I’m taking off my shoes.”

“Why?”

Are all jocks really dumb? I don’t have much experience with them. Bullies and psychos, tons. Athletes, none.

“My sneakers slip on the floor; my socks shouldn’t do the same.” I fucking hope. The water still falling from the showerhead a couple of feet from us has turned cold, but the guy under me feels like a furnace. Hot and hard. A tempting mix.

“Are you going to tell me who you are?” he asks, as I finish with the laces on one shoe and turn to the other.

I tap on the word cleaner under the college logo on the right pec of my uniform. His brows tighten, creating a cute frown line between them.

“What?” I question him, narrowing my eyes at him.

“Never met a cleaner that acts like you,” he replies, staring at my rainbow hairband.

Is he for real? I cross my arms and purse my lips before I clip, “And how the hell do I act?”

“Like that,” he has the audacity to reply.

“Now I have confirmation that football players are indeed careless fools, not looking where they are going unless there’s a ball involved,” I retort sassily. Fuck him!

Instead of giving me a vitriolic reply, his lips curl up at the corner. Then he chuckles low and deep as he wipes the water from his face and runs his fingers through his

shoulder-length, light blond hair—his huge bicep bulges under my eager stare.

His big, brown eyes meet mine again as his large, calloused hand finds its place back on my hip, sending a shiver down my spine. The cinnamon smell coming out of him urges my tongue to come out and play. It's a very bad idea to go there. But damn, he's handsome.

"I think it's time to get you back to dry and pristine again." I lift my torso up and push my palms against his fabulous, hard, squeezable pecs again.

He frowns and then winces. I feel his half-hard dick right against my ass, and J-e-s-u-s, he's packed.

"Pristine? Dude, you look like a mess, too." His words register after a second.

I follow the direction of his gaze down to my damp shirt, half-drenched pants and socks getting soaked on the wet floor.

I hesitantly move above him, standing all the way up when I'm sure I won't slip once again. My knee and elbow hurt, but the ache is manageable. Had much worse in the past. I shift away from him as he moves into a sitting position. My eyes fall on his still half-hard dick for less than a blink of an eye before he covers it with his hands and attempts standing up. Is he a gymnophobic? Is that why he's showering alone?

He's taller than me, and definitely bigger. It's like being near a brick wall, if said wall had jumbo, rocky muscles sticking out from...everywhere and sexy, veiny arms.

His hands are unfortunately still on his groin as he takes a step forward.

"Easy." I haven't finished uttering the warning when he slips once again. This time, I'm there to catch him. His massive weight makes it impossible for me to hold him

up, and I fall back against the wall with a thud. My shoulder hits the hard surface as the jock falls on me—him and his entire boulder-heavy body.

I just discovered the literal meaning of being caught between a rock and a hard place.

“Fuck! What the hell is wrong with the floor?” he pants near my ear with his smoky, rough voice, before pulling his head back. His nose is large and a bit crooked, and his chestnut brown eyes have some green in them.

“I sprayed some cleaner since I was cleaning ,” I say brusquely.

He keeps his hips away from mine, but his wet chest is plastered to my torso. I can feel his heartbeat pounding against mine.

He nods and swallows. His bobbing Adam’s apple catches my attention for a second. He’s so close, I can feel his warm breath on my lips. “We aren’t supposed to be in the locker room in the evening. I didn’t realize the time.” Is this supposed to be an apology?

A cold shiver makes me tremble all over. We’re both wet. “Let’s get out of here with all our bones in the right places.”

“Jesus, don’t jinx it, man.” Guess it’s true that jocks are a superstitious bunch. I mime zipping my lips. The silent gesture earns a chuckle from him, rumbly and deep. It fuels jolts of pleasure rocketing along my back.

I start sliding forward, holding him around his biceps and waist while he has one hand on the wall near my head and the other on his junk. We are almost out of the shower when I hear noises, and then four guys appear in front of us. They must be jocks as well, judging by their size and the arrogant way they carry themselves.

“What the fuck, TJ?” the shorter one snarls, his eyes quickly assessing my wet clothes and the jock’s—TJ—lack of them.

“The fuck are you doing?” another one asks with an accusing tone, gazing at my shoes in the middle of the shower floor.

Ah, the homophobic crowd. It always pops up unwelcome and jumps to the wrong conclusions. The spewing, nonsensical part should come up soon.

I snort. “I thought it'd appear obvious, we're getting out of the shower.”

“Get off him!” the short one barks at me.

I hate being right sometimes. Can't he see that I'm holding him up?

“Stop fucking touching him,” I hear another one hiss.

So this is my WTF-is-wrong-with-people moment of the day. I thought I skipped it today.

“Fuck this!” All of a sudden TJ gives my chest one hard thrust, forcefully shoving me back against the wall, and leaves the showers. I'm so taken aback by his strength that I slip and fall on my already aching knee. I grit my teeth against the pain and hear him add in a flat tone, “He's just the cleaner,” as the fucker walks away without a backward glance, followed by the others.

The shorter guy stays behind to give me a disgusted look, to which I respond with an eyebrow lift and a middle finger as I slowly stand again on both feet.

I can clearly see the hatred in his eyes, and I prepare myself for the imminent attack. My hands ball up in fists when someone calls, “Josh! Come on.”

He takes a step back before uttering, “This doesn’t end here.”

“Here’s to hope.” I smirk at him before he turns and leaves.

Assholes.

I turn the water off and grab my soaked shoes before finally leaving the showers. I take off my shirt and squeeze it before yanking it back on—arduously. Wet fabrics don’t slide easily. I have a change in the janitor’s storage closet, so this has to do for now. I take off the socks and put my wet shoes back on. My feet will freeze on the way back to the apartment.

The locker room is empty. The cart with all the cleaners, rags, and sponges is tipped over on the floor. Some bottles are open, and the liquid soaps and cleaners have spilled on the floor.

Fucking macho dicks!

I roll my sleeves and start taking care of the mess as I anticipate how good my knuckles against those fuckers’ faces would feel.

When I finally get back to my apartment an hour later, I get a phone call from Patrick, my boss.

During which I’m informed that I’m fired.

Where I come from, payback is not a bitch, but a promise.

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 2:18 am

two

Odium: general or widespread hatred or disgust incurred by someone

SPENCER

Three days later, it's my second day of my new job at a café on the edge of campus. The owner is Fiona, a nice lady who believes in equality. Therefore, her employees have to take turns in covering every single task around the café. This morning, I'm the busboy.

The pay is slightly better than the cleaning job, plus I can ask for more shifts if I want, two reasons why I don't mind the mundane tasks at all. It allows my brain to work on autopilot, so I can recite the points for my next exam on child development while gathering empty mugs and dirty plates.

It's fucking cold when I check the few tables outside. The campus is slowly clearing. Students are leaving or preparing to go home for the holidays, there are only a few classes left. Soon it will become deserted.

I like Christmas if it means having some peace around here. Lori invited me to join him and Gabe's brothers since I don't have a family to be with this winter break, but I much prefer to spend these holidays as I always have. Alone. I feel a physical and mental lassitude lately, taking a break in solitude is going to replenish my energy.

Three more weeks. Hopefully this job will be less eventful than cleaning locker rooms. Famous last words.

When I walk back out from the kitchen, tray in hand, my eyes are quickly caught by a mountain of a man. His long blond hair is covered by a gray baseball cap, a red down jacket over his wide shoulders, and gunmetal sweats wrap his bubbly ass. He's standing near the counter, trying to grab a straw with his pinky finger while holding a cup of coffee in each hand.

I grit my teeth, crushing the chewing gum inside my mouth. I'd smile at his cute artlessness if he wasn't a colossal asshole.

"Spencer, can you give him a hand?" Clarissa, from the till where she's taking care of other costumers, is pointing at TJ, who's now staring at me. Fuuuck my luck!

Filling my eyes with contempt, I move the green tray under my arm and make my way to the counter, slow and unfazed—outwardly. Because inwardly, I want to slap his privileged, prejudiced, hypocritical dick of a face.

I push a bell decoration out of the way and grab a straw before sliding it oh so very slowly and suggestively into the small space between his palm and the cup he's holding. He sucks in a breath and widens his sweet, deceiving eyes.

thoughts are whirling inside my head. Socking him on the jaw and discovering how big his dick is, equally tempting me at the moment. But I won't do anything to jeopardize my scholarship—not with people present anyway.

Instead, I chew hard on the gum and amble away when I hear, "Thanks...Spencer."

I turn my head and scoff at his fake demureness, before leaving him standing there. He thanks me for a straw but shoved me away for helping him out of the shower. I still feel the ache in my knee as testimony of what a total ass he is.

Not going to lose another second thinking about him.

A few minutes later, I'm clearing a table when I hear an "oops" just before a plate crashes on the floor. When I look up, the angry jocks from the locker room—all wearing the same red and white jacket with the team logo of a wolf—are sitting with a few girls. TJ is surprisingly not among them. They are sneering, sending me glaring looks. One mouths the word "fag" at me.

Charming.

Poorly concealed insults it is, then.

I turn to their table and give them a coy smile. "You keep dropping stuff on the floor. Uhm. Aren't you supposed to hold on...to the ball? That's ominous."

The guy stands up, looking all hostile; the sound of his chair scraping the floor is quite annoying. "What the fuck did you say to me?"

"It's bad luck," I slowly explain while standing my ground. The air has turned electric, filled with tension and imminent frenzy. My hand goes to the tray I left on the table behind me. There's five of them and only one of me, but I can still do some damage. I like my odds.

"Yo! We have class in ten minutes." Out of the corner of my eye I see TJ and three other guys near the door calling their dickish teammates.

The jocks all begrudgingly move away from the table and file toward the door. One of them bumps my shoulder while another stops a foot from me. "We'll see you aga—" He tries to finish his bombastic little threat, but I jerk back.

"Dude, a mint before you start a conversation," I exclaim out loud. A couple of girls giggle, sending me curious glances. Never got a stiffy for a woman. My type is usually silent and packing.

The guy glowers but, being the last one left, doesn't try anything before stomping outside. I shake my head at his lack of braincells.

I walk over to check the mess they left on the floor more closely. Feeling the ache flare inside my knee for a moment, I lean down to massage away the pain.

"Why are you limping?" TJ's sonorous voice makes me jolt with surprise.

"Fuck!" I spin, finding only two feet between us. The air is suddenly filled with the smell of spice and cinnamon. My body turns tense remembering how strong he shoved me.

"Are you hurt?" He is sporting that frown again on his face.

What's with the sudden interest in my well-being? "No."

"Did I do it? In-in the shower?" He lowers his voice on the last part.

I sniff at his remorseful tone. "You should go back to your witty teammates. I have a floor to clean." I dip each word in contentious sarcasm. I don't wait for his retort, though. I head to the back to get a mop and whatever else I need to clean while trying hard to forget a pair of annoyingly worried brown eyes.

TJ

I ache everywhere thanks to the most excruciating football practice in history. Coach Morgan worked us hard and kept me on the field for extra training afterward since my head hadn't been in the game.

It's the holidays. I hate this time of the year. And what I know will come during winter break. The thought of going back home to endless dinners and boring meetings

creates a dreadful sensation in the pit of my stomach. My father likes to parade me around like a peacock in front of his friends and colleagues while my mother pretends everything is swell. It makes me nauseated.

Maybe I should stay on campus . I snort at my idiotic thought. My father will never let me do that.

I place my palm on my hurting abs as memories of Spencer falling on top of me fill my head. He's tall and slim, but I definitely felt lean, warm muscles under those loose clothes. Under my fingers. I can't stop thinking about it, how my body reacted to him. To all that hard weight covering mine.

He went from grumpy to playful in a matter of seconds. His quick comebacks left me speechless. At the café today, I saw his kindness as he helped an old lady out of a chair and paid for a coffee for a student who forgot his wallet. Then he handed me the straw, after the way I treated him. I didn't want to do it. I was just trying to avoid a mess with my teammates. But he doesn't know that.

I could clearly see the disdain in his hazel, almost yellow orbs this morning. It didn't stop me from studying the little freckles peppering his nose and part of his cheeks, the wavy dark red hair curling on his nape, and the low-waist jeans hanging dangerously on his narrow hips.

He has a peculiar way of talking too. He is clearly from Chicago or nearby—his accent is unmistakable—but he uses fancy words I sometimes don't know the meaning of.

The eye tattoo on the back of his hand is pretty dope. Makes me wonder if he has any others.

I need to stop this. He clearly hates me.

I look around the quad. There's no one out at this time of the evening. It's lightly snowing, but I don't feel the cold after the training I had. My jacket is open at the front, hair damp from the shower, and my gloves are inside my backpack with my lucky gray cap.

I keep walking for a few minutes. I have my jeep, but I prefer to move on foot when I can; it helps me clear my mind. The café where Spencer works is closed, the yellow Fiona's sign off. But I hear voices coming from the alley on the side.

A bitter laugh reaches my ears followed by a whimper and an oomph. Hit by a sense of dread, I jog toward the noises and stop dead at the sight of four of my teammates surrounding Spencer. are on the ground, Greg in a fetal position holding his groin and Stan his leg. Spencer has blood near his mouth, and his shirt looks wrinkled at the collar under his open jacket. He's standing with his back to the wall and his fists high. His eyes are cold and filled with anger.

Damn, he looks tough as nails and sexy.

"Stay out of our locker room and away from us, you piece of disgusting shit!" Josh is threatening him, getting closer, with Nolan doing the same on the other side.

"I got the message when you jumped me, four against one." Spencer spits near Josh's sneakers, smiling like a loon. "By the way, you couldn't be more clichéd and your point more trite."

"What the fuck is going on?" My body finally decides to work again.

"Clearing the air, TJ," Nolan answers.

"What's that supposed to mean?" I snap at him. My teammates should be my family, but some of them, just like my biological ones, are pricks.

“He started it by disrespecting the locker room,” Josh barks.

That’s bullshit! If they caught me in the shower with a girl, they’d have given me a pat on the shoulder and left us alone. But it was a guy, and since they are too afraid to come at me—I’m built like a tank and the son of Taylor Moore—they went for Spencer.

“I didn’t start it. But I’m happy to show you how I finish homophobic motherfuckers like you.” Spencer sounds almost excited at the prospect. “A hint? Look at your friends moaning on the ground.”

Josh and Nolan are about to attack him when a tall wave of protectiveness washes over me, and I growl, “Get the fuck away from him!” This is not right. Spencer has only helped me.

“You’re defending...him?” Nolan spits out.

I clench my fists. We are supposed to always have each other’s backs, something they didn’t do during practice today, tackling me to the ground more times than I can count—their way of letting me know what they thought about the shower incident.

We have out-and-proud players on the team, and apart from some unhappy faces, there’s no problem usually. I’m still figuring things out. I’ve only ever been with girls, but what happened with Spencer tells me another story. It’s fucking private, anyway, and no one’s business but mine.

“After the way you acted on the field today, you guys expect me to defend you ?” I growl.

“Don’t know what you’re talking about.” Josh tries to look ignorant.

I scoff at that. “If Coach Morgan gets a whiff of this, you’ll all be benched. Is that what you want? It’s five months to the draft.”

Nolan grits his teeth and shakes his head, taking a couple of steps back. Josh does the same, but then he suddenly utters, “Fuck it!” and punches Spencer in the face.

I drop my backpack and grab Nolan’s arms, pulling him back so that he won’t go and help Josh. I’m much bigger than him, so it’s no hardship to hold him.

I turn my head toward Spencer in time to see him elbowing Josh in the face, then kneeing him in the gut, and, finally, backhanding him across the jaw so hard he drops to the ground. He wipes away the blood from the corner of his lips and crouches down near a whimpering Josh, his booted foot moves on top of his hand.

“No!” Josh cries out when Spencer’s sole presses harder. Nolan jerks his body, trying to make me release him, but I tighten my hold. I’ll stop Spencer myself if he overdoes it.

“I’m no snitch,” Spencer says in a colloquial tone, checking the chipped black nail polish on his nails. “But since I’m dealing with cowards and snakes, look up and smile at the security camera.”

He waves at the one mounted over the café’s back door. Fuck, they are big ass idiots!

Nolan groans incredulously in front of me. “You said this was the best place to rough him up, Josh!”

Josh replies with a groan filled with anger and pain.

“Try pinning anything on me, and I’ll show everybody what disgusting pieces of shit you jocks are, comprende ?” Spencer presses more weight on Josh’s hand, making

him scream a loud “yes.” He then stands up and takes a step back. Looking at Nolan and the other two guys on the ground, he adds, “Come at me again, and I’ll end your football careers.”

I get only a scathing glance before Spencer grabs his messenger bag from the ground and walks away without looking back.

I let go of a cussing Nolan, and after picking up my backpack, I jog after Spencer.

“That was...” I blow out a breath. “Are you okay?” I ask him.

“Fuck off,” he replies. He’s still limping slightly. I see him bend down to retrieve his bike, and I move closer, intent on helping him. He stops me.

“Stay back!” he snarls. His hazel eyes are sparkling with fury, body trembling with it.

I raise my palms up in a yielding move. He stares, nostrils flaring, body alert. My dick twitches at how hot he looks all disheveled and badass while my mind is fucking enraged about what happened.

