



In Love With My Stepfather

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Category: Mafia

Description: After her father dies, 18-year-old Aria Callahan has to get used to a new reality when her mother tells her that she is getting married to a powerful, mysterious man named Sebastian Devereux. But the man her mother is going to marry isn't just incredibly good-looking; he's also dangerously attractive.

At first, Aria fights it, but then she becomes obsessed and is torn between disgust and desire. Sebastian's forbidden love draws her in, and dark secrets come to light: his criminal empire, a bloody kitchen, a dangerous enemy named Marco, and a past that ties Sebastian to everything she thought she could trust.

Aria's world falls apart into l**t, lies, and deadly promises as she tries to choose between being loyal to her mother, getting over a lost love, and the thrill of a man she should never touch. But nothing is what it seems, not even her own heart.

He was supposed to be her stepfather. But now he is her biggest temptation and maybe even her downfall.

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“Aria!” I heard my mom yell from the basement.

I sat up in bed and put my book down next to my nightstand. I went downstairs and saw my mum sitting at the dining table with her hands crossed in front of her. I thought to myself, “Important business.”

“Yes, Mother?” I sit down across from her and raise my eyebrow at her.

“Sweetheart, we have a very important dinner tonight.” My mom got up from her chair and sat down next to me.

I made a face that said, “I’m not sure what you’re feeling,” as I tried to read her face.

“Mom, what’s this really about?” I ask with a little bit of doubt. I straightened up and leaned to the right to look at her.

My mom reaches over and takes my hand. “You know I love your dad.”

“Mom,” I whisper, my voice barely audible as my nerves start to kick in.

“Meet my fiancée at this dinner,” my mother says as she looks down.

Wait, what? Did I hear you right?

“You’re kidding.” I laugh out loud, but my mom gives me a serious look. It wasn’t a joke.

“Please just do it for me. The dinner starts at 7.” My mum begged before getting up and leaving, leaving me with questions and thoughts.

I stomp up the stairs to my room, angry that my mum kept this from me. She told me that she would never get over my dad and that their love would last forever and ever.

I combed my hair while tears of salt ran down my face. I don’t mean to sound rude, but she should move on. It’s been two years, and I’m ready to.

I whisper to myself, “This isn’t helping,” as I look back and forth between my two thoughts. I held the black dress in front of me and tried it on. This one is definitely not the one.

I put on the other dress, which was red against my body, and tilted my head to the side to see which one looked better.

“How about this one?” My mom’s voice echoed through my room. When I turned around, I saw her leaning against my doorframe with a beautiful white dress in her hand.

“I’m fine,” I said, clearly still angry about all this fiancée bullshit.

I tried to hurry to my closet, but my mom was quick enough to grab my elbow and stop me. I turned my head quickly to look at her, and she was crying.

“Don’t cry,” I say quietly, relaxing my tense face. Maybe I’m being too hard on her. “I’ll put on the white dress.”

“Thank you, Pumpkin.” My mom smiles weakly at me as she hands me the beautiful white dress. “I’ll wait downstairs; please hurry,” she says, patting my shoulder before leaving.

The food better be really good.

I looked at myself in the mirror and patted down the white dress that hugged every curve of mine with a sweet shine. I put on my rosy lip gloss and let my hair down from the bun I had it in. As I walked outside to join my mom, my blonde hair started to flow all over the place.

“Why didn’t you brush your hair?” she asked before she locked the door to the house.

“I got lazy.” I shrugged my shoulders to show how relaxed I was.

As my mom pulled into the parking lot of Maison du Luxe, a very fancy restaurant, my thumbs started to fidget with each other.

My mum is giving off very happy and excited vibes as she jumps out of the car and almost flies to the doors. I, on the other hand, sat in the car and thought about what I should say or think about the whole thing.

I said to myself, “You got this, Aria.”

I got out of the car with a smile on my face. I walked up to the door and almost tripped, but I quickly stood up straight. The doorman laughed, and I smiled back. So what if I’m clumsy?

As soon as the doors opened, my mouth dropped open like an idiot.

The walls are painted a light pink colour with gold lines on top. There are diamonds everywhere, and rich people walk around like nothing new is happening.

“Pumpkin.” I heard my mom call my name, so I slowly turned around.

My mom was there in her beautiful long blue dress and perfectly styled blonde hair. My eyes went to her hand, and another hand was holding hers.

I slowly looked over this person. He was wearing a black suit that hugged his big biceps, which made me think that he worked out a lot. My green eyes turned into light blue ones, and my breathing got heavier.

His hair was light brown and curly at the ends. His jawline was perfect, and his lips were full and slightly parted. All I could think about was how much I wanted to smear my lip gloss all over them.

“Are you okay?” My mom was right next to me, looking worried, and this guy was just standing there with his eyebrow raised.

His eyebrow is even sexy as hell.

“Yeah,” I said quickly.

We start walking towards this very attractive man, and my heart starts to race.

My mom said, “This is my daughter, Aria.” I held out my shaky hand for him to take.

“Hi, I’m Sebastian, your mother’s fiancée.” Sebastian runs his finger over my hand and then shakes it, making me breathe deeply and squeeze my legs together.

Shit, he’s my mom’s fiancé.

“Do you have to pee, honey?” my mum asked.

Oh my god, mom, that’s not cool.

“I don’t think so,” I said, and then I hit myself in the head.

I didn’t notice that Sebastian was laughing, but I was still holding his hand. He looked at me strangely before I pulled my hand away from his.

“Let’s eat,” my mom says to try to get rid of all the awkward energy. I nod in agreement.

We all walked over to the table. My mom and Sebastian sat next to each other, and I sat next to my mom, trying to avoid looking into her fiancée’s cold blue eyes. I mean, he looks so young, and he’s already getting married.

“Aria, do you have any questions for us?” my mom asked.

“A few.”

“Go ahead and ask.” His deep, husky voice was music to my ears.

I blurted out, “How old are you?”

“Aria, that’s rude,” my mom said, but Sebastian cut her off.

“28.” He gives me an answer.

I thought about it for a second; that’s a big age difference.

“Mom, aren’t you a little too old for him?” I said without thinking about what I was going to say.

Oh no

“Aria Claire Callahan.” She says my full name in an angry voice that makes me cringe.

Sebastian laughed a little, but my mom gave him a look that showed she was angry, and that made him stop laughing right away.

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“I know, that was too much,” I said.

“You’re forgiven,” my mom said with a sour smile.

“I have one question for you, Aria.” The way he said my name made me want to moan.

“Yes?” I stuttered like a fool.

Sebastian took a long pause, and I couldn’t help but stare at him because of how perfect and strong his features were.

“For god’s sake, we’re moving in with Sebastian,” my mum says, and I choke on the food I was eating.

I put my hands around my mouth to help me swallow the food.

“You’re kidding,” I said as I drank some water.

“Not at all.” She smiles at Sebastian and then at me again.

“Mom, it’s only been two years since Daddy left.” I whispered-yelled at her, and her face fell when I said my father’s name.

“Don’t talk about your dad, Aria.” My mom sounds angry and doesn’t believe me.

“Right now that you have your new, young husband, you forgot all about my dad, the

man you loved.” I yelled, not caring that we were in a nice place or that Sebastian was right there. I slammed my fist on the table and said, “Who gives a f**k about him, right?” It was very dramatic.

“Your dad is gone, Aria. He’s never coming back. You really need to move on.” My mom yells, and the coldness of her voice makes me jump.

I couldn’t believe how she spoke to me. My eyes were watery as they moved from my mom’s to Sebastian’s. There was something else on his face that I couldn’t quite put my finger on, even though he looked sad.

“Have a nice dinner.” I quickly got up from my chair and threw my serviette on the table.

“Honey, I didn’t mean to—” My mom tried to talk, but I cut her off.

“Nice to meet you, Sebastian,” I said.

I stormed out of this fancy, annoying restaurant with tears running down my face. My mom didn’t even try to stop me.

I didn’t have my dad, my house keys, or the keys to my mom’s car. I’m a mess, so I started walking to the only place I knew I’d always be welcome.

“Maya.”

I knocked on my best friend’s door, crying and shaking because it was so cold outside and I didn’t have a jacket.

Someone I never thought would be there was standing right in front of me when the door opened.

“Is that you, Aria?”

“Is that you, Aria?”

I couldn't say anything; I was completely numb. First, the whole dinner thing, and now this. Is there any way my life could get worse?

“You're back in town.” My voice was barely a whisper.

Caleb said, “I just got here tonight.” He looked around outside, and when he saw that no one else was outside with me, his dark brown eyes met my light green ones.

God, he still looks so good.

“This was a mistake.” I tried to turn around, but Caleb was quick enough to grab my wrist and pull me against his chest. My breathing got heavier, and my hands started to sweat right away.

“Don't touch me, Caleb.” I pull my arm back to my side.

“Just get inside,” Caleb says. His voice is deeper and stronger now, and his eyes are darker than they were three years ago. He didn't have gel in his hair like he used to; now, it was messy and lighter. He was tanner than usual, and his style had changed a lot.

“No, I'm leaving.” I turned to leave, but he grabbed my wrist again and pulled me back.

“I'll drive you.”

“No, you're not,” I said, pulling my arm away from his strong grip.

“Yes.”

“No.”

“Yes.”

“Jesus Christ, I’ll go with you guys. Just stop going back and forth.” My best friend Maya comes up behind Caleb with a look of annoyance on her face.

I said, “Maya, you take me. I’m not getting in the car with him,” while glaring at Caleb.

“Damnit! Just let me take you, Aria,” Caleb yells in anger.

Maya was looking down at her feet to avoid the awkwardness as if her legs were suddenly interesting.

“Fine, but Maya, you’re coming.” I started to stomp towards the car, and Maya quickly and quietly followed me.

I’m in the back right now, and Maya is in the front. My best friend asked a question, and no one else was talking.

“What happened tonight?” Maya asks.

“My mom.” I huffed as I leaned against the car window and watched the lights in the distance turn off.

Back in the day:

“Maya, where is he?” I yelled as I barged into her room. My messy blonde hair and

Caleb's long t-shirt with nothing under it but my skin probably made me look crazy.

I wore dark eyeliner the night before, but now it looks like I have two black eyes.

"Aria, who are you talking about?" Maya gets up from her bed and walks over to me slowly.

"Caleb, your brother!" I yell.

"Aria, he left," Maya says as if she has known this for a long time.

Those few words made my whole world fall apart.

"What?" I asked, confused and not wanting to believe anything she had just said.

"He left for Louisiana two hours ago. Did he do something? Is that why you're looking at him? He pranked you, huh?" Maya laughs. "Classic Caleb. What did he do? Wait, he left an exploding confetti box at your door?"

My face goes pale, and everything starts to spin. She thought of all the theories, but none of them were right. He promised he wouldn't leave me, but he did anyway. He lied to me and took something I could never get back.

Maya asks, "Aria, why are you crying?" with concern.

I didn't know I was crying until she said something.

"Maya, I gave him my virginity." I cried as I fell apart in front of her. My legs gave out, and I fell to the floor, where she caught me.

"Please tell me you-"

My urgent nod confirming her new, correct theory cuts her off. She holds me while I scream and shout, and she puts her head on top of mine.

“Shh, it’s okay,” Maya hums.

“I care about him, Maya,” I said through tears.

“Shh.”

Flashback is over:

“Aria...”

“Aria.” Maya’s worried look brought me back to the present.

“Yeah?” My voice broke, and the sadness came back. This time, I couldn’t get away from it.

“Are you sure you’re okay, Aria?” Maya puts her hand on my knee.

“I’m fine,” I said with a weak smile.

I opened the car door slowly and walked to the door of my house. I was too scared to even look back at Caleb one last time.

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He still has a hold on me, and now that he's back in town, it's going to be hard on my mind.

I banged on the door as hard as I could to wake up my mom. Caleb's car pulled out of the driveway, and my body relaxed a little more now that I knew he was gone. I kept banging on the door until it finally opened.

"I don't want to hear it, m-"

My sentence stopped when I saw dark blue eyes, the same ones that make me shake all over, Sebastian's. I couldn't help but look at his bare chest. His strong chest made my eyes widen. He was only wearing sweats and nothing else. His hair was messy and horrible, and I wanted to run my fingers through it.

He opened the door wider so I could walk in, but he didn't move to the side, which meant I had to squeeze through his abs and the door frame.

He decided to trap me between his chest and the door frame as I was trying to get through. His nose was almost touching mine, and his hot breath fanned against my pale cheeks. His head was slightly tilted, and his eyes were starting to drill holes into me. I held onto my thigh with my hand as I got more nervous. My lips parted, wishing I could feel his juicy, pink ones.

Sebastian walked past me and leaned in closer to my ear. "Your mother was worried," he said in a low, sexy voice.

"I-I."

I couldn't even say anything. I was so focused on how close he was to me that my mouth got dry, and I needed water. I closed my legs tightly because I felt something strange down there, and Sebastian looked down.

"Do you need to pee again?" Sebastian said with a wicked grin. I opened my mouth to say something, but nothing came out.

"Don't forget to lock the door, Pumpkin," Sebastian said my name so softly that it made me shiver. He winked at me before going up the stairs, which left me confused and, oddly enough, wet.

I learnt something after last night with the whole Sebastian thing. I want Sebastian, but not in a stepfather way. He made me feel needy and sexy in a way I've never felt before, which made me nervous. Maybe it's because I'm getting ready to move in with him.

I kept telling myself, "Aria, he's engaged to your mother," as I packed up my clothes.

"Aria," I heard my mum call my name in a sweet voice.

I turned around with my boxes in my hands, and my mum was leaning against the door frame.

I thought, "What does she know about last night?"

"How are you doing, sweetie?" my mum asks with a smile.

I let out a sigh of relief.

I said very clearly, "I'm fine." I still remember the dinner where she yelled at my dad. I won't forgive her until I want to. I might be a bitch, but who cares?

She crosses her arms over her chest and says, “Honey, I’ve already said I’m sorry. What more do you want?” She is angry, and her face is scrunched up.

“Can you give me a new mum?” I said as I lightly pushed her out of the way and walked down the stairs.

I put my box next to all the other boxes in my mom’s car. I carefully push all the boxes back, making sure to cover every inch of space. I had to fit everything in somehow. I haven’t seen Sebastian all morning; all I’ve seen is my mum freaking out about packing and other things.

“Aria, make sure to get Simba,” my mum says as she stands by the car door.

“He’s my cat. I won’t forget him. I’m not like you; I don’t forget my loved ones.” I roll my eyes at her. “Or should I say, husband?” I smiled at her in a kind way.

In a matter of minutes, I saw my mom’s eyes go from light to dark. She took a deep breath and let it all out.

“Just get the damn cat, Aria.” She opens the door to the car and gets in. I carefully picked up Simba, my orange Persian cat that my dad gave me for my 13th birthday.

“Anyway,” I say as I walk back to the car. I ask, “Where’s Sebastian?” in a casual way.

My mum says, “He left in the morning.”

I buckle up while Simba cuddles up to me and my lap. I look at my mum, who is watching the road. There was no noise at all, just an uncomfortable silence.

I turned on the radio and the song “Fetish” by Selena Gomez blasted through it. My

mom quickly looks at me. She's probably getting sick of the music. She calls this kind of music "nasty music." She acts like a saint, but she's had s*x and has a daughter.

I sang along with Selena, sounding almost like her. "You got a fetish for my love."

"You said you didn't sing anymore." My mom smiles and quickly turns to look at me.

"I don't."

"Sweetheart, your voice is amazing. It sounds like you've been working on it."

"Thank Dad for my amazing voice." I copy her tone when I say "amazing."

My mum just frowns and keeps looking straight ahead at the road. She was right about one thing: I have a great voice. My dad signed me up for singing lessons, and he has a great singing voice, too. But after he left, I stopped singing and everything else.

After an hour of awful music and uncomfortable silence, we finally got to Sebastian's house. It's not a house; it's a huge mansion.

"No way." I couldn't believe what I saw.

"Don't be rude, Aria," she said before getting out. I rolled my eyes. I opened the door to the car and got out.

My mom opened the doors to the mansion like she owned the place, which makes me think she's been here a lot. A woman in a black and white maid dress came up to us quickly.

I thought that was something that only happened in movies.

“Mrs. Devereux.” The housekeeper bowed. She really did.

What the hell

“Where’s Sebastian?” my mother said in a rude way. She didn’t say hello or even look at her.

Mom thinks she’s tough and big now that her husband is a sexy goddess and has a lot of money.

I was really shocked. My mom never acts like that. I look back and forth between her and this older woman.

“I’m sorry she’s rude; you don’t have to bow. It’s Venessa Callahan,” I said with a smile. “And I’m Aria Callahan, but you can call me Aria.” I held out my hand.

I heard my mum laugh in the back, and the older woman looked down and didn’t take my hand. I raised my eyebrow in interest.

“Is she bothering you?”

I turned around, and Sebastian was there out of nowhere. His deep voice bounced around the room, making the air feel thicker. I moved back a little because he was too close for my comfort. I totally forgot what he asked because his minty breath and beautiful face were too much for me to handle.

“No, dear,” my mother says. She holds his hand tightly, making Sebastian wrap his arms around her. It was gross how hard she kissed Sebastian’s lips.

I stood there like an idiot, almost throwing up at the scene in front of me, until someone spoke.

“Miss. Callahan, would you like me to show you to your room?” said the woman in a maid’s outfit.

I turned to look at her. “Yes, please.” I smiled softly, and she nodded and quickly took my arm.

“Don’t touch,” my mom growled.

The woman let go of my hand right away. I turned my head quickly and gave my mum a look that said, “F**k off.” I looked my mom in the eye while I grabbed the lady’s hand and smiled at her. I heard my mom say something, but I didn’t pay attention.

We walked up the stairs hand in hand, and I couldn’t stop looking at how big and beautiful this place was. I didn’t even know we were in a room. The walls were white, and the floors were light brown wood. It was beautiful and just my style.

I touched the bed in the middle and the little nightstand next to it. I found a picture frame with a picture of me as a little girl with my mom. I was about 7 years old, and my mom was in her late 20s. We were happy then.

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I took the frame and put it in the drawer. Then I turned around. I could see that the woman was looking at me from behind. When she saw that I was looking at her, she dusted off her dress and started to walk towards the door.

“Can I have your name?” I ask.

She stopped and turned around slowly. “I’m Lucille,” she said.

“Thanks a lot, Lucille.” I smiled and waved goodbye. I guess she didn’t know what a wave was because she just looked at my hand moving and walked out the door.

She might not have been able to wave.

I put Simba on my bed, and he quickly jumped on my new, big bed. I laughed when I saw it. I put my bag on my bed and began to take things out of it.

I walked around the room, putting some of my clothes in the closet and some in my drawers. I chose to go downstairs and show up after I was done. The sky was dark, and there was no light in the house. I tiptoed down the stairs in my tank top and booty shorts, but I did put on a bra just in case.

I walked by a lot of doors before I found the stairs. I walked around the place until I found the big kitchen. I was so excited that I ran to the fridge. I opened the fridge with two doors, and it had everything you could want.

I whispered-yelled, “Thank you, food goddess!” and looked up at the ceiling as if I were talking to a god up there. I opened the fridge and took out a big bowl of

cherries.

“Thank you, Sebastian, you mean.” A loud voice came from the kitchen, and it made me jump up and drop the bowl of cherries.

I looked at every door in the room, trying to figure out who spoke. I walked over to the wall and flipped a switch. To my surprise, the kitchen lights came on. When I saw him, I gasped softly. Sebastian was sitting at the table with no shirt on and a cup of milk or something white that I couldn’t see very well.

I tried to hide how nervous I was by acting bravely. I pointed to the floor where all the dark red cherries were and said, “You made me drop the cherries.”

“It’s not my fault you’re jumpy,” he said as he took a sip of his drink.

“I was in a stranger’s house, the lights were off, and you chose to speak in your horrible deep voice,” I said, confused because I was trying to figure out how he didn’t get that I was scared.

Sebastian tried to fix my sentence by saying, “Stepdad’s house.”

That makes me feel bad. I mean, I want to have s*x with him, and now he called me father’s name, ew.