This is partly my fucking fault. I feel responsible. I should have been the one to clear the air with those four fuckers—even though it would have probably made it worse. But I saw the way they were glaring at him this morning, and I didn’t do anything, too lost in my little mental, bi freak-out.

He lifts the broken bike, cursing at it. Both tires are slashed and the back wheel is bent. Did Josh and the others do this? I want to ask if he knows, but it doesn’t look like he’ll give me an answer.

After looking at the damage for a bit longer, Spencer hoists the bicycle onto his shoulder and starts walking. After witnessing his fighting skills, I know he has trained

muscles under the purple tie-dye t-shirt and black jacket, but his limp has worsened.

“I can carry the bike,” I tell him.

He keeps walking ahead of me like he didn’t hear me, which is impossible. His loose black jeans have fallen lower, putting on display the upper curve of his round ass and the waistband of a pair of black boxer briefs.

“Why are you following me?” he asks. “You want me to beat you as well?”

“I’m sorry, okay? Didn’t know their intentions.” I jog ahead of him and spin, walking backward, facing him.

He studies my face and then makes an incredulous sniff. “You’re being glib! Are you telling me that I didn’t lose my job because of you?”

He lost his job? That’s why he didn’t show up the last few nights. Not that I waited for him by prolonging my training in the gym.

He pushes me unceremoniously to the side and lowers the bicycle to place it under a bike shelter. Then he moves toward the two-story building.

I expected a cheap student accommodation, instead, Spencer is climbing the stairs of a nice four-apartment complex. I follow him. He stops on the second-floor landing, and while he takes out the keys, he says without turning my way, “You and your jock friends are pathetic. You know that, right?”

“I’m not like them,” I automatically retort, even though I know there’s truth in his words. I am pathetic.

“Don’t worry, getting hard when brushing against a hot body means fuck all.” He

pats my shoulder with mockery as he opens the door.

His bold if patronizing statement takes me off guard, and I start stuttering like an idiot. “I... It...didn’t...”

“Riiight, denial from a macho guy. So cliché. Go back to your bunnies, groupies, or whatever the fuck you call them, jock. Good luck.” He uses the word jock like a curse.

I open my mouth, hoping to give him a comprehensible reply, but he has already closed the door on my face.

three

Incendiary: extremely hot or capable of causing a fire

TJ

The next day, I'm leaving Markson Hall after a boring-as-fuck econ prime class when a small guy with curly hair and high boots flanks me.

"Hey, football star," he greets me with a cheery voice. He's wearing a black kilt skirt with a red sweater under a long coat. Brown curls escape from his pink knit cap, and he's holding an expensive bag. He screams money and confidence.

"Me?" I ask, stopping at the bottom of the stairs.

"Ah, apparently ignorance is bliss." Did he just insult me with a sweet smile? His upturned nose is red from the cold, and his pink-lipsticked mouth has a perfect cupid shape. Objectively beautiful, but I prefer the naturally red, full lower-lipped mouth of a certain someone with a taste for baggy clothes and fancy words. Fuck!

"I'm Lori, a friend of Spencer's."

I blink at him, taken aback by his words. "TJ," I utter. Then an anxious feeling makes me hold my breath. "Is he okay?"

He frowns. "Do you know what happens when some wankers decide to hurt a friend of mine? I don't only get even, I like to pile up on it."

Fuck, I get that. I'm still fucking angry at Josh and the others—and myself. “Look, it was my fault if my teammates assaulted Spencer. I mean, I didn't tell them to do it, but I should have handled it differently. I had no idea they'd attack him. But they already got what they deserved. From Spencer.” And me. I told them I got the security camera video on iCloud, ready to be sent to Coach Morgan and the dean. Assault is a serious fucking offense. I don't really have that video, but I know how to deal with this kind of people since unfortunately I am one of them.

“And you? Did you get what you deserve?” Lori narrows his makeup-defined brown eyes at me.

I drop my backpack on the floor and turn my cap backward. “Go ahead,” I tell him, spreading my arms wide. “I won't fight back.”

“Blimey! What's the bloody fun in that, Thor?” he grumbles and childishly stomps his foot on the ground. He crosses his arms in front of his narrow chest and then taps a gold-nailed finger on his chin, pondering.

“Thor?”

“You have brown eyes, but the rest?” He waves in my general direction. “You could be his twin. Hammer included.” He points at my groin with a knowing expression.

Did he just allude to the size of my dick?

“Is the air fresher up there?” He then asks, “How tall are you? Six feet and a mountain and half of inches?”

I drop my arms at my sides. “Habitual mockery is a strong indicator of depression; did you know that?” I ask him.

“No, but thank you for clarifying that, mate,” he replies distractedly. “I guess there’s still hope for you.”

“I get the sense that thinly veiled insults are your daily bread.”

“You’re wrong on one account, there’s no veil there.” He winks.

“I gotta go, are we done here?” I ask, already picking up my backpack.

“Where are we going?” He skips a couple of times, following me.

We? “I’m going to pick up a bicycle.”

He smirks at me. “And is that bicycle by any chance going to be gifted to a sexy redheaded bloke with a quarter-bouncing arse?”

Spencer’s round butt pops into my head, I feel my cheeks getting warm as my step falters for a moment.

He chuckles and snorts. “You’ll be all over him like dressing on a salad.”

“I... What does that mean?” I stop to look down at him.

“It means you want to shag that meaty tushy.” He talks...weird.

“So you say.” I resume walking.

“I’ve got a twenty that says the same thing.”

I shake my head, trying hard to push the image of Spencer’s ass away.

“Spence and TJ kissing in a tree. K-I-S-S-I?—”

I stop his singing. “You’re on, fifty bucks.” Spencer hates me, and I’m a mess. Nothing will ever happen between us. I’m just trying to fix a wrong.

“Okay, brown-eyed Thor. But if you have ill-willed intentions, I’m warning you to do like a rock and roll right now.” Ill-willed? “Because if you hurt him in any way, I’ll nail your big knob to the scoreboard. Do you get me, football guy?”

He sounds serious. “Football guy?”

“Don’t know the technical terms. It doesn’t fucking matter.”

“You’re like a feral Frodo,” I tell him as I reach my jeep.

“Who?” He leans against the driver’s door, blocking it.

“The hobbit, from the Lord of the Ring s.”

“I’m used to worse names.” It’s not hard to believe him.

He suddenly erases the distance between us and proceeds to slap me hard on the cheek.

“We have eyes on you, Thor. Behave! And remember, pecker-nail-scoreboard.” He then growls in my face, pushing himself onto his tiptoes. He only reaches my shoulder and I still loom over him which kind of nullifies the...warning.

He sashays away from me as I massage my aching cheek. He surely knows how to land a hard slap. That doesn’t stops my eyes from falling appreciatively on his butt. My dick doesn’t seem to be interested, though. An image of another plump, round ass

fills my head again, and the half chub inside my pants lets me know how much my body is on board with the idea of fooling around with a tall, no-fucks-given badass named Spencer.

I don't know why I stuttered yesterday when he pointed out I got hard for him. It was self-preservation I guess; my brain tried to fight the automatic denial, and all I got out were incomprehensible words. I've never talked about my appreciation for a man's bod before.

But the truth is that I...I'm bi. I've always tended more toward girls, and while still glancing at and lingering on a nice male figure, I never felt real attraction toward a guy.

Until...him. There's something about him.

Those hard amber eyes in contrast with his kind acts and his unpredictable personality combative one moment, playful the next urge me to discover more.

That's one of the reasons why I'm knocking at his apartment door an hour later. He opens after a long moment with only a towel around his waist and another in his hand. My lips part in surprise as my eyes eagerly run down his long and very defined torso covered in tattoos.

He runs his inked hand through his wet hair, leaving it a wild tangle of waves, as drops of water start rolling down his lightly freckled skin, one catching on his hard pale pink nipple.

I swallow hard, unable to stop my eyes from ogling and my dick from lurching inside my jeans. He must have just gotten out of the shower. The smell of jasmine envelops me for a moment, and I take a big breath, hoping it will stay with me a little longer.

He makes a clicking sound with his tongue, and I jerk my gaze to his unhappy face. He has a bruise under his eye and another on his jaw. The sight pours cold water on my libido.

“Here for round two?” he asks, bringing the towel to his head to rub it over the wet locks. The eye tattoo on his hand looks lifelike, staring at me too deeply.

“I...” I clear my voice and repeat, “I brought you a new bike.” I open my palm and show him the lock keys. He doesn’t say anything nor attempt to take them from my hand.

He pushes me to the side and walks barefoot to the landing, leaning over the railing to look down at the parking lot.

“You can’t see it well. It’s under the bike shelter. It’s the yellow one,” I say awkwardly.

“Why?” he asks, turning toward me.

“It’s from me and the guys. They won’t give you any more trouble,” I assure him. When he remains silent I add, “Hard to believe, but in the shower, when I pushed you, I was actually trying to protect you.”

He scoffs scornfully at that.

“I thought that acting like nothing happened in front of those idiots was the right choice, that not giving them an explanation would make them let go of the whole thing. But I was wrong.” I quickly say, “And also I was protecting myself. I’m still trying to understand a few things about myself. One in particular.” I tuck my lips inside my mouth, unable to say more than that; my tongue feels like one of those heavy weights I lift in the gym.

The heavy silence that falls between us is broken after a few, interminable seconds by his sigh. He walks back inside his apartment without saying a word but leaves the door open. I take it as an invitation and step inside, closing it behind me. After dropping the bicycle lock's keys on the small table on the right I make my way in.

“Heyyyy, wanker! I don't like to be kept waiting.” That's his feral friend's voice—Lori—coming from the phone on the flamingo pink sofa's armrest.

“Shut your trap,” Spencer replies, dropping himself on the small, comfortable-looking sofa. He tosses the damp towel on a chair and pushes his hair back, revealing another tattoo under his arm. Fuck, he looks good. All that ink gives him a bad boy charm. I didn't think I was into that, but I also never thought I was actually into men.

“So rude!” I hear Lori scolding him. “Are you gonna do it? If you decide to indulge me, I'll stop. It's a promise.”

I studiously avert my eyes from Spencer to stop the ogling and look around instead. The place is nice. The small kitchen to the right looks untouched. The airy living room I'm standing in has only the essentials: a big TV, a desk with a laptop and notebooks on top, shelves filled with books, and a door that must lead to the bedroom.

Spencer huffs with what sounds like exasperation. “It's always a negotiation with you. I'd like to say I'm gonna hold you to that promise, but nobody can hold you to?—”

Lori cuts him off. “Gabe and Bez did just that yesterday when they bent me over the kitchen counter and poun?—”

Two guys? Wow, that sounds...hot.

“Hanging up now,” Spencer lets him know.

“Tomorrowsix o’clock. Have fun, you slut!” Lori quickly says, all in one breath before Spencer ends the call.

I’m still standing in the living room, but now, he’s the one staring at me. From my old gray baseball cap to the tips of my sneakers. I usually don’t mind. I have a great body, and enough girls hit on me to make me feel confident about myself. But under his amber eyes, I feel self-conscious and second-guessing.

“Nice place. Comfortable.” I was going for a light tone, but my voice sounds stilted and awkward.

“Better than your opulent frat house, you mean?” He raises a challenging dark red brow at me. How does he know I’m part of a fraternity? Did he ask around about me? The thought pleases me more than it should.

“Definitely. It’s peaceful here.” I nod. And I’m not lying. I love my bros, but I’d like to have more fucking privacy. Since I’m a frat legacy, though, I need to stay put.

“Beer?” He stands and walks toward the small white fridge in the kitchen.

“Uhm, no thanks.” Why am I so tense? I follow and lean my hip against the small counter.

I suddenly feel the need to tell him, “Sorry about your job. I talked to your ex-boss, but he already hired someone else.”

He gives me that scrutinizing, sober stare before going back to sit on the sofa. He takes a long sip from his can, and I find myself hypnotized by his Adam’s apple bobbing with every swallow. My head goes straight to the gutter in half a second, and

I have to force my eyes away from him again. They fall on the pile of sociology books on the desk.

“You following Professor Corder’s class?” He nods in reply. “He’s a bore,” I state, remembering his endless lessons as he spoke in that monotone, sleep-inducing voice.

He shrugs.

“Wanna become a sociologist? Or a psychologist?”

“Nope.”

He’s a damn hard nut to crack. And for some inexplicable reason, I want to crack him open, even though the odds for a positive outcome are not on my side. “Nice tattoos.” I wave my hand toward his torso.

He sighs. “Are you always so loquacious?”

“Do you always use fancy words?” I counter.

“It’s a hobby of mine.”

My lips kick up because it’s not at all something I’d attribute to him. But I know literally nothing about the guy, so I guess every new little thing would be a surprise.

Those deep, inscrutable eyes continue studying me with grim insistence. I feel like I’m under a microscope, which makes me both uncomfortable and excited.

He looks away before turning his eyes back to mine. I hear the click of his tongue, then he points at the tattoo on his hand. “The evil eye wards off wicked intentions and gives personal enlightenment. It keeps me on the right path.” He takes another sip

from his can. “What does yours mean?”

“When did you see mine? Oh, right.” The shower.

“Yeah. Oh,” he repeats with a hint of mockery.

I ignore it as I take off my jacket and make my way toward him. “The sleeping bear was the mascot of my high school football team. It’s where I fell in love with the sport, and every time I see it, I can remember an echo of that feeling. The weight of the ball in my hand, the smell of freshly cut grass, the adrenaline running in my veins.” I stop near the sofa and raise my shirt to give him a good look at it and at the same time show off my incredible abs. Chicks love them, and it seems Spencer is no exception. His eyes slide down my torso with interest, stopping on the crotch of my pants.

It sends a prickly sensation straight to my balls while my dick gives a twitch.

“Do you like any sports?” I ask him, letting the shirt fall down and then dropping next to him. The sofa is small, there’s only a couple of feet between us, and I’m assaulted by that jasmine scent again.

Instead of giving me an answer, he abruptly asks, “Why are you here?”

My wooden voice doesn’t help my attempt at sounding convincing. “Uhm, the bike.”

“Why are you still here, TJ?” he insists.

My lips part, but nothing comes out. His head tilts slightly to the left as his gaze turns intense once again. He lowers it on my lips and holds it there. Then he spreads his legs, letting the towel part slightly, although without revealing more skin.

“Tell me, why are you really here,” he perseveres, using a softer but commanding tone. My eyes focus on his fingers brushing the eagle tattoo on his pec, then going around one nipple and trailing down the intricate orange and black ink to his flat belly. My cock grows inside my jeans until it turns painful.

“Mm, if you have nothing to say, maybe you should go.” His hand drops flat on his leg. He wants me to confess my reason for coming here. Which was the bike, wasn’t it? An innocent gesture. Totally innocuous, right? I’m not so sure anymore. Because it morphed into something completely different—way far from innocent and innocuous.

I take a deep breath. “I-I need to know.”

“Need to know,” he echoes.

“If...” I stop because the towel starts tenting, and fuck, is that the pink head of his cock? Is he getting hard? For me?

“If the scintilla is real?” he utters in a sultry tone. His hand lifts once again, and the middle finger stops on the edge of the towel around his waist, drawing circles there, making me burn and sweat. Body tingling. Balls filling. I want to see him so fucking much.

Now is my turn to repeat, “Scintilla?”

“The faint hint of attraction you feel toward someone, a guy you just met.”

Fuck, but he’s right. I open and close my mouth like a damn fish, fidgeting on the sofa as I try to give my cock some relief.

He hums. “You are in need of a dude-on-dude exploration session. That’s the reason

why you're here."

My eyes find his for a moment, seeing lust starting to darken them. I nod vehemently, uncaring of the consequences while so damn captivated by the sight of the leaking tip peeking through the white towel. Spencer tugs on it, and the fabric falls open on each side of his hips. His long, hard, slightly left-curving cock springs out in all its glory. And a shiver rushes down my body, ending in my boiling balls.

It's not the first dick I've seen—I take daily showers with my teammates. But it's the first one I want to touch, explore, maybe even taste. Spencer slides his hand between his legs to cup his balls, and pulls on them, letting out a rumble growl that makes my cock weep.

"Ever been with a guy?" he asks.

"No," I choke out, following the massage he's giving to his nut sack. My hands flex and ball up repeatedly.

"But you've had sex before, right?" He finishes his beer, crushes the can, and tosses it on the floor. Now that his other hand is free, he uses it to pinch his nipple.

"Not a virgin," I finally reply. I've even done some butt stuff, some experimenting with my fingers.

He releases his balls and wraps his hand around his uncut dick, giving it a slow, hard pump, pushing the foreskin further down. I almost jump off the couch. I've never felt this fucking horny in my entire life. He's a fucking vision, legs wide open, eyes getting lost to the pleasure as he jerks himself off with purpose now.

"Take your cock out and beat it off," he tells me without stopping his hand from going up and down. "I won't touch you unless you ask." I know he won't, I trust him

for some weird reason.

I pull on my jeans button and push down my boxer briefs, releasing my aching, dripping shaft.

“Fuuuuck! It’s massive.” He licks his mouth, and all I can think about is feeding him my nine inches, stuffing his lips with my fat cock until they stretch wide. He sinks his teeth into that larger lower lip, and holy shit, I want to suck on it.

His cockhead looks red now, so much pre-cum rolls down his shaft, making it easy for his hand to slide. He grunts sexily as his hips start to buck.