I said, “You’ll never be my stepdad,” as I bent down to pick up the cherries. I picked them up one at a time and threw them back into the bowl.

“Look at me.” Sebastian’s voice was low and harsh. It also got closer to me.

I looked up and saw Sebastian standing right in front of me in a pair of joggers that hung dangerously low. I was on my knees looking up at him, and his d**k was right

in front of me. I swallowed the big knot in my throat. He gently knelt down so that we were at eye level, which made me bite my tongue.

Sebastian's eyes turned a darker shade of blue as he asked, "What are you thinking about?" I never saw this before, but he has freckles all over his face, not just light ones.

I completely ignored his question and lightly traced his freckles with my fingers. This made him breathe harder.

"Nice freckles," I said, still holding his cheeks with my fingers.

He shivered when I touched him and spun me around so fast that I got dizzy. I was still on my knees, but my back was against his chest, and my breathing got heavier, too.

Sebastian took my hand that was next to my hip and traced my finger lightly up and down my chest. It felt good all over. I closed my eyes and leaned my head back against his shoulder as he ran his finger down to my stomach. I could still feel my finger, but I was so hungry that it was driving me crazy. My finger brushed against the lace on the top of my pants, and he stopped completely. I growled very quietly.

I slowly opened my eyes and raised my head off of his shoulder. "Why did you stop?" My voice was hoarse.

Sebastian whispered in my ear, "It's time for bed, Pumpkin," and I shivered.

Then his heat was gone, and I was hot and wet again. I went upstairs and forgot about the cherries. I heard it when I walked by my mom and Sebastian's room.

"Harder, Sebastian," my mom whispered.

I heard her scream with pure desire. What a lucky bitch!

I was so mad that I stomped into my room and slammed the door. I was so angry that I lay flat on my bed and stared at the plain ceiling.

He turns me on and leaves me hot, and then he has s*x with her. I won't let him touch me or turn me on again. I won't let myself look like a fool again.

"Wake up, pumpkin." My body started to shake, and I groaned as I stretched. My mum is right next to my bed right now, watching me like a hawk.

"Mom, can I help you?" I say in a sarcastic tone. My mum suddenly pulls out a pink dress.

"Wow, now you can pull dresses out of your b**t."

"Just get ready, Aria." My mom rolled her eyes, and I looked at her like she was crazy.

"Venessa, sweetie, the sun isn't out yet, so I'm not either." I made fun of her high-pitched voice and threw the blanket over my head. Mom hates it when I call her Venessa. She always says, "I'm your mom, call me mom," and so on.

My mom yells, "Aria Callahan, get up right now!" and holds up the blanket.

"Fine," I said in a low voice.

I got up and walked to the toilet. My mom was right behind me. "Mom, can I go to the toilet by myself?" I slammed the door in her face before she could answer.

“You better be ready in 10.” My mother shouts. I turned on the shower, not listening to a word she said.

After my hot shower, I started on my makeup; I did my makeup wildly. She has to be crazy if she thinks I’m going to wear that ugly pink dress with pigtails; I’m going to wear the most revealing outfit I own.

I changed into some shorts and paired them with a lacy pink crop top. My breasts were still covered but still showing, and I smiled. I let my wavy blonde hair down and brushed it with my fingers.

“Aria, hurry up!” my mom yelled from downstairs. I quickly put on my shoes and went downstairs. I knew my mum would be in the kitchen, so I walked in there instead of going to the front. I leaned against the door to the kitchen and smiled as I waited for her to turn around.

“Good morning, mom.” Her face went white when she saw my body. “I look that good, huh?” I said, smiling sweetly at her and commenting on her facial expression. I could almost see smoke coming out of her ears.

“Aria Claire Callahan, go change right now!” she screams. Her loud, annoying voice makes the house shake.

“Um, no.” I went over to get a green apple. Red is too basic; I like my things sour.

“Go change!” my mom yelled again. I put my hands over my ears to try to block out her voice.

“Stop freaking screaming,” I said in a loud voice.

“Aria, you’re out of control.”

I yelled back, “I don’t give two flying f***s!” in the same tone as her.

“My mum was going to say, “Your father—” before she was cut off.

Sebastian walks into the kitchen with a cup of coffee and asks, “What’s with the screaming battle?”

I had a lot of confidence, but it went away as soon as I heard his voice. Sebastian has a very strong presence, but it doesn’t work for me; it only works for him. I didn’t like how weak Sebastian made me feel.

“Aria won’t change her clothes!” my mum says, annoyed.

Sebastian’s eyes were locked on me, and I started to feel uncomfortable, so I crossed my arms over my chest.

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“Sweetheart, go to the car. I’ll talk to her.” Sebastian kissed her on the head. I was praying that she wouldn’t leave, but she nodded and walked out.

Damn

Sebastian stepped in front of me after my mum left, and I stepped back. I gulped nervously when he looked straight into my eyes.

Sebastian says, “You’re playing with fire.” I step back again, and he steps closer.

“I like living on the edge.”

“And the edge you’ll get, Pumpkin,” Sebastian said. My nickname was very slow and deep. He stepped in front of me again, and I took my last step back before my body hit the wall. He put his hands on the wall behind me, trapping me in, and I whined quietly.

“Mr. Devereux, you’re a little too close,” I said in a shaky voice. My mouth was getting dry and needed water or some other kind of hydration.

He looked at me for a second before leaning down to my ear. “Don’t act like you don’t like me being close to you,” he whispered, and I tightened my thighs.

I opened my mouth to argue with what he said, but nothing came out. I wanted to shout, “You’re with my mum, you jerk,” but my mouth wouldn’t let me. I wanted to slap his perfect face, but my body wouldn’t let me move. I was stuck. He saw that I was having trouble, and a smirk appeared on his perfect, evil mouth.

“Miss. Callahan, you’re very tempting.” Sebastian leaned in close to my ear again and whispered so softly that I shivered.

“And y-you’re very annoying.” I tried to sound strong or even sure of myself, but I couldn’t even pretend to be.

His eyes were going through a lot of different feelings, and so were mine. The horn of the car made us both jump. He shut his eyes and ran away. I held on to my shorts to calm down after that heated moment.

“Jesus, give me power.” I looked up at the ceiling and prayed to God.

I got all my strength back and went outside. Sebastian was driving, my mom was in the passenger seat, and I was in the back seat.

“Great, you didn’t change.” My mom rubbed her head to try to get rid of her headache. This is going to be a long day.

I hate not talking; the silence is driving me crazy.

“Mom, where are we going?” I asked, feeling anxious.

“Oh, Sebastian is taking us to lunch for work,” she says.

I’m freaking out right now. I should have just worn that ugly pink dress. His business friend is going to think I’m a whore.

“Cool,” I said quietly, pretending that nothing was wrong, but inside, I was screaming.

The whole drive was an awkward silence. My mom didn’t even say anything, which

was surprising because she always had something to say. We arrived at our destination after an hour and thirty minutes. I kept track of the time. I was shocked to find out that it wasn't a restaurant but another mansion. When I got out of the car, my shorts went up a little, and I quickly pulled them down. I heard someone clear their throat, and when I turned around, Sebastian's eyes were full of l*t.

"You don't look so good, Sebastian," I said. He wanted to play a game, so I guess I'll play along even better. He looked confused, and I smiled a lot.

"Oh dear, are you sick?" My mum checks his temperature by putting the back of her hand on his forehead and then his cheeks.

I couldn't help but smile in victory.

"I'll take care of that later, but something just caught my eye."

I couldn't help but think that his words had bad intentions behind them, even though they were so innocent. I stopped looking at him and started walking. My mom and Sebastian did, too. We got to the front of this big house, where a butler and a maid were standing by the door.

"Sebastian Devereux and my family," Sebastian said. I hated the sound of family.

Both of them nodded, and the butler opened the door wide. I quietly followed my mom.

The whole place was great. I could smell rich all over these walls. Everything was so clean and bright, unlike Sebastian's house, which was dark and shady. There were a lot of flowers and other plants here. They must really like plants or something. I think we're in the dining room because there's a big table in the middle with flowers on it.

“You made it,” a voice from my right said, which scared the hell out of me.

A man in a suit said, “You made it.” He was probably a few years older than Sebastian. I saw that all men do that: Sebastian and this stranger quickly shook hands hard.

Sebastian says, “This is my fiancée, Venessa, and her daughter Aria.” I shook his hands gently and smiled warmly.

“Salvatore Moretti.” He said his name with a smile.

Uncomfortable

Salvatore’s eyes followed my outfit, which was so f*****g bad. I looked like a whore who works the streets in her free time, but they were all dressed so nicely and modestly.

“Where’s your wife and daughter?” Sebastian asked. I’m glad he took the focus off my outfit.

Salvatore led us to our seats and said, “My wife couldn’t come, but my daughter should be here soon with her fiancé.” “My son and his wife will be here soon with their kids.”

I sat next to my mum, and Sebastian sat next to me. I was glad I didn’t have to sit next to Sebastian because he would have made me act dumb and nervous.

Salvatore sat across from us, and a few minutes later, his son came in and said hello. Salvatore’s son lives in Norway and doesn’t come to see him very often. His wife was beautiful, with red hair and a model body. I would look like an 11-year-old boy next to her. While we waited for his daughter to arrive, we kept talking about random

things.

“Please excuse me while I go help them with something. My daughter is here.” Salvatore stood up and left the table.

I turned my eyes back to my plate, which was full of big pieces of food.

“So, Aria, do you like living with Sebastian?” Salvatore’s son’s wife asked me.

When she said Sebastian’s name, I froze. I didn’t know how to respond to her question. Sebastian makes me doubt everything about myself. Should I tell her that? Maybe he makes me doubt how much I love my mother. I didn’t tell the truth.

“All that matters is my mom’s happiness,” I said while my fork played with my food.

“You’re such a good girl. I hope my daughter believes that when she’s older.” She smiles at the thought of her daughter getting older.

I knew I was lying, but I just nodded. I was too embarrassed to look at Sebastian to see how he was feeling. You don’t feel this way about him, and you definitely don’t mean it.

“I guess we have one more guest,” Salvatore says as he walks into the room. I look up to meet his eyes. There was a pretty brunette girl next to him whose hand was locked with someone I thought I would never see again.

“Caleb,” I said quietly, and everyone stopped talking as soon as I said his name. Caleb looked surprised to see me, and when I realized he was her fiancé, I felt a twinge of sadness in my heart.

“Aria, what are you doing here?” asked another voice. Maya looked over her

brother's shoulder.

She looked sorry for him; she knew he was getting married and didn't even tell me. Under the table, my mom gently put her hand on top of mine. I felt dizzy and like I didn't belong as my whole world started to spin. How could Caleb get married? I thought we would be together forever, but I guess I'm dumb for thinking that was possible. My heart raced and my breath stopped.

"Let's talk business." Sebastian once more turned the focus away from me and back to himself. We looked at each other as he tightened his grip on the fork, which made his knuckles turn white.

Everyone sat down, and Salvatore put another plate on the table for Maya, who was sitting next to Caleb and his fiancée. I kept my eyes on my plate and slowly looked up to see that Caleb was already looking at me.

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My eyes saw some kind of feeling. I didn't want to cry in front of everyone, so I turned my eyes away from him and looked at Salvatore's daughter. She was too perfect, and I hated everything she did, even how she breathed.

"Is that Caleb?" my mom whispered in my ear. I told my mum everything that happened between me and Caleb that night. The next morning, I just nodded. "Caleb, I have to admit, I've been dying to see you," she says, cutting off Sebastian and Salvatore's business talk. Everyone got quiet and looked at my mum with a confused look, and so did I.

"It's not the place." Maya smiles at me as if to say, "You need to control your mum."

How could she do this to me? How could she?

"Mom, I'm fine." I took a sip of my water. Sebastian was now staring at me, and he looked worried. Or maybe my head was just playing tricks on me.

"No, Pumpkin," my mom says and shakes her head. "Caleb, how was it ruining my daughter?" my mom asked angrily. My face turned red as I looked at Sebastian.

"It wasn't like that, Mrs. Callahan." Maya stood up for her brother, but I couldn't shake the feeling that something was wrong. Maya always stands up for me. My eyes were drilling holes into Maya's head, and my brain kept trying to come up with reasons why she was defending him and not me.

"Mom, leave it." I pulled on her arm to get her to look at me again, but it didn't work.

Salvatore's daughter stood up for Caleb and said, "I won't let you talk badly about my fiancé." I was angry and stood up to protect my mom.

"Don't you dare stand up and try to belittle my mother? Know your place." I said this slowly so she would understand better, and I tilted my head as I said it.

"Sit down, Aria." Maya then stood up, and my best friend stood up to argue with me. I can't believe her; she's supposed to be my sister, but she's defending this stupid model.

"Just tell your dog to sit down, Maya, or I'll do it myself." I moved my chair back a little to make more room for safety reasons.

"I like to see you try," Salvatore's daughter said with a smirk.

"Sweetheart," Caleb tries to say, but I jump forward towards his fiancée and cut him off.

She threw herself back to avoid my hands before I could even wrap my hands around her small neck. I start to fight back against the hands that caught me, but they tighten around my waist, stopping me from moving. I kicked and punched, but they didn't move.

"Get her out!" Salvatore yells.

"The business deal is off, and it's all thanks to your dumb daughter." I heard Sebastian say this behind me. I stopped and slowly turned around. He was the one who caught me. My mom is still sitting down, but she can see Sebastian's hands around my waist. I stepped on his foot, which made him let me go and moan in pain.

"I hate you, Caleb." I was so angry that I didn't even notice I was crying until one of

them hit my arm. I quickly wiped them away and pushed past Sebastian to the door, leaving everything and everyone behind me.

I ran my hands through my hair as I walked outside. I was on my way to the car when someone grabbed my hand.

“Please let me explain,” Caleb begs. I turned my head quickly to look at him. Caleb Wolfe was crying, and so was I. I couldn’t help but let my eyes soften a little.

Caleb gently pulled me in closer. “Aria, you’re the only girl I’ve ever liked. I love you, Aria.”

When he talks, my heart skips a beat, but then I remember everything he put me through: leaving me after I gave him something I could never get back and coming back with a fiancée. I shut my eyes and then opened them again. I slowly pulled my hand away from his until it was back on my side.

“I never want to see you again.” My lips trembled, and Caleb’s face fell when he heard what I said.

“Don’t do this, Aria.” Caleb takes my hand again, and his eyes are full of fear.

My heart wanted me to take back what I said, hug him, and tell him I loved him, but my brain knew better. My mind showed me a picture of his fiancée from the past and everything that made me cry about him.

I took my hand away. “Bye, Caleb.”

I kept walking towards the car, and now I’m crying and my heart feels like it’s been broken. It feels like I just lost something I was holding on to for dear life, but it slipped right out of my hands.

I heard my mom say, “Awh, Pumpkin.” She held me close. I turned around to show off my red, puffy face, which had tears streaming down it. She hugs me even tighter, and when I look into Sebastian’s eyes, I see that he is conflicted, as if he is mentally fighting a battle between his heart and brain. I tore my glare away from his.

“I’m fine,” I said and pulled away from my mom. “Can we just go?” I ask, but it sounds more like a plea.

“Of course, sweetie.” My mom says, but she seems a little unsure before she says anything else. “Pumpkin, Auntie Nora texted me earlier and asked if I could spend the night at her house to help her with some divorce papers.”

“Oh.” I raised my eyebrow. “Mom, I’ll be fine.” I quickly understood why she was hesitant; she wanted to be with me because I was having a mental breakdown but couldn’t.

“Are you sure?” my mum asked.

“Yes.” I tried to sound sure, but crying a few seconds ago didn’t help.

“I’ll go home with Aria so she won’t be alone,” Sebastian finally said. His voice sounded more like a demand than an offer.

Please, God, let my mum say no.

“Thank you, Sebastian.” My mum kisses him on the cheek in a sloppy way. I was going to say no and argue, but I couldn’t do that anymore, so I just nodded my head.

Sebastian drove us all to our house so my mum could get some clothes. I ran to my room as soon as we got there and slammed the door. I wanted to be alone for a little while to get my thoughts in order.

I put on some shorts and a big T-shirt that my dad gave me before he left us.

I took a candle out of one of my boxes and lit it so that my room would smell great. I never get mad at Vanilla Bean. I keep thinking about how Caleb is engaged and how my best friend stood up for his fiancée instead of me. This is going to change Maya and me forever. That trust problem will always be there. She knew how much her brother hurt me and that I still loved him, but she didn't have the guts to tell me he was getting married. I took a book off the shelf and sat on my bed to read it to get my mind off of things. When I looked down at Simba, who was snuggled up against my leg, I smiled.

I chose to take a break and go downstairs to watch TV and eat ice cream. I walked on my toes into the hallway. Sebastian's office door was open, and a bright light was shining inside. I promised I was going to walk by it, but then I started to worry about ghosts and robbers. Yes, I'm that paranoid, so I decided to look inside.

"Aria, you should be sleeping, right?"

I should have kept going.

I didn't answer his question because my eyes were wandering around his office. I had never been in his office before, and it was so clean and organized. I lightly ran my fingers along his wall, and my legs quickly followed. He was watching me like a lion stalking its prey, and I stopped in the middle of the room.

"I thought you were a ghost," I said in a whisper, and the words came out rough and deep.

"Is that so?" he says.

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He had a whisky cup in his hand with just one ice cube in it. When I've seen him drink, he always has a single ice cube in his drink.

"Is to so."

Why are you so dumb, Aria? I slapped myself in the head.

"Today was interesting," Sebastian said as he leaned back in his chair and put his finger on his chin. I watched him closely, and his finger started to scrape against his soft, honey skin.

I couldn't help but look at every curve on his face. He was so hot and memorable that he made me feel hot. His hair, which was always slicked back, was now messy and free. His tie was undone, and his sleeves were rolled up to his forearm. I wanted to jump his bones right then and there.

"Aria?" He smirks with a smug look on his face.

"Uh, yeah." I swallowed hard and did my best to stay calm and sane.

"Who's Caleb to you?" I felt my heart race as he asked me the question.

"Well—" I couldn't say anything; I just stammered.

I heard him get up and walk towards me. "Aria, you need to leave right now." He stops and uses his soft fingers to lift my head. "Or I'll take you to this table right now," he whispers, and I gasp.

“Sebastian.” My lips shook as I said his name, which sounded more like a warning. He opened his mouth a little and then moved closer to my lips.

He softly says, “I should stop.”

“You should.”

Sebastian pulls me close and kisses me on the lips. I’m shocked, but my lips quickly move with the deep, strong movements around my mouth. His tongue softly pushed into my mouth, filling it with his taste.

He pulls away and rests his forehead against mine. He slowly licks his wet lips and looks right at me, both of us out of breath from the passionate kiss we just shared.

I got rid of the space between us. “What’s next?”

I don’t know where this confidence came from, but it did.

He wrapped his strong arm around my waist, and I crashed my lips into his. I scratched his face with my hands and bit his bottom lip.

I didn’t even know what I was doing. I was scared that his lips would touch mine, but I wanted more. His hands moved down my back, bringing me closer to his bulge.

That tongue of his could do amazing things when he kissed.

He threw me on top of his desk and ripped off my shorts and panties. His papers and the glass of alcohol he was drinking from fell to the floor. He pulled me closer by my thighs, and I quickly took off my shirt while he unbuckled his jeans.

“Are you on the pill?” he whispered, moving his lips closer to my ear and making me

shiver.

I quickly nodded.

“Please beg me to f**k you, Pumpkin.”

His naughty words made my body feel hot, and the warmth of his hand on my thighs was starting to melt through my skin.

I pulled his head closer to mine and lifted my naked body against his. “F**k me, Sebastian. Do whatever you want to me.” I said harshly in his ear.

There was a wicked smirk on his lips when I saw him. It was like a switch had turned on inside of him. I gasped in pain as soon as he thrust deep inside me. I held on to his neck tightly while he got used to how tight I was. As soon as the pain came, it turned into pleasure. My hips rose to meet his in the hard thrust, and he hit my G-spot over and over again.

“Sebastian,” I groaned.