“See something you like?” he whispers darkly, letting out a small chuckle. His fingers pull on his nipple again, turning it pointy. I want to touch him so bad.

Instead, I spit on my palm and curl my fingers around my dick, and with my eyes on his pumping hand, I imitate his movements.

I can’t believe I’m getting off in front of another guy. But it’s really happening, and it’s by far the hottest thing that’s ever happened to me.

After a few seconds, he releases his length and extends his hand toward me. “Spit.” I follow his order without a second thought, or a first.

He gives me a smug smirk before opening his mouth and letting more saliva slowly fall on his dick. Holy shit. He moves his extended hand back to his cock, closing his eyes and opening his mouth as his fingers—slick with my spit—curl around it.

“Fuck, yes,” he groans, upping the tempo. Jesus Christ, he likes it dirty. I can come just from the thought of that.

I spread my legs wider until my knee touches his. It's a small connection, but it sets my blood on fire. And his heated eyes tell me he likes it too.

Obscene, squelching sounds fill the room, and I fucking love it. All of it. So much that I keep grunting and groaning. So many images shuffle in front of my eyes: my dick in his mouth, on his tongue, my cum shooting on his face, chest, inside his throat, choking him as he begs for more.

God, I'm dying to come, but I want Spencer to do it first, want to see him losing control, shattering in front of me. I don't have to wait long.

"Faster," he moans. "Fuck your hand faster like you'd fuck my ass."

Jesus. Christ. I want that. I so fucking want that.

He focuses his blown pupils right on my face and growls, "TJ." My name is on his lips before his body tenses, his back arches, and he lets out the sexiest moan as his dick starts to shoot on his chest. He keeps jerking and grunting until the last rope comes out. Cum rolls down to his abs, making his torso slick and shiny. He rubs his index finger in it, scooping some up and then sucks on it, making a pornographic sound I'll forever replay inside my head when I beat one off.

His cheeks hollow around his finger as he drives it in and out his mouth, and I almost come right then and there.

He slides his finger out and says, "I can clearly see what you want in your eyes. Are you too scared to ask for it?"

The hand on my dick halts, and I grit my teeth at the thought of what I could get from him.

His hand keeps spreading jizz over his chest as he stares at me. Waiting. But my tongue won't work. My head is fuzzy, body stiff. I feel like a caveman ready to pounce.

He smirks again, eyes glazed with lust. "I'll lie down, and if you want what I think you want—straddling my face while my mouth sucks you dry—just take it."

God have mercy on me. The hand holding my dick is trembling now. My whole fucking body is. I can barely control myself. And all because of this guy.

He shifts on the sofa, placing his head on the armrest, belly up, soft cock lying on his thigh, knees bent, hands at his sides. He's a wet, hot sex dream, and I don't want to waste even a second. I yank my sneakers, jeans, and boxer briefs off and straddle his shoulders—cautiously adjusting a bit, not wanting to hurt him with my big bulk.

My cock bumps against his lips, and he licks the tip with his wet tongue, making me grunt. It's so fucking carnal seeing him like this, under me, at my mercy. The smug smirk on his beautiful face wakes up a wicked, lewd part of me that urges me to take and wrack him.

"Fuck my face, TJ," he says darkly, opening his mouth wide.

Guided by immeasurable lust, I spread my legs wider, grab his damp hair, and feed him my whole dick, slowly but forcefully. When the tip hits the back of his throat, I stop and groan like a horny animal. Hot, wet, tight, squeezing paradise. No gag reflex.

Only one girl was ever able to take my entire size, but I had to rein my libido with her. I'm big and strong, could easily hurt her. That's why even though engulfed in breathtaking pleasure, as soon as I see tears forming in Spencer's eyes, I start pulling back. His hands fly upward and grab my ass, holding me there, pushing me even

deeper.

“Holy shit!” I growl, tightening my grip on his hair. All I can think about is fucking his strangling throat fast and rough until I nut inside it.

He moans and hollows his cheeks, making me see stars. I drive out and then all the way back in—slowly. Fucking hell, I don’t want to leave this slutty mouth ever again. So good. So. Good.

“You can take it rough. Fuck, tell me you can take it,” I almost beg him.

He nods and tightens his throat around my cock again, sucking pre-cum out of my damn slit. It makes me feral. Fuck control. I start a merciless tempo, stretching his lips to the maximum as I fuck his eager mouth. I savor every gurgling sound, tear, and trail of saliva. My balls hit his chin with every thrust of my hips, and I feel so fucking high.

His tongue keeps working the underside of my dick while his fingers slide between my butt cheeks and find my puckered hole, brushing over it. Nobody has ever touched me there. Only me. And damn, it feels exhilarating. His soft finger on my sensitive hole makes me ram my cock even harder inside his throat.

I don’t need to rein in my strength with him, because he can fucking take it. More, he wants it. This is the best fucking blowjob of my life. When the tip of his finger breaches inside, it’s like a bomb goes off. I push all the way in and come like a freight train.

“Swallow!” I hiss completely lost in the ecstasy, as I spurt deep down his throat. And Spencer drinks it all, moaning his enjoyment, watery eyes filled with pleasure.

Damn, I can’t believe how amazing face fucking a guy is. I never completely let lust

possess me before. It's freeing, intoxicating. So much that I'm looking forward to doing it again.

I pull slowly out, still trembling, and I slide down his body until we are face-to-face. I remember to use my arms to hold myself up, not wanting to crush him under me.

"You...okay?" I pant.

"Fuck, yeah," he rasps with a small smile. I look into his sparkling amber eyes, and I just can't stop myself. I need to taste him.

My lips crush his, and my tongue invades his mouth. He freezes for a second but then melts under me. His lips are just as soft as a girl's, but the hand gripping the back of my hair is bigger and stronger, adjusting my head to the left. I can feel his light stubble scratching my chin, and the way he kisses me back is commanding and imposing. It makes me fucking moan for him. All of the new sensations do. I once again let go and let him lead; he bites my lip and then licks it better before whispering, "Like the taste of our cum on my tongue?"

I feel my sedated dick twitch, telling me he could go for round two.

I smile. Sinking my tongue inside his mouth for a long, slow lick is my reply. We taste so fucking good, I never want to stop. The kiss grows all-consuming and I shudder against him, dick twitching next to his flaccid one.

My phone starts ringing inside my pants, and I reluctantly turn my head toward the discarded garment on floor.

"Answer it. I need to drink some water," Spencer says, tapping my thigh. His gruff voice makes me feel quite proud of myself, urging me to sink my cock inside his throat again.

We untangle ourselves, and I unabashedly ogle his amazing bare ass wandering toward the kitchen. What would it feel like to sink inside that instead? It's too soon. Way too soon.

When I finally grab my cell, it has stopped ringing, but my father's name on the screen sends an arrow of poisonous dread straight into my chest. It spreads quickly, filling my lungs, making it hard to breathe.

I grab my clothes from the floor and yank them back on, leaving the button of the jeans open as I pull on my sneakers.

"Gotta go," I mutter, as I make my way to the door without looking at him.

"Right." I hear his hesitant reply as I close the front door.

I don't stop. I can't. Instead I run down the stairs and quickly unlock my car, scrambling into the driver's seat. I take off my shirt and hoodie, hoping it will help me breathe easier. I place my hand on my running heart and close my eyes, trying to will my pulse to slow down. I hit my head on the headrest one, two, three times before letting out a scream filled with hopelessness.

The beep coming from my phone makes my teeth grind. I grab it and read the text.

Father:

Coach Morgan told me you could be eligible to play in the NFL. That won't be happening. You already have a job waiting for you, Taylor.

Father:

Don't disappoint me.

How did I go from experiencing one of the most defining events of my life to hyperventilating, pathetically alone in my car?

I fucking hate myself.

four

Dulcet: pleasing and soothing in nature

SPENCER

It's my till shift today. Fiona added so many Christmas decorations that I feel like the café's windows and walls will soon implode. Everywhere I turn is green and red. Maybe I should buy a small tree for my apartment. As soon as the thought crosses my mind, I push it away with a huff. Christmas is all about family and sharing, two things I've never had.

The day is slow. More and more students are leaving for winter break, and so, I have more time to clean the shelves and wash the espresso machine's portafilters. I unfortunately also have a front-row seat to the football table and TJ. He hasn't looked at me once since he took a step inside the café. He went straight to sit at a table while one of his pals made the order.

Being ignored stings, but with closeted jerks, it is pretty much the same old story. I didn't expect much if anything, but fuck, it had been hot. I don't usually let hookups get a go at my face unless I'm truly turned on. Looking at him let go like that, all wild and predatory, did it for me. And that fucking massive cock. My ass clenches at the thought of being filled with that thing. I guess it will remain that, a mental image.

At least his homophobic teammates are keeping their heads down. I know that fucking them up a little didn't do the trick. Rich kids are arrogant and feel entitled. I need to stay alert for their next move.

I grab my bottle of Seven Up and refresh my throat. It still aches from the hottest face-fuck of my life. Pity it'll remain a solitary one.

Two posh girls come in and order two skinny lattes. While I grab their change, I hear one excitedly saying, "Did you hear about TJ? The NFL is sniffing around him. Can you imagine? I could say I fucked an NFL star."

Me and you both. Even though, technically, he fucked my mouth and then just left without a second look. I'm not a snuggle bunny, I'm usually a wham-bam-thank-you-sir kind of a guy, but I never treat my hookups like they are invisible after the deed is done.

I knew he was bad news from the first moment I saw him—gloriously naked on the shower floor like a fucking demigod. It's all those fucking brown puppy eyes' fault, and the taste of cinnamon on his lips. I just have to file it in my mind as a hot encounter and move on with my life.

My eyes fall on the yellow bike parked outside. The one TJ bought for me as an apology—pretty sure he forced the rest of the dicks to pay for it. It's one of the latest, most expensive models, lightweight carbon construction, aerodynamic design, EPS electronic groups, leather saddle, and more. A decent person would give it back, but I've never pretended to be anything but me. And after what his teammates did to me, I fucking deserve it.

The girls grab their lattes and then move to the football table, stopping right near TJ. He smiles at them, and when I see one sit on his lap, I turn my eyes toward the door.

He's going to be an NFL star, which I know is a big fucking deal, even though I don't care about football. One quick hookup is all we could ever have, and I'm fine with it.

My phone vibrates inside my pocket. No new customers come in, so I slide it out of

my pants and tap on the new text.

Lori:

Tonight, hide all your crazy, act like the lady you are not...but show the merchandise like the slut you are. Have fuuuuuuuun.

Fuck! I forgot about the hookup Lori arranged for me. I have an appointment to get some ink done tonight. I'll meet Lori's guy at six, so I have three hours before the tattoo. That should be enough.

I don't really feel like going out to a club, but maybe it's exactly what I need. I've been studying and working too hard—not including yesterday's hot occurrence.

I can't stop myself from glancing at TJ again. The girl is still on his lap, but his dark brown eyes are locked on me.

Ralph is talking my ears off as we round my building. It's cold as fuck, so I hurry my steps toward the stairs. He insisted on taking me to my apartment, probably hoping for a make-out session, which I'm not so eager to give him. He's cute and funny and has a tongue piercing I wouldn't mind feeling around my cock. Maybe I should rethink this. Lori hooked me up with him, which means that this guy is great if not phenomenal in bed.

I frown when I see a black jeep that looks just like TJ's parked in front of my complex. There's someone inside, but the tinted window hides their face. I decide to ignore it, just like TJ did with me this morning. I keep smiling at Ralph as we climb the flight of stairs.

When I reach my door, I hear footsteps coming up. Overwhelmed by a sudden urge, I turn around, and grabbing the guy's jacket, I pull him toward me until my lips lower

on his. He tastes like the cranberry juice and vodka cocktail he drank at the club. His tongue is hot against mine when he pushes it inside my mouth, while the piercing feels cold but nice. I feel his small hand grabbing my ass while he moans too loudly.

This feels wrong , I think just before pulling my head away. I catch someone in the corner of my eye, and when I turn my head, I see TJ. Gray cap, pink cheeks, hands balled up at his sides, and a grave expression on his face.

“What are you doing here?” I ask him, pushing Ralph gently off me. A sense of regret squeezes my throat for a moment.

He doesn’t answer. His gaze has moved to Ralph, all intense and aloof.

“I think this is my cue to go. You have my number,” Ralph tells me with a rasp in his voice before leaving, being very careful not to walk too close to the stiff giant standing on the landing.

“Why are you here again?” I ask TJ, grabbing my phone to check the time. I have thirty minutes to get to the tattoo parlor.

“Who was that?” His growly voice sounds pleasingly smooth to my ears, mellifluous—love that word. Still, it’s none of his business who I was with.

“He was inconsequential.” I sound a little stilted now.

“Can we talk?”

“I have somewhere to be.” I unlock my apartment door just to grab my messenger bag from the entrance and then lock it again. When I turn, he’s still here.

“I’m sorry about last night. I... What we did got me by surprise.” His puppy eyes are

back, but the tension in his body is still evident.

I believe what he said. Most guys freak out after their first man-to-man experience. But he seemed fine all smiley and kissy until he checked his phone.

“Your apologies are starting to be a frequent recurrence,” I state with a flat tone. Not caring about his excuses, I add, “We’re cool. It was fun. It’s done.”

“I’d like to do that again, if you want,” he has the gall to say.

“Are you going to ignore me every time we meet outside my apartment? Clandestine relationships are not my style. Well, relationships in general. ”

“I wasn’t ignoring you. It was the opposite.” He blushes so fucking adorably. He’s big and handsome, showing embarrassment looks odd on him. So damn cute.

I frown. “So, you acknowledged me by not talking to me?”

“No. I didn’t know how... I... Fuck! I didn’t know if you wanted me to approach you.”

“Approach me?”

“After what my teammates did to you—which I assure you they’ll never do again—and the way I left, I thought you had enough of stupid...jocks.” He shrugs.

This guy is a mystery to me. Every time I think I comprehend his actions, he proves me wrong. I can’t fucking pin him down.

“But you’re here now,” I remind him.

“Couldn’t stop myself. I felt like shit for the way I left, especially after...” His gaze falls on my mouth, and I can’t resist teasing him with my tongue slicking my lower lip.

“Maybe you should go back to girls, looks like you treat them well. I mean, they even sit on your lap.” I use a carefree tone, but that tramp wants him only because he could be an NFL player one day. And why do I feel irritated by it? Who the hell knows? This guy is fucking with my head, and I don’t like it.

“That was Tracy. Our parents are friends. I’ve known her a long time.” He slides his hands inside his jeans pockets.

“And Ralph, the guy I sucked face with a moment ago, was a friend as well.” I pronounce the word “friend” very slowly, witnessing the way his jaw ticks. I’ve had enough of this.

“I need to go now.”

“I can take you,” he offers, all awkward looking.

Both my eyebrows rise in surprise. “Why?”

“Hoping to change your mind?”

Well fuck! Persistence is one of my favorite character traits—which I’ll never tell Lori. Plus, it’s icy cold, going by car sounds better than getting frozen fingers riding my bike.

“Let’s go,” I say. The beaming smile he gives me lightens up his entire face, his eyes gleaming with contentment. I forget to breathe for the duration of two heartbeats.

The drive to the parlor is fairly short by car. TJ's jeep is fucking fantastic, and it surprised me to learn that he paid for it himself. He worked part-time jobs all through high school and the first two years of college. He's a junior, while I should be a freshman, but I got enough credits transferred to be a sophomore. I like to study, and I'm good at it.

"The car belonged to a friend of my mother, so he gave me a good price," he finishes. Still, he must have saved every single penny.

"You can park there," I tell him, pointing at the spot in front of the tattoo shop. When he stops the car, I open the door and turn to him before getting out. "You coming?"

"Really?" he asks, looking as excited as a small puppy. Another glowing grin appears on his face, and I roll my eyes at him, hiding my stupid smile when I walk to the parlor.

The rainbow shimmering sign on the door says Trice & Vice Tattoos. A guy from my psychology class recommended it, so I decided to check out the artists here.

There's nobody at the reception desk when we enter. I tap on the little bell while admiring the amazing designs framed on the walls. Maybe I found the right place.

"Fucking coming!" a voice yells from somewhere inside. And I frown at it. Not for the crass delivery, but because I know that voice.

"Ash?" I call before he appears from around the corner.

"Who else, man? What the fuck are you doing here?" He comes over and gives me a bro hug.

"Getting inked. So, this is where you work. Lori told me it was doing great."

“Of course. I co-own it.” He spreads his arms around and raises a duh eyebrow.

“Oh, this is TJ,” I introduce him.

“What’s up?” Ash tilts his pointed chin at him. I met him through Lori. He and his triplet brothers run a pet shelter I volunteer at when I can.

“Hey, man,” TJ greets him back.

Ash checks the computer behind the counter. “Well, you’re in luck. Leela is sick, so I’m gonna ink you tonight. Follow me.”

“Are the designs on the wall yours?” TJ asks him.

“Most of them.” Ash nods.

“Then fuck yes, you are in luck,” TJ states, making Ash chuckle, which is a fucking small miracle. Ash is as tight as a virgin asshole. And thinking about virgin holes, I can’t stop my eyes from falling on TJ’s plump ass, perfectly wrapped in those gray sweats.