“He growled in Spanish. Sebastian grabbed my hair and pulled it back, making my head arch back as he thrust harder.

His words were making me even more excited, and I could feel him deep inside of me, which made me feel like I couldn’t breathe.

I know I’ve slept with a guy before, but Sebastian was huge and had a lot more experience.

He groaned, “You feel so f*****g good.” His teeth started to nip at my neck, leaving marks, and his hand moved down my front between my lips, where he rubbed harder.

I yelled his name over and over again while I let out one moan at a time.

I spread my legs even wider and leaned against him to try to get some air. He was f*****g me hard, and he knew exactly how hard he was f*****g me.

I couldn't hold on much longer, and he couldn't either. We were both panting like dogs and breathing hard.

He roughly picked me up by my thighs, which made me wrap my legs around his body even tighter. When he slammed me against his bookshelf, all the books fell down. I held myself up by his shoulders, and my mouth was open across from his lips.

Sebastian moaned in my ear, "We're not even close to being done," and that made me wet all over again.

I was about to fight with him when he pushed back inside me, making me throw my head back against the wall. My nails dug into his shoulder blades with each thrust, and I felt my toes curl in pleasure.

My lips shook against his, and that sealed my place in hell.

"You're supposed to be my daughter."

I hear my mom's voice in my head telling me that this is wrong. What the hell am I doing?

I have to stop this right now.

"Sebastian, stop," I said in a weak whisper.

He still had me in his arms, and his d**k was still inside me. Sebastian pulled back a little to look at me, and it hit him like a truck. He pulled out and put me back on my feet, but my legs felt like jelly. He turned around to find his boxers, and I slowly picked up my pants and put them back on.

I stood there awkwardly, staring at him because I didn't know what to say after what had just happened.

“Leave,” Sebastian ordered with no emotion.

“But we just had s*x.”

“I just needed a quick f**k, and you were right there.” Sebastian leaned back in his chair and typed something on his computer without even looking at me.

I just betrayed my mother for him, and all he said was, “You’re such a bastard.” My eyes started to water.

Why do all the guys treat me badly after s*x? Is it because I’m not good enough?

“You’re such a jerk.” I took my shorts and stormed out of his office.

When I got to my room, I was crying so hard that my cheeks were wet. I slammed the door so hard that I thought I was going to knock down the whole house. I slid down the door while my hands ran through my blonde hair. I was a crying mess.

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It could have been because I slept with my mom's fiancé, or it could have been because he treated me like a whore after that.

I don't like myself.

I haven't left my room in two days, and I haven't eaten. All I've done is drink water, which is bad because a human body needs food, but I don't feel like a person anymore after what I did. For a couple of days now, my mum has been knocking on my door and begging me to talk to her or let her in, but I won't.

How can I face my mom after what I did? I haven't heard from Sebastian at all. He hasn't even begged me not to tell my mum.

"Pumpkin, someone is here for you." My mom's sweet voice came from the other side of the door. I took off my white sheets and tiptoed to the door. I bent over and put my ear to the door to try to hear a familiar voice.

"It's me, Naomi."

What the hell is she doing here?

I quickly opened the door and threw my arms around her neck to pull her closer to me. At first, Naomi was surprised, but she quickly hugged me back. Naomi is my cousin on my dad's side. In a lot of ways, she's like my sister. It's always been me, Maya, and Naomi, but after my dad left us, she left me, too.

"I can't believe you're here," I said, my voice shaking with emotion.

“I owe you a visit, didn’t I?” Her thick accent came through.

“I missed you so much,” I said with a small smile. We let go of each other but held hands.

“I knew you would come out of your room.” My mom smiles at me, and then everything hits me all at once. I stood in front of my mom after sleeping with her fiancé last night. I felt sick to my stomach, and my smile turned into a frown.

Naomi asked, “Are you okay?” She was clearly worried about my health. She gently put the back of her hand on my forehead to check my temperature.

I must have looked sick.

“Let’s all go eat at Momma’s Berry’s like we used to when you were younger,” my mom said with excitement.

No way, I don’t want to be around you or your fiancé.

“That would be great.” Naomi jumped up and down like a kid, and I couldn’t say no.

“Of course,” I said quietly.

While I got ready, Naomi and my mum went downstairs. I chose to wear my baggy denim jacket with some leggings and a white tube top.

I didn’t want to make noise, so I slowly walked down the stairs. I went into the kitchen and saw Naomi drinking water and my mum sitting on Sebastian’s lap. I wanted to stomp over to my mom and pull her away from Sebastian, but I couldn’t

because he was kissing her right in front of me. I hold the edge of my jacket tightly in my hand to keep calm.

Naomi said, "You look cute."

"Thanks." I smile at Naomi and completely ignore my mom and Sebastian.

"Come on, girls." My mom started to walk with Sebastian's hand in hers. I really want to break an arm right now.

Please stop. Aria

The ride in the car was quiet, and Naomi was shocked by how different it was here than at home. I kept looking out the window at the bright blue sky getting darker. Mom and Dad would take Naomi and me to Momma Berry's when we were younger. I miss my dad so much.

I wonder if my dad is sad that I'm not there.

My cousin and I sat together at a table outside, and my mom and Sebastian sat across from us. I didn't look at Sebastian at all.

My mom asks, "So Naomi, how is your mother?"

"She's doing great," she says. "I'm so sorry about my uncle, too; my mom told me about it."

"It's okay; we've moved on," my mom says as she kisses Sebastian on the cheek. I squeeze Naomi's hand tighter, and she looks at me with interest.

"Okay," Naomi says with a smile. Naomi asks, "Sebastian, what do you do for a

living?”

It takes Sebastian a while to answer, but when he does, the words come out easily. “I run a business.”

“Oh nice,” Naomi says.

“How about Maya and that guy? What was his name again?”

“Caleb,” I said softly. Naomi nodded quickly, and I couldn’t help but look down at my lap. “I don’t talk to either of them anymore,” I said.

“But you and Caleb were so cute together with your secret little relationship.” She says this in awe, thinking of Caleb and me if she only knew what happened.

“It’s over,” I yelled at her. I didn’t mean for my voice to sound so harsh, but it did. Naomi must have seen that my shoulders were getting tense because she quickly changed the subject.

“I’m so happy to see you guys again,” she says with a smile. “Especially with everything going on with Nora.”

“Talking about her, she’s been really sad,” my mum says.

“That’s awful.”

My mom says, “I was wondering if you could come with me to see her. She hasn’t been eating or going out. Naomi, she would be so happy to see you.”

That means they’re leaving me alone with Sebastian. I have to do something to keep them there.

“Of course I will,” she says, smiling warmly at her.

Naomi is always too nice for her own good.

“Mom, do you have to go?” I asked.

Please tell her no. I can’t be alone with him again.

“Yes, dear,” she says.

We kept eating without talking. I didn’t even try to talk to Sebastian or look at him; I just couldn’t. Naomi was talking about her college and some things that have been going on in her life lately. I was trying to come up with a way to get out of being home alone.

Sebastian said to my mom, “I have to take this phone call.” She nodded.

Sebastian went outside, far away from us. I was curious why this phone call was so important. He usually ignores his calls when he’s with us. I couldn’t help but lean over the table a little to try to hear something, but I didn’t hear anything. After a few seconds, he ran inside and grabbed his coat off the chair.

“I’m sorry, but I have to go. Something went wrong with my work package, and I need to take care of it.” He kissed my mom and turned to face me. “I called an Uber to take you home.” He left the restaurant quickly.

Sebastian is acting strange, which is strange. While my mom and Naomi ate their delicious meal, I played with my food with my fork and thought about how quickly he left. My mom didn’t even think it was strange.

After we were done eating, we all walked out of the restaurant. My Uber was waiting

around the corner, and my aunt was parked right outside. I could never go with my mom to see my aunt because she hates me. I said goodbye to my mom and gave Naomi a quick hug.

I whispered in her ear, “I love you, Naomi.”

“I love you too, Pumpkin,” she whispers back.

I walked slowly to my Uber and got in. I was confused, angry, and tired because I had so many thoughts in my head. The drive to the house was quiet and peaceful, and I liked it. If my dad ever called my mom, would she tell me?

I quickly tipped the Uber driver and then walked to the front door. When I got there, I stopped because the door was slightly open, which was strange. When I pushed the door open, my hands were shaking.

“Hello?” I yelled, but no one answered.

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When I went inside, it was so dark that I was even more scared. “Sebastian?” My voice was shakier than I wanted it to be. I was scared out of my mind right now.

I went into the dark to look for the light switch. My hands shook as I reached over and tried to turn on the lights, but they wouldn’t work.

I whispered to myself, “It’s okay, Aria. Everything is fine.”

I grabbed my phone to use as a torch as my legs fumbled around on the wooden floor.

I heard someone having a hard time, and the sound of glass breaking made me jump. It was coming from the kitchen, and my hands and breathing got heavier. I looked up at the ceiling and said a quick prayer before I opened the kitchen door. I turned on the light on my phone and shone it in the kitchen.

“Oh my god!” I yelled when I saw what was in front of me.

There was blood all over the kitchen, glass everywhere, and pots and pans all over the floor. Sebastian was dragging a dead body across the tile floor. Sebastian looked at me, and I was shaking with fear. Tears started to fall down my face. I put my hand over my mouth because the food I ate a few minutes ago wanted to come out.

“Aria.” He dropped the body and walked a few steps towards me. I backed away in fear and almost tripped over a dead body.

My hands went up to my head and pulled my hair. “What the hell is this?” I yelled in anger.

“Pumpkin, look at me.” He held my face in his bloody hand and made me look at him.

“No,” I said, pushing his hands away. The blood-stained my pale cheeks. I heard more footsteps behind me, and Sebastian reached behind him and pulled out a gun.

I screamed, “What the f**k!” with all the air in my lungs and my hands around my neck. There was something cold against the side of my head, but it couldn’t have been Sebastian because he was right in front of me.

“Well, isn’t this cute?” a stranger said behind me. My body froze in fear as I gripped this stranger’s forearm tightly. When I looked up at Sebastian, who was pointing his gun at me and the man, my lips shook.

“Let her go, Marco.” His voice was rough and deep. He sounded like he was possessed by something dark and scary. I’ve never seen this side of him before.

“Sebastian, you didn’t tell me your stepdaughter was hot,” Marco said in my ear, just loud enough for Sebastian to hear. Marco, this guy, slowly lowered his hand down my thigh. I was disgusted. “Your tears are making me even more hot stuff,” I whined when I heard his nasty voice.

“Look at me, Aria. You’re fine,” Sebastian said, nodding at me. I felt a little better, but I was still scared.

“He’ll never stop looking for you, Sebastian, especially now that you have a new family.” He laughed.

“Thanks for the fun, Marco.”

Bang

The man who was pointing the gun at my head fell to the ground, and blood sprayed all over me, especially on my shirt. I slowly ran my hand over my face to try to get the blood off. I felt sick and confused. He could have shot me if he missed.

I mumbled, “You couldn’t have done that sooner.”

“Aria, focus on my finger.” I didn’t even see him until he spoke; he moved his index finger in front of me. His finger caught my attention.

“You just f*****g killed him. You could have missed and gotten me, asshole.” I started to hyperventilate and crawled on my chest for air.

“Should I bring him back to life? He was going to kill you or maybe r**e you.” He says this angrily before kicking the dead body lightly. He just kicked someone dead.

“Who the hell are you?”

Sebastian moved closer to me and said, “Aria, you know exactly who I am.”

“Stay there!” I yell, telling him to stay where he is. “I don’t know who you are; look at all the people you just killed,” I yelled, pointing at the bloody handprint on the wall.

I was really angry, but mostly, I was scared.

“They were bad people, Pumpkin.” He hissed, getting angry at everything.

“And you might think I’m a bad person too, you crazy person.”

Beep

Beep

Sebastian held his phone up to his ear. “Come clean up this f*****g mess right now!” he yells very loudly and then throws his phone on the counter.

“You lied to my mum,” I said in a low voice. He looked up at me. “This is a lot more than just f*****g her daughter.”

He was going to say something, but he stopped.

“I can’t believe this.”

“You’re going with me out of town, and don’t even think about saying no. I swear I’ll kill that pathetic cousin of yours.” His voice was full of rage.

I couldn’t believe what he said. How could he do this to me? He’s a monster, a killer, and a f*****g jerk.

“You kill people”

He grabbed my cheeks hard with his bloody hand, and my face hurt from how tightly he was holding me. “And I always do what I say I’ll do.”

His chest rumbled as his eyes got darker, and his face became unrecognizable. “I’m only keeping you alive because I love your mother.”

I said in a teasing tone, “You love her so much that you f*****d her daughter.”

He let out a big breath.

A voice I know well says, “Boss.”

Sebastian's mouth twisted into an evil grin before he threw my chin back.

I was so scared that I couldn't turn around, so I just relaxed in the arms that I knew so well. This person turned me around so that I was facing the front of their chest.

"Caleb?" I asked. He gently lifted my chin so we could look each other in the eye, and I was shocked.

"You said she wouldn't find out," Caleb said angrily.

What the hell? Caleb knew all along that my mom's fiancé was a killer, but he didn't tell me.

Sebastian said, "Things just changed, boy."

Caleb made a fist, and his knuckles began to turn white.

"I don't want to go with you." I turned around and looked at Sebastian again.

He laughed. "I didn't ask you, you whore."

I looked at him in disgust, and I could feel the tears coming, but I quickly looked down at the floor to keep myself from crying. Caleb pushes me behind him and steps in front of me. The two men start to size each other up like buildings. He looks at Caleb with a lot of intensity, daring him to do something.

"It's fine, I'll go. Just stop it," I said as I pulled Caleb back by his wrist.

"Caleb, get the car," Sebastian hissed at him.

"You must be crazy if you think—"

“Shut up and get the car,” I said, still looking Sebastian in the eye. “I’m not a damsel in need.”

I could hear the kitchen door open and close, and Caleb listened to me. Sebastian and I were alone, and I hated him. I felt like I was going to explode with rage because of him. I tried to relax by closing my eyes. When I opened them again, he was standing right in front of me. His breath made my cheeks feel warm.

“Walk,” he said.

“What?” I asked.

“Are you deaf? I said f*****g walk,” he yelled, making me jump a little. My legs were shaky as I walked out the door, and they fought to stay upright. Sebastian grabbed my wrist and started pulling me outside because I was walking too slowly. My wrist is going to be bruised.

Caleb was already outside with the car parked. He was leaning against it with his arms crossed over his chest. He asked, “Where are you taking her?”

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“Don’t worry about it.” Sebastian picked me up and threw me into the passenger seat. I almost hit my head on the roof of the car.

“Be careful with her.” Caleb stomped over to him and stood chest to chest with him again.

Sebastian had a nasty grin on his face that told him to be careful. Caleb got the message and was smart enough to back off.

Sebastian laughs and says, “Good boy.” “And Caleb, get rid of the bodies,” he said firmly.

Sebastian got into the driver’s seat, and I looked at Caleb, who was looking right back at me. I didn’t want to look at him anymore, so I looked down. The car started to move.

I leaned back in my seat and wiped away the tears that were starting to form around my eyes. I wanted to scream or pull out my hair, but I didn’t want him to know he had won.

“Has he killed anyone?” I asked, wanting to know more about everything.

“Don’t worry, your boyfriend can’t even kill a fly.”

“Then why does he work for you?” I asked, feeling confused and scared.

“I found him in Louisiana, and he needed money, so I hired him.”

“Which is?” I finally asked, looking at him. He kept his eyes on the road and turned the wheel.

“None of your goddamn business.”

I crossed my arms over my chest, stopped asking him questions, and turned back to the window.

After that, the car ride was mostly quiet. He didn’t talk, and the radio wasn’t on. I don’t even know where the hell we’re going. I should probably ask.

What if he’s taking me to a hole in the ground to kill me? He wouldn’t, would he?

“Where are we going?”

“Somewhere.” He gave me a very short answer that didn’t help.

“Where is somewhere?” I asked again, just changing how I asked it.

“Hotel.”

“Hotel? Damn hotel. I have a life, friends, family, and a mother who is very controlling.” I said this angrily.

“Do you really think your mum doesn’t know what I do for a living or where you’re going?”

“I don’t want to relive my mom’s past with you,” I said quietly but loud enough for him to hear.

“Your dad and I are two different men who do business in different ways.”

“Right, you like to kill people in your kitchen.”

“And your dad would just do it behind your guy’s back.” He smiled, but it was clear he was being sarcastic.

I always knew about my dad’s business, but he never let my mom and me be a part of it. He kept us safe from that kind of life.

“Just take me home,” I said softly.

While he looked up at the thunderous sky, he didn’t pay attention to me. “We’ll have to stay in a hotel tonight.”

“Don’t try to change the subject, Sebastian,” I said, but he didn’t listen.

I can’t be alone in a hotel room with him. The last time we were alone, I let my mum down and so did he. I sat back down in my seat and pouted. Why does God always have to do this to me?

I can see Hotel 6 in big letters across a small building. It’s the devil’s number. He parked the car close to the door. I looked up at the rain that was covering the sky. I didn’t have an umbrella or a jacket.

I ask, “How am I supposed to get down when it’s pouring outside?”

“Simple, you open the door and step outside.” He looked confused.

You smart a*s.

I opened the car door and ran into the hotel, almost slipping on the wet floor. Sebastian walked in slowly, not bothered by the rain. People were looking at me

funny, maybe because I almost ate shit right now.

“One night in a room.” He told the man at the front desk, who quickly began typing something into his computer. One room?

“I won’t share a room with you.” I crossed my arms over my chest. He is doing this on purpose to make a sick, twisted point. His eyes brighten with interest.

“Have fun sleeping outside then.” He smiled, and a loud noise outside made me jump. Mother Nature is even against me.

I am standing at the door of our hotel room with my mom’s fiancé, who I have slept with and who has just killed people. What could go wrong?

“Are you really going to stand there like a f*****g statue?”

I rolled my eyes and shut the door behind me. I tried to hurry to the bathroom, but my hand hit the door knob before it got there. I couldn’t move anymore because Sebastian’s hand was in front of me.

I yelled, “Move!” What’s his problem with me? He’s getting on my nerves.

He whispers in my ear, “Are you nervous?” and it sends shivers down my back.

He sadly thought my anger was nervousness, but they mean two different things.

“Not at all.”

“Then look me in the eye,” he says. I could almost see the smug look on his face in my head.

I was so scared to look into his sinful eyes that I couldn't take my eyes off the floor.

I finally looked him in the eye, and as I licked my dry, needy lips, I swallowed the big knot in my throat. His eyes fell to my lips, and all of a sudden they sparkled with interest.

The air got thick, and I could smell the s****l frustration that was in the room, which made the air toxic and unbearable. He slowly and carefully raised his hand to my cheek. His hand gently brushed my cheek before he forcefully pulled me closer to his lips. Then his hand went down around my neck.

“You're my temptation,” he said softly. “And I hate you for it.”

I didn't know what to say, so I just looked into his dark, empty eyes.

He turned his head to the left to look outside at the dark, rainy sky. He was so beautiful that I couldn't take my eyes off of him. Everything about him made me think of a geek god. He still had water droplets on the side of his cheek. I don't know why, but I gently wiped them away with my finger, which made him look back at me.

“I'm sorry, I shouldn't have—”

He slammed his lips against mine with such force that it felt like he had been waiting to do it.

I fought it off at first and tried to get away from him. I pushed his chest with my hands to try to get some space between us, but it didn't work. I should have fought harder, especially since he's been treating me badly, but I just couldn't do it. He had complete control over my body, mind, and almost my soul. My body was a slave to him.

I gave up and wrapped my arms around the back of his neck to pull him closer. I kissed him with the same passion while pulling at his shirt, wanting it to be gone. He quickly ripped it off.

“Jump.” He grunted against my lips, and I did what he said. I gasped when I felt his hand gripping my a*s tightly and my legs wrapped around his body.

He throws me on the bed, and my legs fall open. I took off my shirt as quickly as I could while still kissing him. He helps me by tearing my bra off in the middle like it was nothing. That made me even wetter. He puts my right n****e in his soft, warm mouth right away, which makes me moan. He looked like a crazy lion looking for food, and this time I was the food he was looking for.