We enter Ash’s room. It has a long tattoo bed, a table covered with all the essentials, a small sink, two comfy armchairs, and a small round stool. More incredible designs cover the walls. If I knew Ash was this talented, I’d have come to see him much sooner.

He taps on his tablet and shows me the drawing I already approved with his colleague.

“Where do you want the fucker?” Ash asks.

I smirk. “My shoulder.”

“Bare yourself to me then,” he jokes as he turns to wash his hands and put gloves on.

I take off the various layers of clothes and then sit on the bed, still wearing my black jeans. TJ is standing near the armchairs, his heated eyes are zeroed in on my body. I used to train in a boxing gym almost everyday, but since I moved to college I’ve been focusing more on studying than anything else. Despite that I’m still fucking well-built and damn good-looking.

“Nice cave,” he tells Ash after a minute. “Got some cool music?”

“Of fucking course!”

TJ smiles at Ash’s rude reply.

Ash puts the stencil on my shoulder, and after checking the position in the mirror, we are good to go. I sit again on the bed as Ash starts prepping.

“Ad astra per aspera.” TJ is suddenly looming over me from behind as he reads the letters on my shoulder. That smoky voice timbre of his is sexy as fuck. I can feel the ghost of his breath on my skin as he asks, “What does it mean?”

I swallow the embarrassing squawk in my throat and reply, “It’s Latin. It means to the stars through hardships.”

His raspy, low hum wafts softly through the hair on my temple. I close my eyes against the tingling sensation that assaults me at his nearness. Then I feel a light finger trailing the length of my shoulder. Slowly, disappearing too soon. I only realize I’m holding my breath when TJ pulls away. I can see his reflection in the long mirror on the wall, his gray cap is backward and he adjusts the slightly tented front of his

sweats before sitting in the armchair. I feel an absurd pinch in my chest at the sight of him.

Fuck, I was wrong, he's extremely good at this. And excessively hot and dangerous, seeing how strongly my body reacts to his.

"Can't Help Falling In Love" starts playing in the room while the buzzing tattoo gun works on my shoulder. Ash sends me a knowing smirk, the fucker is screwing with me. Still, my eyes keep going back to TJ. He's chatting with Ash. I'm barely feeling the sting from the tattoo gun since his low chuckles continue unleashing a delicious melty sensation inside my guts that I'm unable to stop.

Ten minutes later, we are done, but it felt like it took forever. After the cream and bandage, I rapidly put my clothes back on and give Ash a pat on the shoulder as a thank-you.

"Call me when you decide what ink you want to get," he tells TJ.

"You bet, man." They exchange a macho handshake before we leave the room.

How the fuck they became homies in ten minutes is a mystery I'll never comprehend. I'm still wondering about it as I exit the shop and bump against someone.

"Sorry," I utter when I see Raj's smiling face looking back at me. We have a couple of classes together, and I got an interested vibe from him on more than one occasion.

"Hey!" he greets me. "Got inked?"

"Yep," I reply.

"Ash is the man," he declares and I nod. "Oh, you coming to Carl's party Saturday?"

“Probably.” I was thinking of going. “Who’s DJing?”

“Stuart,” Raj informs me. Stuart is not bad. “You have to come!”

“It’s the last party before winter break,” TJ adds. Is he going?

“Exactly. I’ll see you there.” Raj squeezes my arm before walking away.

“Carl’s parties are always fun,” TJ says, as we get in his car.

“So maybe I’ll see you there,” I reply with a shrug.

five

Surreptitious: kept secret or done in a stealthy manner

TJ

Saturday couldn't have come fast enough. I saw Spencer once in the last four days at the café for a few minutes. He was working and I was running to practice, so I said hi and asked how he was, and then I grabbed my smoothie and ran to the football field.

I've been too busy studying for the last exam in statistics and then training. But Spencer has been on my mind every fucking day, especially when I'm in the shower or at night in bed when I rub one out, replaying in my head what we did on that pink sofa over and over.

My father texted me twice more to remind me of my...responsibilities. The only time I've fought him was about continuing football in college. He was against it, thought it would distract me from my studies, but I convinced him of the opposite, that having a son excel in both a nationally followed sport and a hard major would give him more prestige among his envious colleagues. For the past three and half years, he let me be. And at times, I almost forget about the bleak future ahead of me. Because letting go of football to sit behind a desk is going to be the hardest thing I've ever done in my life.

The loud honking behind me shakes me out of my dreadful thoughts.

I park my car two blocks from Carl's house, leaving my jacket on the back seat and

sliding the rolled notebook in my jeans' back pocket. I can hear the music blasting from all the way over here as I push my hands inside my front pockets. Snow covers the house's roof, tree branches, bushes and part of the street and sidewalk. It's cold, but my body temperature runs high, my blue sweater and my favorite pair of jeans keep me warm. When I reach the front yard, there's a guy sleeping face down on the snowy lawn, a girl is puking near the bushes while her friend is holding her hair, and a couple is making out savagely near the porch stairs. I avoid the plastic cups littering the path to the front door and then enter inside the house.

The music is crazy loud in the living room where Stuart is playing. The place is packed, and the change of temperature makes me shiver. It's fucking hot. I high-five a couple of guys, wave at some smiling girls, and then greet a few more people. Football players are known around campus, we are popular. And most people are very friendly with us. I do like that most of the time.

Some of my frat bros try to get me to play beer pong with them and the girls, but I'm here on a search mission. And I successfully find Spencer after five more minutes of hunting.

He's in the kitchen. He's wearing a sheer, full-sleeve black shirt with the first three buttons open. It's so damn revealing, I can see the outline of each one of his tattoos and the pink color of his round nipples. His jeans are not baggy tonight, but they hang low on his hips, showing his narrow waist and flat stomach. His hair is pulled back, a few wild red strands fall on his forehead, and his eyes have some makeup on them that give a smoky appearance to the hazel pools. He's the embodiment of sex and exciting promises.

I just can't fucking help the pull I feel toward him. It's extreme and visceral. Something I've never felt before. Those slick red lips, I want to kiss them again while I explore his body with my hands.

He's talking to the same guy we met outside the tattoo parlor a few days back. The music is a bit loud, even in here, forcing them to lean into each other. Spencer doesn't seem to mind that. He is smiling; the guy's hand is on his forearm, thumb brushing the skin.

The same enraged sensation I felt the night I saw Spencer kiss that fucker outside his apartment envelops me. I feel my nostrils flare as I get the urge to walk over to them and yank the asshole's hand away. For touching him. For thinking he can do it in front of me.

Where the fuck is that coming from?

I turn to the side to stop the irrational feeling from climbing inside my chest and coming out as a growl. This possessiveness I keep experiencing is a whole new thing for me. I've never cared enough about anybody to feel jealous or even protective. Not with any girls I dated.

Why Spencer? I need to get a rein on my emotions and fast.

"Are you always wearing that cap?" I hear his teasing voice before my eyes find his.

I give him a forced, closed-mouthed smile. "My lucky charm." That's an overly simple way to describe what this cap means to me. It's not only my football juju—which I wear constantly—but it embodies all my passion for this sport. It's a talisman. A shield. A memento that reminds me who I am and what I've achieved.

"It's not so bad on him," the guy next to Spencer states. There's a short silence in which I realize that this is the second time Spencer is not introducing me to him. Who the fuck is this fucker?

Taking a page from Lori's petty book I turn my attention to the fucker. "How about

this?" I say, as I turn my cap slowly around, letting my bicep bulge and flex under my sweater. I caught Spencer staring before, so I know he likes it.

"Damn, I see the appeal. Girls must love that." The nameless guy sends me a knowing look.

"Boys, too," I drawl.

Spencer scoffs derisively. Then he takes a sip from his Dr Pepper. What's with him? Doesn't like when I interact with his friend ?

"You do know that those kinds of beverages are the worst for your teeth, right?" I tell him. He drinks way too much soft drinks.

"Heard before. Your point being?" he retorts. Always so fucking confusing. Why did he start talking to me if he planned to act like a jerk?

I give him a bitter smile. "Here." I take the notebook from my jeans and try to hand it to him. But he doesn't take it.

"What's this?" He looks at it with wariness.

Really? I sigh. "Found my old notes from Professor Corder's class. I thought they could be of some help." It took me two hours to remember where I stashed them, but I decide not to disclose that embarrassing extra piece of information.

He looks at me strangely, like I did something wrong.

And I've had enough. I fucking like him, embarrassedly so, but I won't let him treat me like this. "If you don't want them, man, it's fine." I'm lowering my arm with the intention of leaving when he grabs tightly onto the notebook. My eyes jerk to his as

my hand doesn't let go.

We stare at each other for a long moment. His deep, hazel eyes are so intensely focused on mine; the air gets stuck inside my lungs.

Allison's voice breaks the spell. "TJ! Finally." She pulls on my forearm, and my fingers release the notebook as I turn my attention to her.

She kisses my cheek and then looks at Spencer and the nameless guy.

"Hi, I'm Allison."

"Raj."

"Spencer." His voice has turned even colder; his eyes slide up and down Allison's skimpy dress and high heels.

"Are you friends with TJ?" she asks, pushing her breasts against my arm. They are soft, and I enjoy the feeling, but I would rather have a hard, muscly chest rubbing against me. My eyes go to his visible nipples again.

Pity Spencer decided to be a dick tonight. Is he having second thoughts about me? Truthfully, when I left him at his place after the tattoo parlor, he didn't promise me anything. But I still remember the way his body trembled against mine inside Ash's room.

"Friends? Not really," Spencer replies with a bored tone. He's looking everywhere but at me.

Message received. Loud and clear. Fuck. It stings like a motherfucker.

“Okay, then.” She frowns, but then looks at me all happy again. “Let’s dance, TJ.”

Allison is fun, always cheery, easy to talk to. She’s a member of the sorority house near mine, so we see each other often. We’ve never hooked up, but we made out a bit when I was really drunk one night sophomore year.

I smile, ready to follow her, when Spencer grabs my hand. I frown at him, but he sends me a severe look and then tells Allison, “Need to talk to TJ for a moment.”

I see Allison’s disappointed face as I let him drag me out of the kitchen.

His hand holds mine as we zigzag among people. He has very long, strong fingers. They wrap my hand up completely. I like his warm skin against mine, the demanding way he’s leading me where I need to go. That doesn’t make me forget what a douchebag he’s been to me, though.

We walk outside the house. Until he finds a deserted spot, and in the next second, I’m pinned to the wall. I’m taller than him and bigger, and after how he treated me, I should tell him to fucking stop. But feeling his nearness, having his full attention makes my heart run and my mouth salivate. My blood pounds inside my ears almost in sync with the music floating from inside the house.

I can see our warm breaths creating little clouds between us, fighting for space, fusing together and then disappearing.

“It’s cold, you should wear a jacket.” I lift a hand toward his sheer shirt, but he grabs my wrist and presses it against the wall. I search his face for a reason but find only a grave expression.

Is he angry at me? What for? He’s the one being a jerk.

He squeezes my wrist, the grip shy of pain. “What the hell?” I hiss, because this is bullshit.

His lips tighten, eyes flickering between mine like he’s looking for something.

Ten more seconds of heavy silence, and I’m done. “Don’t know what’s wrong with you tonight, but you have to stop.”

I hear my notebook dropping on the ground before he growls, “No.” He presses his whole body against me. My cock bursts to life, standing at attention when it grazes against his. That bit of light friction brings stars to my eyes, and I groan, letting my head fall against the wall.

“Did you want Allison doing this to you?” he whispers darkly, sliding his hand inside my jeans to grab my dick through my boxer briefs. Fuuuck, his long fingers feel so damn good.

“Answer me, TJ,” he demands, with his hot breath on my neck, tightening his hand around my dick.

Fuck, is he jealous? “N-no,” I moan.

“I saw the way she looked at you. Did you fuck her?”

Anger suddenly rises in my chest. “Like you fucked that guy?”

I feel his smirk against my skin as he replies, “Never fucked him.”

“I still didn't fucking like it!” I growl.

“What?” He licks my neck and sucks—hard. His tongue feels so hot in contrast with

the low temperature. The hand not pinned on the wall lifts and slides under his shirt, finding the cool, smooth skin of his back. I'm finally touching him and he shivers under my exploration.

"What?" he repeats, almost moaning, and I realize I didn't give him an answer.

"I didn't like the way you were with him, all flirty and shit." The memory makes me see red.

"What are you saying?" The soft feel of his lips on my neck and his hand working slowly on my dick replace my anger with pure, undiluted lust.

But I need to clear things up with him before I lose myself to the pleasure. So I jerk my hand from his grip and grab his hair, tilting his head back until I'm able to look down at his eyes. "I want to do this with you, but I don't like to share it."

"And when you say 'it ,' you mean me?" He lifts a questioning brow.

"Have a problem with that?" I almost curl my lips over my teeth. I feel fucking feral.

He smiles. "With exclusivity? No—while it lasts. I have a part-time job and classes to go to. No time for much else. This is actually a nice arrangement for me." Fucking finally.

"It's settled then." I growl before I kiss him, so fucking greedy for it. It's messy, all teeth and tongues, as my hand slides to his round ass. His left cheek fits perfectly in my palm. It feels fucking divine, so much that I can't stop squeezing it as our tongues twist wildly.

His fingers suddenly leave my jeans as the hard length of his cock starts rubbing against mine through the layers of clothes. I lift his leg and anchor it on my hip to get

a better hold on him as we slide our bodies together. He grunts and wraps both his arms around my neck.

Humping has never felt this good. This right.

“Want to feel your bare cock against mine,” I almost snarl as the image of a porn clip I saw a few days ago of two guys frotting pops into my head. I bet we’d look hotter.

He lets out a small squawk, it makes me smile. “Yes.” His moan is followed by some laughter too close to us for my comfort.

“Wanna get out of here?” Spencer suddenly asks.

“Fuck yes,” I reply, sucking hard on his lower lip before letting him go.

When Spencer suggested a change of scenery, I had a few ideas in mind. Eating ice cream in my car wasn’t one of them.

Still, my pistachio tastes good and Spencer is here with me. Smiling lazily. My dick can wait a little bit longer. Even though it hurts every time Spencer licks that fucking cone. Every soft moan he utters is causing my leaking cock to soak the front of my boxer briefs.

“You still haven’t told me what you want to do after college,” I remind him, trying to distract myself from...him.

“Social worker,” he replies with no hesitation.

“That’s a tough job, a very altruistic one.”

He shrugs. “The foster care system is bad. I experienced first-hand what it means to

be in a broken system where people who should help you don't give a fuck."

"I'm sorry." It's the lamest thing to say, but I've got nothing else. I file this new, small piece of information with the few others I have about him.

"You? Going to be a football player?"

"Family business," I reply stiffly, giving a hard bite to my cone.

He regards me with a scrutinizing look before asking, "What kind of company?"

"Import, export." The idea of sitting in an office eight hours a day sucks the life out of me.

"I heard some people saying the NFL is interested in you."

I shake my head with a sad smile on my face. "It's possible. My stats are damn good, not for the first picks, but...it's possible."

I remember Coach Morgan's words: "College football is not just a sport, it is an experience." And damn, he's right. The best experience of my life.

"I have no idea what that means, but it still sounds fucking huge. Congrats," he says with a faint smile.

"A chance of a lifetime," I murmur, shutting down the faint light of hope that is trying to bloom inside my chest.

"Why aren't you ecstatic?" he asks, looking at me like I have two heads.

"Because next year I'll get my BS degree in economics and then go work for my

father.” I try to use a light tone, but I fail.

Spencer throws the rest of his cone in the small trash can on the back seat and then puckers his lips in a pondering manner. “If you could choose what to do after college, regardless of anybody’s feelings or demands but your own, what would you do?”

I sigh, looking ahead at the cars waiting at the red light. “I can’t let myself think about it. It’s painful to dream when I already know it’s not in the cards.”

“You’re saying that you can’t make decisions about your damn life?” He sounds outraged on my behalf. If his words weren’t so devastatingly true, I’d smile at his affronted expression.

It’s time to change the topic. So, I shrug, and after finishing my cone, I turn to him. “Okay. Here is one decision: I want to suck you off.”

He starts coughing, and I pat his back as I let out a short chuckle.

“Saliva. Wrong...pipe,” he explains.

I laugh. Real, deep down from the soul laughter. It makes him glare at me. But I don’t care. I find his glower kind of sexy.

“You’re trying to kill me,” he mutters.

“That would be in contrast with my purpose of blowing your dick.”

“Jesus Christ, TJ!” he splutters, but I can see his cock stiffening inside his jeans.

I turn my cap backward before sliding my hand on his thigh.

He spreads his legs in invitation. “That cap move? Don’t fucking do it again in front of others,” he hisses. I like this jealous side of him. It makes me feel all...tingly.

The sound of his jeans’ zipper going down fills the jeep’s cabin.

Then I realize something. “Were you a jerk to me before because you were jealous, Spencer?”

“I...” My hand wrapping around his hard cock and pulling it out of his briefs makes him pause. “Fuck! Maybe.”

His reluctant confession makes me smirk smugly. “I don’t want anybody else but you, got it?”

His eyes glaze over with pleasure.

“Next time talk to me. Don’t like to be treated like shit,” I state firmly.

He nods. “Noted.”