His rough eyes looked over every part of my body. He pulled back and just looked at me.

I couldn't wait any longer, so I got up on my knees and moved over to him. My hands ran up his abs as I looked into his eyes with innocent eyes. A sweet smile crept up my lips before I slammed them against his. He reaches down with his hand and grabs my left leg, pulling it up higher with each kiss.

Our bodies hit the bed hard, and he uses his elbows to keep his weight balanced so he doesn't hurt me.

He kissed me all the way down the valley of my b****t, making my back arch. His lips kept going lower and lower until they got to my jeans. He slowly unzipped them and pulled them down with my panties.

“Sebastian,” I tried to say.

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He leaned in closer to my p***y, and I could feel his hot breath on it. He looked up at me.

“I want to eat you.”

He held my thigh and kissed my p***y slowly while I squeezed the sheets with my hands and opened my lips.

He put his mouth over my clit, which made me arch even more. He began to move his tongue in and out of me, which made me shiver. He threw my legs over his shoulders and f***d me with his tongue even harder. My eyes rolled back in pleasure as his mouth gave me so much pleasure.

He hit me in the neck, and my legs got around him again. I started pulling at his jeans and taking them off completely. He took off his boxers before I could stop looking at his huge d**k, and he smiled like he was proud of it.

I don't remember it being that big. How did it fit inside of me?

His lips pressed against mine, and they moved faster against each other while my tongue moved freely inside his warm mouth. When I bit his bottom lip, he let out a deep, husky moan that made me drip. He thrust inside me without warning, making me scream in pleasure. I held onto his shoulders while my head was pushed back against the bed.

“Harder,” I said softly.

He slammed into me even harder, and the bed frame hit the wall with a loud bang.

“Sebastian,” I said.

“No. Papi, Pumpkin.” He pushed inside me again, and my legs started to shake. My nails dug into his back, leaving marks on his skin.

“Mm harder, Papi,” I screamed. He flipped me over and put my a*s against his c**k. He pulled a chunk of my blonde, innocent hair back, which made my back push against his sweaty chest.

He didn’t let me ask what he was doing before he pushed himself inside me from behind. I screamed and my back bent back.

“Oh my god,” I moaned and shivered at the same time.

He pushed into me while we were both on our knees. He pulled my head back, and I screamed in pain and pleasure.

I don’t think I’ll be able to feel my legs for a day or two. He was f*****g me harder than the last time we had s*x. Was this a punishment?

I screamed out my o*****m, and my chest was going up and down quickly.

Aria, why did you do that?

That question keeps coming back to me. I had s*x with him again after I found out he kills people, and he called me a whore just a few hours ago.

You’re doing a great job, honey.

He whispered against my lips, "I'm not done with you yet, little one." It made me shiver all over my skin, and I gulped.

The bright sun came into the room and shone on my pale, smooth skin. I opened my eyes and turned around slowly to see that I was the only one in the bed. I sat up and held the sheets tightly around my body. I looked around the room for Sebastian but couldn't find him. Then I heard the bathroom door open and in he came, looking great in a black knitted jumper and black jeans.

I knew that jumper very well.

"Where did you get that jumper?" I stood up on my knees, and just thinking about last night made my cheeks turn red.

"Your mum bought it for me." He turned his back to me and picked up his coffee from the table.

When my mom said it was for a coworker, she was lying.

"That's great," I said, now mad that he had worn that jumper after being with me all night. I stood up all the way and tried to walk to the toilet, but he grabbed my hand hard.

"I'm going to say this in the nicest way possible. You're nothing to me but a simple blonde stress relief toy. I love your mother and it's always going to be her, so stop making faces." His voice was full of hate, and he didn't care about me at all.

Why did I let him use me again? I wanted to cry. Because you don't know any better and are dumb. Why do I care what shirt he's wearing? He's going to marry my mum for crying out loud.

We both looked at each other, and then I nodded my head and pulled my hand away from his. I opened the bathroom door with my head down, and my hands slowly closed it before I leaned against it.

I took very slow breaths in and out, and I was about to cry. “Can you leave my clothes on the toilet while I take a shower?”

He was quiet for a few seconds, and for a second I thought he might have left. “Okay,” he mumbled.

I walked over to the mirror and looked at myself. All I could see was how ugly I am. My hair was a mess and the bags under my eyes were dark. My hair wasn’t even the right colour; it was more of a yellow colour now. There wasn’t much to offer because my lips were small and pale. I let go of the sheet that was wrapped around me and looked at every part of my body. I don’t have big boobs or a perfect body. I probably have more flaws than my mom. My body looks like it belongs to a boy who is five years old.

Sebastian makes me question everything about myself, and it hurts me that he has so much power over me.

I stepped into the shower and turned on the water. I ran my face under the warm water to try to feel better. I ran my hands through my wet, heavy hair and stared at the checkered wall in front of me. When the bathroom door opened, my heart dropped to my a*s as I tightened my grip on my blonde hair. I pushed my head deeper into the water to try to block out the sound of his movements.

The door shut again, and he was gone again.

I got out of the shower and dried my face and body. I wrapped the soft towel around my body. My clothes were neatly folded and left on top of the toilet. I rubbed my

elbow against the foggy mirror, and I saw my red self.

“Hurry up, Aria,” I heard him yell from the room. I pulled up my jeans, put on a plain hoodie, and put my hair up in a messy bun.

When I walked out, he was on the phone and whispering to someone on the other end. But as soon as he saw me, he hung up.

“Take me home,” I whispered to myself. “I swear I won’t tell anyone about this. I won’t even look at you or talk to you again. I’m done, Sebastian.”

He crossed his arms over his chest and looked at my face for a sign of hesitation, but he couldn’t find one. I tucked a loose strand of hair behind my ear, and his eyes followed my hand, which made me even more nervous.

He said, “I can’t do that.”

“Why the f**k not? I’m not going to say anything. I’ll move in with my aunt. I’ll do anything to get away from you,” I said angrily. Doesn’t he understand? I can’t be near him without hurting my mom or losing myself.

He yelled, “You don’t get who I am,” which made me jump. “I’m a very dangerous person, and I just killed some other very dangerous people.”

“I really don’t care; I just want to go home.” I yelled even louder, daring him to do something.

He said calmly, “If you go home, they’ll kill you, and I can’t let that happen. Your mom would be broken, and I won’t break her again.”

That sentence made me feel bad, and it hurt me a lot. He cares that my mum is hurt,

but he doesn't care how it's affecting me.

"Right." I turned around so that my back was to him. I felt tears start to fall down my face, so I quickly wiped them away and hugged myself tightly.

"I'm just being honest." He let out a sigh, as if he was annoyed with the whole thing.

"I'll meet you downstairs by the car," I said very quietly, trying to hide my shaky voice. My feet took me to the door, and I walked out.

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I sat in the back of Sebastian's car and didn't want to be near him anymore when it beeped. He didn't say anything when he got in the driver's seat. He just looked at me quickly in the rearview mirror. I put my head against the car window and tried to make sense of the fact that I had s*x with my mom's fiancé again.

How did I get here? Caleb ruined me, but Sebastian is going to kill me and break me until I'm nothing.

I saw houses with people inside as we drove by, and it made me want to go home even more. I wish my dad were here so he could tell me what to do and how to deal with this.

"We're stopping to eat."

I said, "I'm not hungry."

"I don't care; I am," he said without hesitation.

We stopped in a parking lot with a restaurant across the street. I crossed my arms and legs to show him that I wasn't going to get out of the car without a fight.

"Get out, Aria," he said.

"Nope, I'm good," I said in a snappy voice.

"Aria, if you don't get up and use those long legs of yours, I'll pick you up, throw you over my shoulder, and walk you inside myself." He pointed his finger at me and

said, “Do you want strangers to see your a*s?”

“That’s fine with me because you think I’m a whore.” I smiled and rolled my eyes.

“Okay, you said it,” he said, and then he got out of the car and opened my door. He reached for my arm, but I pulled away, and my hair fell in front of my face.

“Don’t even think about it, dingbat.” I pushed his hand away. Is he crazy?

He said, “Good girl.”

“Don’t touch me,” I hissed.

“Way too late for that, Pumpkin.” He grinned, and I got out of the car and followed him quietly.

The restaurant wasn’t fancy at all; it was just a small hole in the wall with some cute decorations. The waiter seemed to be paying attention. She was an older woman with a friendly smile.

The nice old lady asked, “What can I get you, kids?” I smiled and looked at Sebastian for help.

“What do you want?”

I said, “Pancakes with strawberries and blueberries,” and I smiled.

The woman smiled, took the menus from us, and left. We were back to the awkward silence between us.

My eyes were glued to the door that was now opening. A man with a lot of tattoos

and piercings walked through the doors. He was staring at Sebastian and me very hard as he walked to his booth behind us.

There was something wrong.

I looked away from the person and put my hands on my lap. There was definitely something wrong with this man. He was wearing the same black clothes as the men Sebastian killed.

Sebastian asked, “What’s wrong now?” He could tell I was nervous.

“Nothing.” My voice came out as a soft whisper.

Sebastian kept typing on his phone and not really paying attention to anything while the man in the booth behind me looked suspicious. I slowly reached into my back pocket to get my phone so I could text him about the creepy guy behind me, but before I could do that, the nice lady brought out our food.

I kept my hand in my back pocket, frozen, and tried not to move too quickly so I wouldn’t draw attention to myself.

“Thanks,” I said.

“No worries,” she said in a strong Italian accent.

Sebastian began to cut up his pancakes, and I stared blankly at the food in front of me.

I kicked him under the table, and he raised an eyebrow at me. I threw my head back and he gave me a strange look. He still didn’t get it. I bit my lip out of anger. This guy is a killer, but he’s a bad one. I threw my head back even harder, and he peeked

his head over the seat while standing up.

“Shit,” he said quietly.

I knew it.

I was really nervous. My palms were sweating and my fingers were playing with each other.

This would be a terrible way to die, especially with him.

That’s when the panic set in. Sebastian quickly figured out that my breathing was off. He touched my cheek, which got my attention. He was teaching me how to breathe in and out. I did what he did. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a gun.