I’m holding another man’s cock for the first time, but it doesn’t feel that different from when I do mine. Spencer’s dick is smaller and thinner, perfect, and I’m salivating over it. I slide my hand over the smooth skin, top to base, making him tremble and moan.

And I do find a difference. The gratification and empowerment I get from knowing that I’m giving him pleasure. A pleasure he’s not afraid to chase as he bucks his hips, making my hand slide again, reaching the slick tip. I spread the pre-cum with my thumb, but it’s not enough, so I let my spit fall on his cock and balls, loving the way he grunts—and then I start really working him.

“God, yes! Just like that,” he encourages me, pulling my cap off to grab on my hair. I lower my head until our lips touch, and Spencer quickly delves his tongue in my mouth, ravaging it. He tastes sweet and bitter like the coffee ice cream he ate. It’s fucking intoxicating.

I nip his lower lip and then shift my body back until my head is an inch from his dick. It’s not a very comfortable position—especially for someone my size in such a small space—but I’m too excited to care. My hand keeps pumping as my tongue starts lapping at his balls. I love some nuts-loving while jerking off, and from Spencer’s long groan, he might like it, too. The earthy, soapy smell of his cock is my new favorite, and I expand my lungs to the maximum to get a big fill.

I focus on his balls for a few minutes, sucking, licking, pulling gently, until he demands— demands —that I make good of my words and suck him off. I’m more than happy to oblige since I’m dying to taste his cum right from the source. In spite of that, I’m a little nervous about giving head.

It’s my first time, and Spencer is a fucking genius at it. I watched some tutorials on the internet on how to give a good blowjob, but that’s all theory, while this is the practice bit.

He must read something on my face because his thumb moves to my cheek, brushing the skin delicately in a repetitive, comforting move. “Open your mouth wide,” he instructs me, “Take what you can and suck on it while you bob your head.”

I follow his directions and close my lips around the head first. His intimate, salty taste hits my tongue, and I moan at how good it feels. I already know I’ll fucking love sucking cocks.

“Just like that. Enjoy my cock, TJ. Make it weep for you,” he grunts deeply. It spurs me on. Closing my eyes, I take more every time I go down on it until I feel it hitting

my throat and his pubic hair tickles my nose. My gag reflex is triggered, but I remember the recommendation from the tutorial to relax my throat and breathe deeply.

“Fuck, TJ. God. Can you swallow?” Spencer pants. I try and feel like I’m choking, but I stay put. I’m a fucking athlete. I’m used to hard and tough—no pun intended.

“Look at me,” he orders. I do, and Jesus, he looks on the verge of losing it. “Look at what you’re doing ...to me.” He lets out a long moan. His pupils are blown, eyes crazed with lust, lips swollen over his teeth. I want more. Want to see him wrecked by unmeasurable ecstasy.

“Do you have any idea how hot you are with my dick in your throat?”

Keeping my gaze on him, I slide all the way up and then drop my mouth down again. He cries out, his hand pulling on my hair to the point of pain as I start a merciless tempo. I’m hollowing my cheeks, sucking hard as I go up and down, feeling the ache forming in my jaw, the stretch to my lips. My dick is leaking inside my jeans, and I want to jerk it so fucking much, but my hands are both full. One is inside Spencer’s shirt, gripping and pulling on his nipple, and the other is massaging his balls. I give them a hard pull, and Spencer growls, “If you don’t want to swallow your first load, move now!”

I do move...up, but just to slide down his dick again. He groans so fucking loud as he comes, flooding me with his jizz. I pull out and cough as he keeps shooting on my lips and cheek.

“Goddamnit. You’re a natural,” he praises me after the orgasm gradually subsides. I smile happily, licking his cum off my lips. It’s delicious. I should have experimented years ago. But I have a weird feeling it wouldn’t have been the same with another guy.

“Got to learn how to swallow better. As my coach always says, practice makes perfect,” I tease.

Spencer drags my head up to his. “So fucking glad to hear that.”

The slow way he licks his jizz off my cheek with those half-lidded lust-filled eyes is one of the hottest things I’ve ever experienced. “You can practice on me anytime you want,” he whispers sultrily in my ear before biting the lobe.

My dick is nearly exploding inside my pants, but this might be a good moment to find out more about him, when he’s so relaxed and satisfied.

I move back in my seat and ask, “Where are you from?”

“Oh, so we have reached that point.” He chuckles lightly.

“What point?”

“Where we exchange useless information we don’t really care about,” he explains, keeping a small smirk on his face.

“I do care. And are you always this difficult or only with me?” I cross my arms. Will he ever lower his walls? Or is this going to be a never-ending battle?

“Always,” he deadpans.

“I can’t even feel special.” I snort with displeasure.

“Look, my past is not pretty. Not like yours.” He gestures nervously while he talks.

“Who said mine is?” I turn to face him, annoyed by his suppositions.

He sends me a long, who-are-you-trying-to-fool look.

“Yeah, my family is loaded. But my mother is an alcoholic who prefers to get buzzed with her classy friends than spend time with her only son. She never cared about me. Pretty sure my father paid her to carry out the pregnancy. Not out of the goodness of his heart since he’s an egotistical, narcissistic, money-obsessed, ruthless, scheming dick.” I ball my fists against the anger building inside me as memories of my interactions with him assault me. My chest starts to heave as I continue, “I went to the best schools and am surrounded by the richest people, can have the best things money can buy. Are those things what’s important in life? My life, my future has already been decided. It always has. Is that a pretty picture?” I finish, lowering my eyes to the nails sinking into my jeans.

I begin hyperventilating when Spencer covers one of my hands, lacing our fingers. “I’m sorry to have assumed.” His apology helps. But it’s the understanding I see in his eyes and the words he utters next that slowly calm my breathing.

“I certainly didn’t have what you did. I actually had nothing, not even a roof at one point.” He turns his gaze away. “I found a way out, and I’m not going to throw it away. This is my only chance at a good life.”

In the end, I vomited my life pains while he offered me a little peek at his. And it’s worse than I thought. “I feel like a sorry is needed, but I seem to remember you don’t like a daily dose of that.”

“Fuck no, nor pity.” He sniffs.

“Pity,” I repeat slowly. “I think you’re extraordinary, Spencer. I actually envy you.” I squeeze his fingers to emphasize my words.

“Envy me? Why?” He sounds really confused.

“I have no say in my life. I’m a damn puppet performing a never-ending show. While you are free to do whatever the hell you want. And you’re making the best of it.”

“That’s a bit too extreme.” A small smile curls his lips. “Can’t you talk to your father?” he asks.

I shake my head and let out a bitter laugh. “Not in this life.”

He leans toward me and kisses me. It’s languid and filled with unspoken words. Words both of us can’t deal with right now. After a minute or two, the kiss turns savage. Spencer is unbuttoning his shirt. “Take out that gigantic cock of yours, it’s frotting experimentation time.”

His words don’t even finish to register that I open my pants at light speed, so fast I almost got my very sensitive skin stuck in the zipper. Luckily, I avoid the self-maiming, and after I push my seat all the way back, Spencer straddles my lap. His jasmine scent envelops me as he opens a small bottle of lube—he got it from somewhere, fuck if I know—and pours it on our cocks.

Then he wraps both his hands around our dicks, and ecstasy flares all over my body from the exquisite friction. I slide my hands inside his briefs and grab his bare ass cheeks hard, unable to halt my growl of ecstasy.

Thoughts of the past and future disappear; only the now, only the man on my lap exists.

“Fuck, TJ,” he grunts, sucking on my neck, surely leaving a hickey. The image of his mark on me makes my balls draw up and my heart beat faster.

I’m in trouble. Can’t catch feelings for him. Not when there’s no place for him in my future.

six

Ephemeral: short-lived

SPENCER

Two weeks have passed. TJ and I see each other every day. He comes to the café in the mornings before training, orders his disgustingly healthy smoothies and even forces me to have one as well—his insistence about soda being bad for me is tedious, but adorable. He doesn't kiss me goodbye; we are not a couple. We are just having fun like a dudes -with-benefits kind of arrangement. So a dirty, very promising look is exchanged, and we spend the day doing our things. Sometimes a quick text about nothing is shared. Then he comes to my apartment in the evenings. We eat boring food—being an athlete is fucking tough—watch TV or study, and fool around.

He's become the master of head—can make me nut in under three minutes. No full penetration, though. He lets me play with his ass, he confessed to me he likes to have a couple fingers up there while being sucked. Tonight, I have plans for that jock's muscular tushy.

My phone beeps on the floor, so I grab it and return my head on TJ's lap. He's watching football, of fucking course, while I'm sinking more deeply into my languor. A few minutes more, and I'll take advantage of his brawny, herculean, body.

His hand goes absentmindedly to my hair again, applying a light massage that gives me goose bumps.

Wish I could have this to infinity. The sudden thought makes me frown. I don't have the capacity to analyze it tonight. My brain is fried after four hours of memorizing how cultural products and social processes contain and enable human behavior. TJ's old notes helped greatly, but I still have a lot to cover. I'm still a bit surprised by his generous and attentive gesture, maybe because I'm not used to people doing things for me. Apart from Lori and Gabe.

I look at my phone screen and see a text from Lori. His ears must be ringing.

Lori:

Let me ask you something vital, is your mental prowess better than your sexual one?

Me:

?

Lori:

I hope not, because you're an idiot and a sucky friend! And a sod. And a wanker.

Me:

Is that all?

Lori:

I hate you. The Krampus curse is broken by the way, THANK YOU for asking, bellend. He possessed Wednesday for a few hours, but everything ended well.

Me:

Bye, Lori!

Lori:

Are you doing the nasty with Thor? Is that why you stiffed the guy I sent your way? If that's the case, I want details and some drawings. Manga style is preferred.

I push my phone to my chest as a snort slips out of my nose. After two seconds, my phone beeps again.

Lori:

I have excellent mental prowess, in case you were wondering. I won't comment on my sexual one, I don't want to make you cry with envy, mate.

That makes me chuckle. He's such a cuckoo—an insufferable one most of the time.

“Who's texting you?”

I tilt my head to the right and find TJ's fiery eyes like melted chocolate on me. Now who's jealous?

“Lori.”

“Oh, Frodo.”

“Fro... You've met Lori?” I ask, confused.

“Yeah, he threatened to nail my dick to the scoreboard if I hurt you.” That sounds like Lori.

“Good friend?” His tone is too nonchalant.

“The best. He helped me with my scholarship,” I confess for some inexplicable reason.

“I didn’t know you won one.” He sighs with displeasure.

“Are you that eager to know about me?”

“Fuck yes,” he replies straight away. “Keep going.”

I’ve never met someone so interested in me before. I’m not used to all this attention. It’s unsettling, and at the same time, it starts a warm feeling inside my chest. A tiny flame that has been crushed before, leaving me broken and alone.

So I do what I do best, distract both of us with sex.

“If I disclose a few things about me, what will I get in exchange?” I purr as my finger trails down his thermal shirt-clad chest.

He follows the movement and then utters, “A piece of my clothing?”

I blink in surprise. “Like a striptease?”

“Let’s see, I have socks, pants, boxer briefs, shirt, cap—six items of clothes. questions.”

“Five,” I counter.

“Two socks. garments, six answers.”

My pout gets me a tongue-sucking, dirty kiss before TJ slides from under me to stand in front of the sofa. Football game on the TV forgotten.

I grab my soda bottle from the floor and place it near my thigh as I snuggle more comfortably against the sofa cushions, ready for the show to begin. “Shouldn’t we put on some music?” I look around for my phone.

“Nope. Want to hear your voice when you answer me.” Then he jokingly scolds me, “Stop pouting, or we’ll go through the stripping part very fast.”

“Promise?” I smirk eagerly.

“How did Lori help you get here?”

His abrupt question makes me blow out air. “His boyfriend—fiancé now—offered me a full scholarship plus this apartment. I think because Lori put in a good word.”

“Wow. You know people in high circles, then.”

“Nice try. I gave you my answer, now strip!” I bark.

He smiles and nods. His arms cross in front of his chest as his hands shift to the bottom of his thermal shirt. He so fucking slowly and damn sexily peels the fabric up, revealing the sexy V peeking out of his black sweats, then, one by one, his swoon-worthy turtle shell abs, the sleeping bear tattoo resting on his mountainous pec, the dark nipples pointing right at me, and his wide, strong shoulders. Fuck, his body is an amusement park, and I’d like to jump on that ride all night. I’ll even make an everyday pass.

It’s a bit challenging to take off the shirt while keeping the baseball cap on, but TJ manages it smoothly. He throws the garment at me, and I dig my nose in the warm

fabric, filling it with the scent of cinnamon—which I found out he likes to add to his daily smoothies.

When I come up for air, TJ is looking at me with an intense gaze I can't decipher.

“One down, five to go.” I bite my lower lip, loving this game.

He suddenly snatches my soda from the sofa and replaces it with a bottle of water he grabs from the kitchen counter. I roll my eyes at his obsession with healthy drinks. Always leaving juice and protein bars for me in my room with the excuse that he forgot them. He even convinced me to train together in the gym.

The fact is that he seems to enjoy it, doing little things for me. He always fucking beams afterward. And damn, a smiling TJ with no shirt is *so* hot.

“Okay. Shoot.” I wiggle my fingers at him as I adjust my dick inside my joggers.

His heated eyes zero in on my half chub, but he asks, “What's your favorite color?”

I snort. “Really?” He just nods. “Purple and gold.”

“Gotta put some purple streaks in my golden hair, then,” he jokes, making me giggle. I'm fucking giggling now. The damn squawking wasn't enough.

He gives me his back and bends down. His plump, round, juicy ass is the only thing existing in my world for the next six seconds. Then he turns toward me again and dangles one sock in the air.

“My favorite song is “Crazy” by Aerosmith,” I state, hurriedly gesturing for him to bend again so I can get another butt show.

“I didn’t ask you that.” He lowers the hand holding the sock.

“I can’t take it back. You have to give me the other sock.” I push my lower lip out.

“Alright.” He yields so easily. “But I ask. You answer. Those are the rules.”

I give him a military salute before enjoying the show again. Damn, I want to fuck that ass. But I won’t push him. I’ll give him all the time he needs. The wait will make the experience even more sweet.

He twists the socks in his hand before tossing them at me, and luckily, they end up on the floor a foot away from me.

“Don’t you have to toss the ball while you play?” I taunt him with a smirk.

“I ask the questions.” He narrows his eyes at me, and I chuckle. I haven’t had this level of fun in...forever. But with TJ, I always feel good one way or another.

“But you should know by now that I’m a defensive tackle, I hardly toss the ball.”

“Tackle. Got it.” I wink at him. I’ve never seen him play, so how would I know? He does talk about football with me, but he sweetly takes his time to explain the terminology related to the sport, which forces me to climb him like a tree. Every single time. Hence my still limited knowledge on the subject.

“Where were you before Lori?” His next question makes me click my tongue. It’s a hard one, I’m not ashamed, but also not proud of my past.

“On the street.”

He frowns. “Why?”

“Is that another question?”

“Yes!” He yanks his sweats down, remaining in a pair of Calvin Klein white, tight boxer briefs and his cap.

“I ran away from my foster family.” I swallow hard, pushing away the memories. When I open my eyes, TJ is in front of me. I can see he wants to know more, but I can’t go there right now. I don’t want to.

Playtime is over. I stand up and grab his hand, guiding him into my bedroom. He follows me without a word, and I feel grateful.

When we reach the bed, I spin around, turn his stupid cap backward and kiss him. Before he can wrap his arms around me, I sit at the foot of the bed and push the waistband of his boxers down. “Need to suck you off,” I tell him before swallowing his dick all the way down my throat.

“God, Spencer,” he growls, grabbing my hair and choking me on his cock just the way I like it. He fucks my face with long, slow drives of his hips, our eyes locked the whole time.

The adoring way he’s gazing at me is too much. He’s too much. I tap his thigh, and he immediately pulls off. “Everything okay?” His attentiveness is killing me.

I nod, while taking off my clothes. Then I pull him on the bed on top of me. My hands end up in his hair; the cap falls somewhere as I suck and lick on the sexy vein on his thick neck. He groans sliding his big, callous hands all over me.

I tell him to lie on the side, and I shift and do the same until my face is on his cock and his on mine. ty-nine has never been one of my favorite positions, but with TJ, everything we try is fireworks and bliss. Having his dick in my mouth, his delicious

taste, weight, and size while he strangles my cock in the hottest, tightest vise, it would have brought me to my knees if I wasn't already lying down.

The wet sounds of our mouths and grunts and moans fill the bedroom. When he starts pulling on my balls, I can't stop my hips from bucking. I slick my fingers with the saliva drooling down my mouth and brush them over his pucker. He groans and pushes his ass more firmly against my hand.

The tip of my finger spears the tight ring and then enters smoothly inside. Damn how much my dick wants that. I'd probably nut after two pumps inside him.

TJ rolls his tongue over my cockhead, and I let out a slutty noise, guiding his hand toward my ass.

I slide a second finger just as he slips one in me. He starts fucking himself on my fingers frantically while pounding my face at the same time.

He suddenly pulls off my cock to snarl, "Add another finger."

I do, and he hisses, probably for the sting, but keeps rocking his hips. His hand holds my head still as his other finger fucks my ass.

"Jesus Christ!" He licks my cockhead and sucks once on it. I'm bombarded by so many sensations all at once, I can't think straight. I'm losing myself in him, turning me into a whore. His whore, and I want it—him, so much.

"So. Fucking. Good." Every word is followed by a hard buck of his hips. "So. Fucking. Hot." And my "more, more," is muffled by his massive cock tunneling inside my throat.

"Here it comes. Swallow once and keep the rest on your tongue," he orders. I'm

usually the one in control when we have fun since it's all new for him. Since I'm his fucking first—the thought gives me more satisfaction than it should. I like this dominating side of him, though. This confident, strong side that comes out at times.

He pushes all the way in, and I feel the first warm rope rushing down my throat. Then he moves back until only the tip of his dick remains in my mouth, shooting more cum. I press my three fingers deep inside his ass until I find his prostate, making him roar and sink his nails into my scalp as another load splashes on my tongue.

“Fuuuuuck me!” he pants. And I wish I could. My dick in his ass or my ass on his dick. I'm not picky.

He sits down as my mouth lets go of his incredible cock. Then he pulls me up as well, and my fingers slip out of his butt.

“Part your lips, let me see,” he rumbles deeply. His eyes turn even more heated as he looks at his cum on my tongue. He's as filthy as I am. It's such a fucking turn-on. I'm looking forward to eating his ass and vice versa. “Let it spill down, want it to roll down your body.”

Jesus, can he be more perfect? I feel the wetness trickling down my chin and chest. I witness his deep satisfaction as he spreads it all over my skin. He really likes my chest. Likes to touch it, to brush his fingers all over it, asking about my tattoos while studying them.

“So damn hot.” His eyes fall on my hard dick. “Want me to help you with that?” He tries to stifle his smile, but I can clearly see how much he enjoys seeing me hard and desperate.

“Oh, you will,” I whisper almost ominously. “Lie on your belly.”

He raises a brow at me but does what I say. This submissive side of him makes my dick weep every single time. Also the fact that he's always eager to try new things.

I straddle his thighs and tap his ass cheeks with my hard-as-steel dick. God, that's hot.

He freezes, all tense under me.

"I'm not going to fuck you. Will never do it without your permission." I caress his back with a comforting touch. "I'm just going to fuck your ass cheeks. You'll love it, I promise."

I feel him relax under me, and I focus again on his spectacular rear. It's a thing of beauty. Never seen such a fine specimen before. I palm his cheeks and part them with my thumbs, spitting on his crack a couple of times. I feel TJ shivering under me, it makes me feel so fucking possessive. The word "mine" keeps spinning inside my head as my insides burn for him.

I push my length between his cheeks and start sliding it back and forth over his gaping hole, stretched out by my fingers. He moans like the slut he is, and his fists grab the sheet as his hips start bucking. The pleasure is out of this world and at the sight of his pink hole—open, slick, ready to be taken—my balls could explode just from looking.

"You're humping the bed like a junkyard dog in heat," I grunt as my hips speed up, moving rough and fast. My cockhead gets caught on his hole, and he cries and moans while I snarl like an animal. "Who's smiling now? You're such a slut. My slut!"

His back is arched toward the ceiling, shoulders tense, muscles flexing and bulging under me. He is a fucking vision. All big and strong and compliant under me, grunting desperately while trying to catch every scrap of pleasure he can find.

I grip his ass cheeks bruisingly hard and go to town on him. My balls hit his ass, making it jiggle every time my dick slides forward. I let more saliva fall on it, and he screams a lusty “Yesss!”

I could fuck him so easily right now. Prop his hips up and slide right in. I can picture it so clearly.

“Spencer!” His cry takes me back to the moment, and I growl as my balls start tingling.

“I’ll cover you in cum, TJ. Just like you did to me.”

“Do it,” he moans before his body starts jerking under me. Is he coming from my dick sliding over his hole? The thought makes pleasure detonate inside me. Everything whites out, and then I shoot all over his back, tightening his plump ass cheeks around my shaft.

“Fuck! God! Yes. Such a fine ass. Milk me so good.” When the last rope spurts out I fall over him, not caring about the cum between us.

My cock is still tucked between his cheeks. I want inside him so damn much. But more than that, I want to be with him. What I’m starting to feel is dangerous. My self-preservation instinct is screaming at me to take a step back.

“Don’t stop scratching my side. I love when you do that.” He puts a stop to my grim thoughts. I didn’t even realize I was touching him.

He sighs contently as I resume the scratching. I inevitably smile against his nape.

“Tell me,” he whispers a few minutes later.

“What?” I ask sleepily.

“One of your fancy words.”

I would have shaken my head at him in exasperation if I had any energy left. “Why?”

“Because I asked you.” It’s as simple as that.

“Luminous.”

“Is that a Harry Potter spell?” I chuckle at his silly joke.

“Meaning?” he asks.

“Anything that radiates or reflects light, shining brightly. It exudes a sense of brilliance.” Like you, I want to tell him, but I don’t.

“Luminous,” he murmurs softly. I can hear the smile in his voice. Then he adds, “You know when you asked me what I’d like to do with my life...if I had a choice?”

I hum.

“I’d keep playing football. If not in the NFL, I’d like to coach.”

I slide off him, and we move onto our sides, face-to-face.

“So do it,” I tell him.

“You make it sounds so easy.” He scoffs. “I’ll lose my inheritance if I change my path.”

“So you’ll be one of the many people who don’t have a rich dad paying for them.”

He sighs. “It’s more complicated than that. Everything I’ve done up until now was to get what’s rightfully mine.”

“You won’t be alone if you decide to change your future,” I hazard in a low voice.

He grabs my hand and intertwines our fingers, lifting them to his mouth for a kiss. “You make me hope,” he confesses, his eyes open and sad.

I’m getting too involved at this point. It’s a very reckless game. The question is, can I quit it before he leaves me?

I wake up feeling too hot. Like burning up. My balls are blazing. What...? TJ’s hand is around my hard dick, beating it off while he’s fucking his fat cock between my thighs. He really is a junkyard dog.

Fuck! He must have fallen asleep here last night. That never happened before.

I groan when his hand squeezes the tip of my cock before resuming the fast pumping.

“Sorry, couldn’t resist,” he grunts. “You’re so fucking hot when you sleep. And your ass, baby. Damn!” Baby?

I hear the slapping sound before the sting registers on my skin. “Love to see it jiggle under my hand. So fucking horny for you.” He smacks me again, and instead of telling him to fuck off—it’s happened in the past with some handsy hookups—I whimper and push my butt toward him.

“You like that?” His mouth brushes against my ear, and I feel his chest vibrating with a chuckle against my sweaty back. His hand falls one more time and then squeezes

the sensitive skin hard, making me hiss.

Fuck, I don't like it.

I love it.

I want more. But I can hardly speak as he keeps jolting me and using me like a sex doll. And I love that too.

His dick keeps gliding between my legs, rubbing my balls with each slick slide giving life to a buzz of electricity all over my skin. His hard abs hits my ass every time he thrusts forward making my eager hole clenching around nothing. I understand fully why he became such a whore for me yesterday. The slurping sound of his dick and the friction of his thick, hard, smooth cock send a bolt of lightning aimed right at my balls. And I can't stop my loud panting.

How would it feel to have that massive dick inside me? Splitting me in two? Reaching places no one has ever penetrated? I wrap my arm around his neck and grab his nape, squeezing my thighs and rocking my hips frantically, following his crazy, fast rhythm.

"Come all over me," I gasp, making him growl. He spanks me again, three fast swats, and the orgasm hits me out of nowhere. My jizz falls on the sheets and rolls down his hand just as I feel him tense behind me, and then a wet sensation spreads between my legs and over my balls.

His hand lifts and loosely wraps around my neck, pushing my head back against his.

He lets out a shaky breath as his body shudders. "What are you doing to me?" I can barely hear his soft whisper when the alarm on his phone suddenly resounds in the living room.

He cusses and leaves the bed and my bedroom, coming back after a few seconds holding the clothes he stripped out of last night.

I'm still riding my buzzing post-orgasmic wave, simply lying on the damp sheet while enjoying watching TJ's muscles tighten and contract as he bends and twists, giving me a reverse striptease. His broad shoulders seem about to tear the thermal shirt and his tree trunk legs are the perfect cradle for his beautiful swinging cock—huge even when flaccid. He's a work of art.

"Aren't you going to take a shower?" I ask him, adjusting my head on the pillow. I have a few more minutes before going to work.

"I'll be late for training." He sits at the end of the bed to lace his shoes.

He grabs his phone and starts tapping on it.

"Will you come to the café later?" I ask, my voice slow with sleepiness.

TJ nods distractedly. "Maybe." His head is in jock mode already—that's what I call it when he turns all his attention to football.

I yawn so loudly I think I hear my jaw crack. "I'll be at the library today."

"Uhm? Oh, okay. Gotta go." He gives my lips a fast, hard peck and then leaves.

I close my eyes to enjoy some more sleep when my alarm starts ringing.

Fuck!

The morning flew away. I had to perform two people's jobs at the café since Rachel got a cold, and even though there's fewer people coming in these days—Christmas is

thirteen days away—I didn't have time to take a break.

I wonder what TJ has planned for Christmas. He'll probably go back home since he has a family. The thought of not seeing him for a couple of weeks sits in my stomach like a boulder. Which further proves that I should put some space between us. This winter break will be good then. It is going to give me some fresh perspective on what the hell I'm doing with him.

It was supposed to be a one-time experiment that turned into what? Friends with benefits? Are we even friends?

Do friends get annoyed when one hasn't texted back after four hours? He finished his training and didn't come to the café, which has happened before—his coach is a slaver if you ask me. But now, it's the afternoon, and he's still AWOL.

I'm walking toward the library for some extra studying with my head still on TJ when I see him twenty feet away from me. It's easy to spot his humongous body and the gray cap covering part of his long blond hair. He's talking with a man, an older version of him. It must be...his father. Expensive beige coat, leather gloves, same brown eyes. But while TJ's are sweet and candid, his father's are cold and calculating.

TJ's gaze suddenly finds mine, and what I see forming in them as he registers my presence hits me hard. Horror and fear. Like a deer in the headlights.

An undeniable wish to protect him from whatever is causing him distress engulfs me, and I take a step toward him. But he firmly shakes his head, halting my advance. A painful realization spears my chest: I'm the cause of his affliction. He doesn't want his father to meet me. He's scared shitless about it.

We aren't together or anything, he doesn't have to introduce me to his damn family.

But the thought of TJ being ashamed of me even as his friend is like an imaginary blow to the gut.

And when his father looks at me and dismisses me in the next second? Like salt on an already bleeding wound.

And when TJ walks away, leaving me there without another look? It should leave me flatlined, right? It does the opposite. It gives life to a blazing anger that promises to turn everything around me to ash. Myself included.

Because this is what I deserve for getting involved with a closeted jock. I knew this was going to happen, I kind of mentally prepared myself, but that didn't help one bit. Being used and thrown away is the only constant in my life. Thought I became immune. Fuck, was I wrong. It still hurts like a bitch.

I should have ended it when I started to feel things for him. But I've known the guy for how long? Less than three weeks? I thought I was safe.

Will I ever learn? Better late than never.

seven

Inure: to accept or grow accustomed to something undesirable, to become hardened or desensitized to negative experiences.

TJ

The next day, I park my car near the library. Spencer has been ghosting me since he saw me with my father yesterday. The deeply hurt expression on his face goes on replay inside my head. But believe it or not, once again, I was protecting him.

My father showed up unannounced. He wanted to make sure I fully understand the repercussions in case I decide to go against him and choose football. He'd cut me off, and the trust fund my grandfather left me, my inheritance, would be delayed ten more years since there's a specific term I need to meet, which is working for the family business for at least five years.

I'd always thought I'd be free from him with all that money. Playing in the NFL is a fucking dream come true, but although right now, my stats would get me a foot in, anything can happen. I could get injured or disqualified. It's happened before to young players. And then what?

That trust fund is the only reason I've been putting up with all my father's crap. But since I met Spencer, I've started to see things from another perspective. Yes, that inheritance is rightfully mine, but do I really need it?

I'll get my degree next year, and the NFL is probably interested. I did this. All of it.

Me . My father's money helped for sure, but I sweat and sacrificed and kept going. I'm still going.

My father left after a very heated argument, caused by the fact that my mother had a car accident a month ago and was sent to rehab and he didn't find it significant enough to tell me before.

Then my mother called, asking me to come see her at the facility. She sounded hesitant on the phone, like she expected me to refuse. And I should have after the way she barely acknowledged me all my life. But Spencer again made me change my mind. The way he turned his life around, plus the desperation in her voice on the phone made me go see her. I tried to call him during the two-hour drive, but he never picked up. When I finally saw her and talked to her, my world imploded.

I tried to call Spencer again and texted him several times, but still no answer. I had to go take care of a few things back at home. It took more time than I expected, and I was able to come back only this morning. I went straight to practice, and after a quick shower, I drove to Spencer's apartment and when he didn't answer the door, I went to the café. I remembered he told me about studying at the library yesterday. So that's where I am now.

I jog up the front stairs and push the heavy wooden door, keeping it open for a girl coming out. The temperature is much higher inside the building, it makes me unzip my jacket and shove my gloves inside the pocket. I know Spencer has a favorite spot on the second floor. I've thought about blowing him among the dusty bookshelves more than once. But now is not the time.

When I reach the room, I spot him right away. Elbow propped on the table, the earphones wire trailing down his neck, he's listening to one of his lesson recordings. His deep dedication to his studies rivals mine to football. And it's one of the things I respect most about him.

Watching him undisturbed starts a butterfly-sensation inside my gut. He's lovely. The light coming from the tall window on the right forms a halo around him. His red hair has a shimmer to it, a shining glow hovering over his head. It gives him almost an other-worldly appearance.

He looks focused on the book, but after spending all my free time with him the last weeks, I can easily detect the tension in his balled-up hands and the faint frown between his brows. I know it's because of me. I just hope he'll give me a chance to explain.

I walk to his table and plop down in the chair next to his. He doesn't lift his eyes from the book.

So, I tag on one earphone and try with a lame, "Hey."

He still doesn't look at me. "Didn't expect to see you here. Or ever again." The ice filling his tone reaches my skin and makes me almost shiver.

"I'm sorry. My father is an asshole, I didn't..."

"Fucking stop with the puppy eyes!" He finally turns to me as a chiding "shhhh" coming from somewhere in the library makes him lower his voice to an angry hiss. "Don't know your father, but there was definitely an asshole standing in front of me yesterday."

"I know. I-I turn into an idiot when I'm around him." I try to grab his hand, but he slides it under the table. Fuck, this is bad.

"No shit!" he mutters. "Don't want to hear any excuse you came up with now."

"Don't push me away," I growl. Another "shhhh" interrupts me, and I see Spencer

closing his books and shoving them inside his messenger bag. He stands up and yanks on his jacket before heading for the exit without waiting for me.

When we get outside, he doesn't stop walking as he focuses his glare straight ahead.

"I'm not pushing you away. Seeing you with your father was an eye opener. As you said, you are a puppet. You have a life planned, and there's no place for me. You had your gay experiment, now go."

"No," I bark, angry at how easily he's disregarding me and what we have. At how stubborn he is.

"Yes," he counters.

"No. I want more."

"No, you want dick. Look around, you can find it anywhere. You're a popular athlete for fuck's sake."

He's right, but, "I want your dick!" I grab his arm, but he jerks back.

"This"—he moves his finger from me to him—"was a bad idea from the beginning. We are from two very different worlds—planets. Let's call it quits now and move on."

I can't believe my ears. "Is it that easy for you? To just dump me and go on with your life?"

His silence scares me.

"Talk to me. I deserve an answer!"

“No, it isn’t fucking easy, and that’s precisely why we need to stop now before you leave me again, hurt and broken!” He gasps, and moves his hand over his mouth like he didn’t intend to utter those words, but they just slipped out. His glowering eyes turn glassy, and he resumes his angry walk, almost jogging now.

Damn it, I shouldn’t have gone away like that. I should have explained to him what was going on. But just like him, I’m not used to having someone I can confide in. It’s weird how a few weeks with him can change everything.

“Baby, it’s too late to stop. Can’t you see?” I try to soften my tone.

He shakes his head. “Oh, I can see perfectly.” We reach his apartment, and I follow him up the flight of stairs until he gets to his door. “I see all the reasons why this won’t work.”

“See the other ones then. The ones that make you want to continue.”

He opens the door and throws his jacket and bag on the floor.

“You mean the fucking.” He turns around and fixes his glare on my face.

“No!” I slam the door behind me. “I mean the way one minute you make me smile and the next burn for you. Your capacity to calm me down by holding my hand. The way my stomach makes a somersault every time I see you. How your fingers searched for me in bed when I moved away. Also...”

He suddenly erases the distance between us and jumps on me, crushing his mouth over mine. It’s not a kiss but a retribution. It’s brutal and merciless, all teeth and ruthless fingers clawing at my back. Is he fighting against me or what I make him feel?

I realize that talking is a waste of time since he's not willing to listen, so I have to show him.

He's wrapped all around me, legs and arms. I grip his ass in one hand and hold his face with the other as I start to respond to his conquering tongue. I tilt his head to the left and take charge of the kiss, giving him long, slow licks and deep sucks. My lips and tongue growing hungry for his taste.

The all-consuming passion that hit us from the first moment our bodies touched in that shower explodes between us. He starts humping me, rubbing our cocks together as I walk us to his bedroom.

Spencer slides down my body and starts taking off his clothes as he tells me to strip. When he's done, he moves to his bedside table to grab the lube and lies down on the bed. After pouring some on his fingers, he starts prepping himself right in front of me.

One finger goes in smoothly and another one joins soon after. "Come here. This will be your last lesson," he dryly declares.

Like hell, it will .

He's jerking his dick slowly, moaning as he adds a third finger and starts pumping them. I toss my cap and the rest of my clothes somewhere on the floor and join him on the bed.

I know he's still fucking angry at me and that sex is his way of avoiding his deeper feelings for me, but my aching dick has taken control over me at the moment, turning me into a caveman. I need to fuck Spencer, to possess him, own him, to pour into him all my over-the-top desire and longing, filling him so full of me that he'll never try to dump me again.

His cock is leaking profusely on his abdomen when I kneel between his open legs.

“No, sit,” he orders, pulling his fingers out as I push my back against the headboard. He straddles me, my hands fall on his hips as the light hair on his legs brushes against the sides of my thighs. I’m trembling all over with anticipation and desire. I try to kiss him, but he lifts his body up and grabs my cock from behind, brushing the head against his slicked, puckered hole.

I grunt, cock eagerly lurching. “Want to fuck you so damn much, never wanted anyone more in my life,” I confess, hoping my sincerity will reach him. He doesn’t smirk at me like I thought he would. He freezes, finally focusing his heated eyes on my face.

I delicately cup his face, and he lets me. “Hey, are you okay?”

“No.” His jaw ticks, his eyes lower. “Why can’t you just let this be a fuck?”

“Because this”—I imitate his previous gesture with my hand pointing between us—“it’s more.”

“Not enough.” Under his anger I can see how vulnerable and unsure he feels. I know he’s thinking about yesterday and the way I turned my back on him. He wouldn’t care if we were just a fleeting arrangement with an expiration date.

“You got it all wrong. My father is not good enough for you, baby. Meeting him... I was scared he’d drive you away from me. That seeing the way I am with him would disgust you. I couldn’t let that happen. I can’t lose you. I won’t.” I try to infuse my resolution into every word.

“How do you keep doing that? Surprising me?” He blows out a breath and covers my hand on his cheek with his. “I’m fucked.” A small smile kicks up his lips as a lonely

tear rolls down his face. The weight that has been pushing on my shoulders since I left him disappears.

“Not yet,” I joke, loving the sound of his low chuckle. I kiss him lightly, a gentle brush, and then lick the saltiness off his cheek.

“You have a monstrous cock, I should be nervous, but I’m not,” he states, making me snort a laugh.

“Monstrous?” I smile smugly because I’m proud of my size, but nobody ever called my dick that.

“Stop that. Or I won’t let you fuck me.” His threat is empty. I can feel how much his wiggling body wants me inside. Plus, he’s pouring lube on it.

“Won’t let me fuck you with my monstrous cock?” I grunt a breathless laugh.

His lips pucker in annoyance, but I can see the mirth in his eyes.

“Are you sure about this?” I turn serious. “There’s no turning back after I take you,” I warn him, because there’s no fucking way I’m going to let him go after tonight.

He closes his eyes for a moment and when he opens them again the sheer beauty and the fierce power of his feelings toward me pour from his deep hazel pools inside me just before he shoves his hips down and impales himself all the way down my thick nine inches.

He shouts in bliss as I groan in overwhelming pleasure. Tight, so fucking tight, it sucks pre-cum right out of my slit. I grab his ass in one hand and tag his head down with the other for a dominating kiss.

He's mine, fucking mine. From his dark red hair to his pale, freckled skin, amber alert eyes, and long, strong fingers. His quick mind, badass fighting skills, sassy replies, and never-back-down attitude, all mine.

When he grinds on my lap, pushing me deeper, I break the kiss to let out a deep grunt. He starts riding me fast, bouncing that sexy-as-fuck butt up and down my dick, his beautiful lean body moving on top of me, using my cock for his pleasure. All that smooth skin covered in ink on display, I want to discover every curve, edge, and valley with my tongue.

God he feels fucking amazing, and if he keeps hammering those hips, I'll blow inside him too soon. I grab his hips and hold him still as I begin pushing inside him, slow and steady. It drives me almost mad, the feel of his walls stretching around my cock as I thrust up and then clenching and squeezing around me as I move back out.

"You're infuriating," he hisses, sinking his black nails into my pecs and then moaning soon after. "Ahhh. So good."

"Your ass, I swear to God, baby, every slide of my dick inside you is pure bliss," I growl, grinding my teeth against the feeling of ecstasy at being inside him. I stare right into his glazed eyes as I roll my hips, opening him up more, creating a space for my cock and my cock only.

"You're so damn big." He whimpers as I start fucking up into him a little rougher. His expression is one of pure lust. His hard cock jolts between us, spreading pre-cum on our skin. He keeps squeezing my pecs and pulling on my nipples, sending jolts of electricity all over my body.

"You like feeling me stretching you? Making you full?" I lick his neck and bite lightly on the tattoo on his shoulder. I want him to smell like jasmine and sex and me.

“God, fuck yeah.” He grabs his hair with his tattooed hand. The inked eye is daring me to fuck harder, hammer deeper.

Never felt this overwhelmingly deep pleasure. It wants to burst out of me, to flood out of my pores and scatter into the cosmos. And it’s all because it’s Spencer. My Spencer.

He contracts his inner muscles around me, pulling me even deeper. And I can’t hold it anymore. My balls draw up tight, and I let bliss surround me, filling him to the brim with cum, blinded by the most powerful orgasm I’ve ever felt.

I hold him tight against me until my brain turns on again and my heart starts to slow down. I move my head back to look into his eyes. There’s still wariness there, mixed with want and fear. And since words don’t seem to be enough for him, I need to prove to him even more how much I need him.

“Spencer, I want you to fuck me.”

SPENCER

His words keep whirling inside my head as the first finger slips through his pucker. He grunts and pushes his ass higher, moving toward my hand.

He’s belly down on the bed, legs bent and spread wide, forehead on the mattress, hands on his ass cheeks, holding them open. A wet, submissive dream. All those tanned muscles under me, golden locks spread on the sheets, the scent of cinnamon and sex in the air.

After a few minutes, I’m driving three fingers inside him, making him moan every time I thrust.

My ass stings, and I feel more of his cum trailing down my thighs as I stretch his hole. He almost wrecked me with that massive dick of his. Even more with those soulful eyes. He looked at me like I was his entire world while our bodies were joined. It melted my heart and assuaged all of the anger and part of my doubts toward him.

Feeling him come inside me gave me more satisfaction than an orgasm ever had, his warm jizz stuffing me, rolling down my balls, slicking me from the inside.

Then he goes and says he wants me to fuck him. My head almost exploded then and there. He had slowly withdrawn the length of his cock. And it had felt awful. Like he was depriving me of what was mine. Leaving me open and exposed, hollow. I'd bitten my lip to halt the little whimper of loss from slipping out. And then I'd heard the strangled sound he'd made. "You look fucking hot, baby," he had whispered, staring at my slick, gaping hole just before he kissed and licked it, only once, unfortunately—we'll get back to that.

He keeps calling me baby. Baby. Baby. Baby. I...like it. Too much. Want him to say it again. What have I become?

I scissor my fingers and crook them until I find that spongy spot inside him that turns him crazy.

"Shit!" he groans, as I press against it again. He makes incomprehensible noises while fucking himself on my fingers. It's hot as fuck; my dick agrees as I give it a couple of slow pumps.

"I want inside you. Ready?" I ask, not able to hold off anymore.

"Yeah, I'm ready."

I want to shove my cock in his ass, feel him strangling me while I piston my hips over and over. That's the only way I fuck—rough. But I can't do that. Not with TJ. I need to be gentle since it's his first time.

My hands tremble when I place them on his back. Fuck, what the hell is wrong with me? Am I nervous? It's his first time, not mine. But I want it to be amazing. Mine was passable at best and a little painful. We were both sixteen, horny and clueless. This is not like that. This feels like...something. I've never had sex that means something until him. Because TJ is right, we are more, so much more.

I close my eyes against the happiness spreading inside me, trying to fight against it, since I'm not used to it. Then I open them again when he starts fidgeting under me.

“Do it,” he begs so damn sexily. He turns his head toward me; our dark gazes lock and don't waver as I start pushing into him. The ring of muscle yields easily, and my cockhead is quickly sucked inside the warmest hole I've ever fucked. He hisses, and I stop, caressing his back.

“Breathe. You're doing so good,” I encourage him.

“More,” he moans after a couple of seconds, and I give it to him. When I'm half inside, sweat runs down my spine and my teeth hurt from all the gritting. I'm trying to control myself, but I can't stop my hips from bucking. Shallow thrusts, my tip goes in and comes slowly out, stretching his tight, pink hole. The sight makes my eyes cross.

“Fuck, baby.” The emotion filling his voice makes me shiver with lust and hope. And I can't resist anymore. With a smooth thrust, I bottom out. He gasps, arching his back as I moan in delight at the tightness surrounding me.

“Okay?” I ask, receiving a vigorous nod in reply.

His hands fall on the sheets, and he props his arms up as he starts to move against me, tentatively at first. A moment later, he's fucking my cock with abandon, letting out the sluttiest sounds.

“Holy shit! Spencer, so good. So fucking good.”

Feeling my length inside him while my own gaping hole is still wet with his cum makes me reach a new level of horny.

“Keep bouncing that ass on my cock, TJ.” That jiggling every time he takes my dick inside is hypnotizing. I spread his butt cheeks to get a better look at our connection. He's sucking me in like a pro, and I start to rock my hips.

“Yes! Fuck me,” he begs again, his eyes back to mine. I can't look away from the flames burning there. The redness painting his cheeks. His tongue peeking between his parted lips.

I start a fast tempo, loving the wet sound of his virgin ass being fucked for the first time.

“Your ass feels divine, TJ,” I pant. “So good at taking your first cock.”

He gasps. “Yes, want your cock.” He's jerking himself—fucking love athletes' stamina.

“Don't stop. Right there. Fuck it harder.” Damn, he's turned wild. He loves to be nailed. He's a slut for it. And I'll be the only one knowing that.

The possessive thought turns me feral. I grab his hips, and as soon as I start hammering away, he cries out my name in a pleasure-drenched voice as he starts coming.

“That’s right. Come on my cock, squeeze my cum out,” I growl as he clenches around me repeatedly. Out of nowhere, my orgasm crashes into me. And it feels like it just keeps going on and on and on. I fly so fucking high, and when I come back down to earth, I’m still pumping my cock inside him, shivering at the feel of his cum-filled hole. His hips barely move, just a gentle push here and there while I give him lazy thrusts that make him moan as I enjoy the echoes of the most amazing orgasm I’ve ever felt.

I roll on my back, taking him with me, my dick still tucked inside him as my cum drips down his balls. My arm falls on his waist, and he immediately grabs my hand, lacing our fingers. Even his hair smells like cinnamon, how is that possible?

“Fuck, we didn’t use condoms,” he mutters.

I think about it. I love to feel slippery with his cum and to stuff him with mine. I don’t like to have barriers between us. “Are you clean?” I ask him.

“Yes. And I’ve never done it without a rubber,” he explains.

I wait, and when he keeps silent, I frown. “Aren’t you going to ask me?”

“I trust you.”

I’m baffled. “Why?”

“I just do.” After a couple of seconds, he asks, “Can you trust me?”

Can I? Will he hurt me again? He probably will without wanting to. And that I can bear. It’s okay. What’s not okay is the fear of being abandoned again.

“Promise me you won’t leave me,” I whisper. His body tenses, then he untangles

himself and turns to face me.

“Who left you?” His voice is soft and caring. It makes me purr like a cat and annoys me at the same time. Perceptive fucker.

“My father bailed before I was born. My mother was an addict, who left when I was a kid, and a couple of years later, my aunt and uncle decided I was too much for them and dumped me in a foster home. I changed foster families three times before I ended up on the street.” An echo of that old pain tries to rise inside my chest and almost rolls down my eyes. I take a big breath and blow it out, willing the ache to leave my body as well. “So the question is, who didn’t leave me?”

I don’t see pity on his face, only anger on my behalf. It eases the tightness in my chest, knowing that he cares so much.

“You’re fucking amazing.” He grips my chin and leaves a hard kiss on my lips before pressing his forehead to mine. “I won’t leave you. Ever. From the first moment I met you, I couldn’t stay away. I need to know where you are, if you’re happy or annoyed, if you need me, if you’re reciprocating my consuming thoughts.” His confession brings happy tears to my eyes. It’s hard, but I push them back.

I stroke his cheek, and he tilts his head, leaning into my touch, rubbing his skin on my palm like an eager fucking puppy.

“Those sweet, brown eyes. I couldn’t escape them, even if my whole being kept screaming at me to turn around and run.” My candid words bring out a glowing smile on his lips. I kiss them, trying to swallow some of his happiness, to make it a part of me. A part of him to carry with me always.

“Come to the game this Friday,” he asks, when our mouths finally part.

“Is your father going to be there?” I hazard, not knowing why I’m asking him that.

“No. He never comes to my games. And even if he was, I’d ask you to come anyway. I learned my lesson.”

“I’ve faced people much worse than your father.”

“I know you’re a badass, baby.” He smirks, and I can see the admiration in his sparkly eyes. I would preen like a peacock if I wasn’t exhausted. Didn’t sleep a peep last night.

“Are you also aware that I know nothing about football?”

“I noticed that, baby, when you called Lamar Jackson the quartermaster or when you asked how teams score a goal.” He chuckles at my expense.

I glare at him, earning a laughing peck on my lips. “So why do you want me to come tomorrow if I’m so ignorant on the matter?”

“I need you to learn about football since that’s what I’ll do with my future, NFL or not.”

His words shock me. “What about your father and your family business?” Did he find the courage to grab his life by the balls?

“Let’s just say that my mother is finally redeeming herself,” he says cryptically, and what he adds next turns my mouth slack and my hands into fists.

eight

Felicity: a state of happiness

SPENCER

“Come on answer me!” Lori insists as we walk down the stairs between the rows of bleachers at the football stadium. “If you were forced to mix your DNA with an animal’s DNA, which animal would you choose? And why?”

This will be the first time I’m watching TJ play, and I feel on edge for some weird reason. Asking Lori to come with me might have been a wrong move. Like me, he knows nothing about football. He agreed to join only to ogle the players. “Face to butt,” he said.

It’s good to keep my mind busy and not let it fall down the doubt-filled rabbit hole, though, even if the distraction is in the form of a mad-as-a-cow, impossible friend.

“A lizard. I’d be fast, ectothermic, have exceptional eyesight, could live anywhere, and smell with my tongue and also detach my tail—that’s a cool trick,” I finish. “You?”

“A koala.”

My foot stops in midair as I look back at him with a confused frown. “Why?”

“I’d be incredibly cute and so...smushy.” He shrugs. Fuck, his craziness is hard to

beat.

I finally find our row. TJ said these are the best seats in the stadium, lower level around the fifty-yard line—whatever the hell that is.

It's fucking cold. I rub my gloved hands and roll my shoulders, fighting against the shivers rushing down my body. Lori is attracting quite a few interested gazes. The neon red wool hat with a huge black pompom at the top could be a reason, but his plump lips and the confident way he carries himself are the real magnets.

He arrived earlier at my apartment, bringing a bag full of makeup, nail polishes, and winter accessories, all matching the team's uniform colors. He applied a red eyeliner and black eyeshadow on my eyes and then painted the number fourteen on my cheek—TJ's jersey number. He also painted my nails red and black, and wrote a big-ass sign that says "TJ's Bitches" with arrows pointing down at us.

Lori opens his Vuitton bag and takes out a tall tumbler, a big burgundy blanket, and a pair of binoculars.

I pull my red knit hat lower on my forehead as he places the warm checkered fabric on our laps. "Do you have a stalker kit in there?" I joke.

"No, but that's an idea." He taps his black and red nail on his chin. "You look nervous, what gives?"

"What if his team loses? Will he ask me to come to another game or label me a jinx and?—"

He stops my rambling by placing his whole hand over my face, which I promptly swat away.

“Have you suffered a recent blow to the head?” He rolls his eyes at me.

“Hey, nutso! Words hurt,” I retort with a glare.

“Oh, sorry,” he says with a voice too sweet for my liking. “Have you suffered a recent blow to the head?” he repeats using a feign cheery tone. “Come on! That’s the only explanation. You’ve been doing the dance with no pants with the quarterback for weeks now and revealed it to me only yesterday.”

“Tackle,” I correct him. “TJ is a defensive tackle. Of that, I’m sure. I wrote it down, see?” I take off my glove and show him my palm.

“I have a two-part question for you. First, are you kidding me? And second, are you really bloody kidding me?” His high-pitched voice catches a few people’s attention. My glower makes them mind their business again. “I fucking knew it! It’s a Krampus miracle!”

I huff with annoyance. “Stop with this Krampus nonsense.”

He ignores me. “You didn’t fuck the guy I hooked you up with that night because Thor was in the picture already.”

“That’s an asinine nickname,” I comment, doing my best to avoid a reply. The fact that I have feelings for TJ doesn’t mean I want to announce it to the whole stadium.

“Quit with the sophisticated language. You let me write his number on your sodding cheek! Either you are a clone or you are on team whipped-and-owned.”

“Sometimes I don’t listen to you. I just look at your jaw going up and down,” I taunt him.

He ignores me. “Did you show him the dark side of the moon?”

“And that jaw never seems to stop.”

“Straight to Ur- anus and finishing with the Milk- y Way.” He smirks knowingly because his dirty thought train is going in the same direction as mine.

I try, failing, to stifle my smile. “You’re certifiable.”

“And you did all the above. Again. It’s a Krampus miracle. My Spencer-Dancer is happy.”

Yes. I fucking am.

The crowd around us comes alive, cheering and screaming as the Wolves—TJ’s team—starts filing out onto the field. Then I see him running, number fourteen. My soul hums with pure undiluted lust and something else. Something warm and scary that curls my lips up and pushes me to my feet.

He stops in the middle of the field and looks up right in my direction, pointing a finger at me. Embarrassment warms my cheeks as I see the people near me look curiously around and halt their eyes on me and Lori—who’s jumping up and down, holding his homemade sign high.

“Lord in hell! This is brilliant! I need to post this.” He takes a quick picture of me and then starts tapping on his phone. But I don’t care, my eyes are on TJ joining his teammates in a close circle.

“That’s a huddle,” Lori suddenly says. “The team captain or quarterback usually holds it before each offensive play.”

I raise a questioning brow at him, and in response, he pulls a Football for Dummies book out of his Mary Poppins bag.

“The only thing I knew about football was how comfortable jockstraps are. I needed to educate myself,” he clarifies.

Just when I’m contemplating grabbing the book for a look, someone sits next to me. The smell of expensive cologne makes me turn their way, and I freeze. It’s TJ’s father, Taylor William Francis Moore the Third—I might have googled him after I saw him with TJ two days ago.

Stiff back, sour expression, and cold eyes. Can’t believe he’s TJ’s father.

“You know who I am, correct?” he utters in a superior tone, eyes on the football field.

“You’re talking to me therefore you know who I am,” I reply with the same tone. He must be here to see me since TJ said that his father never comes to watch him play.

“Do you know who I am?” Lori suddenly asks, catching TJ’s father’s icy gaze for a second before he moves it to me. I’d laugh if the situation wasn’t so grave.

I grab Lori’s arm to stop whatever sassy statement he has ready. This doesn’t concern him.

“I certainly do, Mr. Anderson. Your background is quite...colorful.” His expression turns to disgust for a moment.

“That’s one way to describe my past,” I snort, while inside, a cold fury is slowly rising. I won’t let old memories weigh me down.

He lowers his supercilious gaze on me, his eyes quickly cataloging my inferior traits.

“Let’s cut to the chase. How much?”

I feel Lori tensing near me, but I tighten my fingers around his winter jacket’s sleeve.

I feign ignorance, tilting my head to the side.

“How much to disappear from my son’s life?” Mr. Moore clarifies. He doesn’t deserve to be called a father, especially TJ’s.

“What life? The one under your dictatorship?” I retort heatedly.

“You know nothing about my relationship with Taylor.”

“I know more than I’d like, and it’s total bullshit. Your soon-to-be-ex wife told him the truth about his grandfather’s trust fund. There’s no clause that says he must work for your company. He’ll get the money next year anyway.”

“Lies. My wife is an addict,” Mr. Moore hisses.

“TJ talked to his lawyers”—I even asked Gabe and Lori to double-check the papers—“They confirmed that if he decides to work for your company, half of the trust fund will be transferred to it. Odd, TJ was never informed of that, nor of the fact that your company is on the verge of bankruptcy,” I repeat what TJ told me a few days ago. Mr. Moore is a fucking dick who has disgustingly used his son all his life.

“You little shit, you don’t know what I’m capable of,” Mr. Moore hisses, looking ready to pounce on me.

“I’m not afraid of you. Bring it on,” I growl, ready to punch some justice into his pompous face. TJ defended me against his teammates, and I’m going to do the same for him.

“One wrong move, and you’re dead.” Lori smirks menacingly at him. I know Gabe is into something shady. His whole family is. But I never asked, because I respect the guy. And I love Lori.

The crowd suddenly shouts and screams, and I notice that the Wolves have made a goal...no, touchdown. TJ’s helmeted head is tilted up toward me, arms in the air, before one of his teammates jumps on him.

Mr. Moore’s face morphs into a satisfied, evil, hateful smirk. “I see right through you. You’re scum. You think Taylor will keep you? When he discovers your past, he’ll discard you. He’ll never settle with trailer trash from the worst neighborhood in Chicago. You are just a pastime until he gets his hands on his trust fund. Then he’ll toss you aside. And if he goes to the NFL?” He sneers. “He’ll leave you behind like yesterday’s trash.”

“No, he won’t, you snobbish asshole,” Lori retorts, earning a glare from Mr. Moore.

The fury inside me has reached its peak. This piece of shit needs to leave now, or I’ll rearrange his face and probably end up in jail. “I’m tired of listening to you. Get the fuck away from me and TJ,” I snap, adding a hint of threat to my words.

He slowly stands up and takes his time to adjust his gloves, to prove that he’s not afraid of me. “You are nothing, an insect ready to be squashed.” Then with a derisive sniff, he walks away.

“See you soon, stylish asshole!” Lori calls after him, then he turns to me. “Blimey! That was intense.” I hardly hear him as he keeps talking.

Mr. Moore’s words keep echoing in my ears. Dump, never settle, toss aside, pastime, scum, trash, squashed.

“Spencer, hey!” Lori suddenly flicks my nose, making me blink. “Snap out of it. Don’t let him get inside your head. That twat was spewing shit.”

I nod. All the bastard wanted was his son’s money, and when he discovered he couldn’t get it, he hurt me by feeding my doubts. He went right for the jugular, leaving me naked and open, like a wound bleeding out. He must have paid for a very detailed background on me since he knew where to aim.

I can’t believe that my sweet TJ came from that...arsehole.

I stand up, moving the blanket away from my lap. “I’ll grab something to eat,” I hurriedly say to Lori as I start walking toward the stairs. He calls after me, but I keep going.

I need to move. I can’t breathe properly, still smelling his disgusting cologne on me. Anger is riding me hard, and doubts whirl inside my head. I need TJ. I need to feel his adoring eyes on me and his reassuring arms around my body. It took only three weeks with him to turn me into a needy idiot.

I hear a long, loud whistle. Then the crowd roars with excitement. I glance back and then blink multiple times as I see TJ rapidly climbing the stairs between the rows of bleachers until he reaches me. He’s not wearing a helmet, and his messy hair and red face are damp with sweat.

“Baby, where are you going?” he pants, his fearful eyes flickering between mine.

“You... The game,” I splutter, pointing at the field, not understanding what’s going on. Did he leave the game to talk to me? I’m pretty sure that’s not allowed. Is it?

“Where are you going?” he asks again, and this time, I hear the anxiousness in his voice.

“To grab a churro to shove up your father’s ass in case he comes back.” I lift my palms up. “Don’t say it’s not healthy food, his flaccid rear won’t mind.” I try to play it cool, but my voice comes out trembly. Inside, I’m a fucking wreck.

“Come here.” He climbs another step. Two more, and we will be chest to chest.

I shake my head. Everybody is staring at us. I feel on display. Vulnerable. The silence is deafening. I push a weak hand to his chest, but he moves another step. And then? Then he slowly goes down on one knee.

It’s like a sledgehammer to the heart seeing him lowering down. Everything stops. Stillness surrounds me while every muscle inside my body tingles. My skin feels prickly. My insides twist and my mouth turns dry.

“Bloody hell!” I hear Lori’s gasp.

“It’s my turn to give you a fancy word,” he says, taking my hand and threading our fingers. “You’re incandescent. There’s a sense of radiance and inner light about you, that captivates and illuminates the world around you. It fucking ensnared me, you did, Spencer Anderson. You guided me toward a better path, the right path with your perseverance, integrity, and...balls of steel.”

I take a trembly breath while I hear some giggling around us.

“There’s nobody but me and you, since the day you landed on my lap. The most beautiful and annoying man who’s ever elbowed me in the guts,” he adds.

I feel a tear rolling down my cheek as I smile at him. He swept away all my doubts in less than a minute.

“You’re going nowhere unless I follow you, baby,” he says earnestly.

Oh God, he needs to shut up, or I'll fill this stadium with tears. "That's quite clingy and stalkerish," I joke; my voice sounds wet.

"And you love it."

Fuck yes, I do. It certainly helps with my fear of abandonment.

"And you love...me?" he asks hesitantly in his softest voice.

I gasp, more tears falling down. His brown puppy eyes shine brightly with hope.

I let out a shaky exhale and nod again, my heart racing inside my chest.

"Of course, he bloody does, Thor!" We both smile at Lori's comment.

"Just as much as I love you," TJ confesses.

I close my eyes and suck in a trembling breath before looking down at him again. I shake my head. He frowns and part his lips, but I don't let him utter another word. I cup his face and tug it toward mine, foreheads touching.

"More," I whisper on his lips just before he captures mine in a passionate kiss and lifts me up in his arms without leaving my mouth. Screams and claps and some booing—homophobic jackasses—rise from the people around us.

When we part, I'm panting and he's smiling like a loon. It makes me chuckle.

"I have a game to finish, probably going to be benched for the rest of it, but I don't fucking care," he tells me. "It was worth it. You are worth it, baby."

Baby. Baby. Baby.

“I’ll go back to my seat.” I pat his chest.

“Give me those lips again before I go. I need all the luck I can get.” His puppy eyes are gleaming with mirth. I’ll never be able to resist them, will I?

“What about your lucky cap?”

“You’re all the luck I need, Spencer.”

I smile and kiss him deep and fast. And then I follow his tight ass until he reaches the field.

“Team whipped-and-owned,” I hear Lori singsong.

TJ Moore fucking blindsided me. And whipped or not, he surely owns my heart.

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epilogue

Eudaemonia: state of being prosperous or extremely happy. An expression for those moments when life seems to align perfectly.

TJ

God my baby's ass is the answer to all my prayers and the source of all my dirty thoughts.

I slap one cheek hard, loving the redness forming on the pale, freckled skin and the way it jolts and bounces under my hard thrusts.

“Fuck! Do me harder,” Spencer moans, arching his back and bucking his hips faster. Wall sex in one of my frat bro's rooms is quickly climbing my list of favorite places to fuck my boyfriend.

“You couldn't wait to reach my room, eh, baby? Your greedy hole needed a pounding.” And I always give Spencer what he needs.

But I think that this hot quickie has something to do with the way a couple of girls were ogling me at the party downstairs. Some of them don't care I have a boyfriend, even though I don't even look at them. Or maybe that's why they keep hitting on me, I am a challenge for them. Still, they keep their distance. Everybody knows that Spencer is very jealous and quite possessive, and that I am obsessed with him.

Hence the hot, dirty kiss we exchanged in front of everybody present in the living

room—I even slid my hand in Spencer’s jeans to hold tightly on his ass as I ravaged his mouth. Then he pulled me up the stairs, and we ended up in this room. And I’m in fucking heaven.

Need to send some flowers to those girls. On second thought, better not.

“Keep milking my monstrous cock like that.” He snorts, hearing the monstrous part, and then groans when said appendage hits his prostate.

I’ll never get tired of this sight. My raw cock sliding smoothly in and out of him as he moans all his pleasure, louder than usual—he wants those girls to hear.

I push him against the wall until my bare chest is against his shirt-clad back. He cranes his head back—covered in my lucky cap, it drives me savage to see him wearing it—on my shoulder and curls both arms behind my neck, spreading his legs more and rolling his hips.

“Need to feel you deep,” I growl on his cheek as I grab the eye-tattooed hand and kiss it.

He slightly tilts his head and gives me a wolfish grin before whispering darkly, “Wreck me, jock!”

How did I ever live without him?

SPENCER

My cock lurches as TJ’s dick reaches places nobody ever has before. He’s so big, it fills me completely, and it’s like I’m never going to feel empty again.

“Oh, baby, you feel so fucking good. Love this hole. Love to stretch it. To fill it. To make it all wet.”

He spits on it. I'm already slick with lube, don't really need it. But he knows how horny I get when he turns neanderthal and all dirty on me.

"Want your cum. Get me wetter." I should feel embarrassed by how needy I sound, but I want TJ to know how irremediably crazy I am for him.

"Want me to fill you up good?"

I nod, unable to utter a word when he grabs my cock and starts a frantic pace.

His low, possessive growl near my ear does wild things to my increasing desire and my mending heart.

He grips my ass in a bruising grasp, surely leaving more fingerprints on my skin. I feel so owned. Like I finally fucking belong.

"Put your load in me. I want it so bad." I grab his hair and look at him with my mouth open in a crazy smile. "I love you, TJ."

"Jesus Christ." He pounds my ass like a wild animal, and I take it, love it, own it. "You are fucking mine!" he snarls. I'm pretty sure everybody in the house heard his possessive statement.

Then he stiffens behind me. The first shot that spurts from his tip makes us both moan in ecstasy. He slides a hand lower and squeezes my cock and balls in one big hand while still shooting his cum inside me and pushing me over the edge. My entire body jerks as I let out a shocked gasp. My thighs tremble wildly, ass clenching around his massive size, my head spins, heart and breath stopping for a moment, and I feel lightheaded, like falling. But TJ is ready to catch me and holds me up in his strong arms.

He chuckles in my ear. "I fucked you so good you almost blacked out. I'm damn

flattered, baby.”

I snort and thread our fingers on my wet stomach.

“I love you, too,” he whispers his growly confession in my ear. It reaches my heart filling it with so much elation I’m afraid it might explode.

The music from outside the room comes back, as does the chatter and laughter in the corridor. We exchange a sweet, languid kiss before TJ pulls out of me.

We are at his fraternity’s house party just before winter break. His bros decided to celebrate yesterday’s Wolves victory, and compelled by my jealousy, I couldn’t resist blowing my boyfriend in one of his friend’s rooms, which escalated to wall fucking. Best idea ever.

TJ and I are quite famous around campus now because of his kneeling love confession. And the whole team—except for a few known assholes—asked me to come to every future game and sit in the same seat and give him a kiss, next time before they start playing. He was almost given a suspension by the referee.

His friends call me Spencharm, since that was the best game they played. I huffed at their superstitious idiocy, but I’ll do anything for TJ. Even getting acquainted with the rules. I have to admit, though, that seeing my man getting all caveman on the field turns me the fuck on. Honestly, I’m not complaining. It won’t be such a hard task to watch his team. Plus, if the last game is an example, he has a lot of adrenaline to release afterward, and my ass is the perfect place to do it.

TJ is going to find an agent in case he gets drafted in the NFL, which is a big possibility. I’m a little preoccupied about having a long-distance relationship, primary because I can’t be without him. But we’ll cross that bridge when we get there. I could always transfer to another university—Lori totally supports me. Living without him is not an option anymore.

I take a moment to admire his large muscles on full display and his hair falling in smooth waves a little above his shoulders. It's always a feast to look at him and know he's all mine. This monster of a man belongs to me—his monstrous cock as well.

He told me this morning that he wants to give half of his trust fund away to charities to help abandoned kids. Like I was. How can I not adore him and his big heart?

“Are we still going to spend Christmas Eve with your mother?” I ask him, as I clean my ass as best I can with some tissues I found on the desk.

“Yep.” After the way she helped him, TJ decided to give her a second and last chance.

We'll come back for Christmas vegetating around my apartment, fucking, eating bad food—TJ's only exception—and watching Christmas movies: Gremlins, Planes, Trains, Automobiles, Elf, Die Hard, etc...

I adjust his cap on my head. It's too big but he told me how much he likes to fuck me while I'm wearing it. His phone vibrates, and he smirks as he pushes the speaker button. “Hey, Frodo! Slapped anybody today?”

I frown at that as I pull my jeans on. When did Lori slap someone in front of him?

“Not yet, unfortunately, three more hours before midnight, though, finger crossed.” Lori sounds hopeful.

“Why are you calling my boyfriend?” I ask him in mock annoyance as my hand slides under TJ's shirt to brush the new tattoo he got from Ash. The date of our slippery shower encounter is inked on his left side. I have the same one on my right.

“Sod off, Spencer. Thor and I had a wager, and I won!” I hear his eager clapping. “Fifty bucks, jock! I always win, don't I, boys?”

“Who are you talking to?” TJ asks him.

“My fiancés,” Lori answers shamelessly.

“Plural?” TJ mouths, before he gives me a wolfish smile. “Having two Spencers doesn't sound bad to me. Kudos, Frodo.” He lowers his head and nuzzles my neck, letting out a contented sigh.

“Awww,” Lori responds. “You are so in lurve.”

“Like you aren’t. You love double!” I huff.

My gaze lifts up to TJ’s. Those deep brown, sweet puppy eyes sparkle with love as he looks at me. I don’t think I could ever be happier than this. A carefree laugh slips out of my mouth as I tag my boyfriend’s forehead down to mine.

Me. Happy. Such a foreign feeling until a few weeks ago. Until TJ and our meet not cute.

Fuck! Nutso is right. It is a Krampus miracle.

THE END