No way, oh my god.

I shook my head from side to side, and the hand that was on my cheek was now holding my chin up.

“Run!” he yells, and I don’t waste any time. I tried to get as far away from the table as I could, but I only got a few inches away before the gunshots started.

I curled up on the floor and put my head between my knees. I was shaking with fear, but I wasn’t being shot at, which was surprising. Someone yelled. I was brave enough to turn around, thinking it was Sebastian, but it wasn’t. It was the older woman, and she was lying in a pool of her own blood.

I crawled over to her quickly and put my hand on her open wound. She was bleeding a lot, so I put my hand over the cut and pressed down on it to stop the bleeding, but it didn’t work.

“No,” I said. She started to gasp for air and blood started to flow from her mouth. “Don’t worry, you’ll be fine.”

Her smile began to fade, and the warmth of her skin turned into bitter coldness. I can’t let her die; I have to do something. I ran over to the shooting range and saw Sebastian hiding behind a table. I didn’t need to know this woman to know it was wrong. She had nothing to do with it, but now she’s bleeding to death.

“Sebastian!” I yelled to get his attention.

He saw me and the blood all over my body, and right away he shot the guy in the leg. He fell down. Sebastian hit the man in the head with his gun, knocking him out cold.

He runs over to me and puts his hands on my stomach, where her blood is. He thinks it’s my blood and that I was shot.

“No, no. T-the lady, she was shot.” I stammered as I pulled him towards the lady. He knelt down to feel her pulse, and when he pulled his finger off her neck, his head hung low. I stood there on my two shaky legs, and she was gone.

I whispered, “No.” “I can save her.” I pushed him out of the way and knelt down next to her, putting more pressure on her wound.

“She’s gone, Aria.” He says this with no emotion, as if he didn’t care at all. He picked me up off the ground and made me stand up while he pulled me away from the women.

I raised my hand to slap him across the cheek, and the force of the slap made his head lean down. “It’s your fault she’s dead,” I said angrily, with hot tears streaming down my cheeks.

Sebastian looked bored with what I said, and he didn't seem to care about anything that was going on.

“I f*****g hate you so much,” I yelled as I hit his strong chest with both of my small fists.

He grabbed both of my wrists, stopping me from hitting him anymore, and pulled me closer to his chest, making my hair wave over us. “I don't care about this woman at all. I'd rather have ten old ladies than you. I'd kill every old person in this city if it meant you were safe.”

Sebastian whispers harshly, “You can hate me all you want, but you're still alive, and that's all that matters.”

His face was only a few inches from mine. His tough face slowly relaxed, and he let go of my wrist.

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My blood was rushing through my head, which made me feel sick. His eyes and freckles were my favorite things about him. I looked into his eyes. I tried to touch his cheek softly with my hand, but he stopped me before I could. I bit my bottom lip, which was like a kid getting caught stealing candy. He pointed to his cheek with my hand, and I gently touched him. I'm pretty sure it was the adrenaline rushing through me that made his eyes flutter shut.

I pulled away from his touch and looked into his dark, empty eyes as they moved around my face.

"Isn't she your stepdaughter?" A voice came from behind us, and we both jumped and turned around.

"Shit, I thought I was f*****g crazy." The guy he knocked out a few minutes ago was now standing in front of us with a gun pointed right at us.

"Do you know who I am?" Sebastian asked. I was so scared that I was shaking. When I heard his voice, I pulled on his arm and told him not to talk. I was worried about him.

"The famous Devereux. Who wouldn't know about the devil himself?" The crazy guy laughed. "You killed your father for the cartel business. You became a leader and the most dangerous creature on Earth." The man says.

"Very well, that means you know perfectly well that I will not hesitate to shoot your sultana of a brain," Sebastian growled; it was like a vicious monster took over his body.

“Maybe I’ll just f**k your stepdaughter because she seems to like older men best.”

“Touch her, and you’ll see a hell of a lot faster.” Sebastian put me behind him, and I looked over his shoulder.

“See you in hell, devil.” The disgusting man laughs and then points the gun at Sebastian.

When I heard the gunshots, my heart stopped. Sebastian pushed me back with all his strength, and I hit the wall hard, which made my head bang against it.

“Sebastian...” I said in a whisper before I passed out.

My hand shot up to ease the pain in my head, and I slowly opened my eyes. I am in a room that is orange, and I have never seen it before. I started to panic. I stood up, but gravity let me down and I fell to the floor. I gasped in pain right away. The door swings wide open, and hands grab my face.

I said, “M-mom.” I was shocked.

“It’s me, baby.” My mum smiles as she helps me get up from the floor and onto the bed. I don’t remember her coming, only the gun pointing at Sebastian and me.

“Where’s Sebastian? Is he all right?” I asked quickly. My mum gave me a look that made me think she didn’t believe me, then she nodded. My mum is acting strange; she keeps looking down at her legs. “What’s wrong?”

“What’s wrong is that you’re sleeping with my fiancé. What’s even worse is that you’re in love with him.” My mother yells angrily. Sebastian told her we slept together, but I didn’t get it.

“No, Mum,” I cried. “Please, Mommy,” I yelled even louder.

“You’re a slut just like your father,” my mother says as she slaps me across the face. “Sebastian will never love you; he will always love me.” My mom hits me again, this time harder.

“Mom, please, I’m your daughter!” I said, rubbing my sore cheek.

“I wish your father had taken you. It would have done me a favour.” She hisses this as she stands up and starts to walk away. I tried to stand up and follow her.

I wanted to beg her to stay and let me explain, but I couldn’t move. I was stuck.

The end of the dream

My body shot up in panic right away, and I felt pain all over. My forehead was sweating a lot, and my mouth was dry. I was shocked to see an IV connected to my arm. I looked around the white room I was in. There were pink roses on the table in front of me with a card inside. I carefully and gently stood up and walked over to the table to get the card.

I’m sorry I had to leave to take care of some important business. Please make yourself at home.

Who wrote this? What if the shooter killed Sebastian and is now keeping me hostage?

The shooter was the only one with a gun, and now he’s dead. I quickly grabbed the vase full of roses, threw out the pink ones, and turned the vase upside down to use it as a weapon. I crept up to the door and opened it slowly. I peeked my head out and saw the white hallway in front of me. It was too quiet. I carefully and quietly walked out with a strong grip on the vase.

I heard voices coming from the left side, so I stayed close to the wall and tried to listen. “She wasn’t supposed to know or even get involved, Maya,” I heard a voice I recognised say in a harsh whisper.

Maya, like my best friend Maya. With my eyes closed, I pushed off with the heel of my foot and threw the vase at the voice.

“Damnit!” the voice yells loudly. I opened my eyes and saw Caleb hopping on one foot and holding his other foot.

“Caleb,” I said.

I ran right into his arms and snuggled up to him to get warm. Caleb stiffened up, but then he calmed down and put his arms around me. “I was scared. Where’s Sebastian? The gun? Is Sebastian dead?” I kept going on. What would I feel if he died? Caleb quickly figured out that I was a nervous wreck.

“Just sit down, Aria.” He helped me sit down in the chair next to us. I sat there and looked at him until he answered. He went to the washbasin, filled a cup with water, and gave it to me. I drank the water in the cup all at once.

“He’s fine,” Caleb said, and my body and mind both relaxed. Caleb watched me closely as I ran my fingers through my blonde hair.

I said, “I want answers and I want them now.”

He reached into his pocket, pulled out a gun, and put it on the table. I was so scared that my eyes got big, and I moved back right away.

“I know about the mafia,” I said.

“Don’t worry; you know I’ll never hurt you.”

“I left for Louisiana with the goal of following my dreams and becoming an NFL player, but that didn’t work out. Instead, I met Sebastian and got a job in the mafia, where I fell in love with my fiancée,” Caleb said. It hurt my heart to think about him being in love with someone else, but falling in love with my fiancée was like a slap in the face. I slowly nodded my head. “But it’s hard now.”

I asked, “How so?” without sounding bothered.

“I realised how much I gave up,” Caleb says with a sad smile. Caleb looked deeply into my eyes and asked, “How can you be in love with someone when you know your heart doesn’t belong to them?” My heart raced.

Aria, change the subject.

“Where’s Sebastian?” I asked to change the subject.

Caleb says, “Meeting.” Caleb smirks and says, “You’re stuck with me all day.”

“I’d rather be shot at,” I said. Caleb laughed, but then there was an awkward silence.

“Let’s go swimming and then spend the rest of the day outside.” Caleb smiles at me.

Not weird at all. I think he might be crazy.

“I’ll have Lucia bring you some shorts and a swimsuit.”

“Lucia?” I asked.

“Just go back to the room you woke up in, housekeeper, and I’ll have her bring it to

you.”

I nodded and then left. I sat on the bed and waited for Lucia. Was it the girl Caleb left me for that he said he loved? I love Caleb and will always love him. He was my first love, my first time, and my first everything. But all the secrets changed everything, and my love quickly turned into a friendship.

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Sebastian let me down again. After all that crap that happened, he left me alone. He's crazy in love with my mum, which should make me happy, but it doesn't.

"Hello?" Someone called out to me from behind the door. I walked over and opened it, and I saw a young girl.

"Hi, you must be Lucia." I held out my hand, and she quickly took it and smiled. I looked down at the clothes she had folded in her hands. "Thanks, Lucia." I smiled softly.

"Call me if you need anything, Mrs. Devereux." She smiles and walks away. I swear I was going to stop her and tell her I'm not his fiancée but his soon-to-be stepdaughter. Instead, I just let it happen and smiled back.

I put on the bikini, which was a two-piece in a light blue colour with white polka dots. It was cute. The bottom part was a little too small, and the top was tight around the breasts, but I don't mind. There were also mom jeans shorts, which I put over my bikini bottoms. I shut the door behind me and walked back to the kitchen. Caleb was sitting in a chair with his back to me.

I said, "I'm ready," with my arms crossed behind my back. Caleb looked at me for a long time, and I stood there awkwardly. "Are you just going to stare all day?" I asked in a sarcastic tone.

Caleb chuckles and gets up. "Come on."

Caleb smiles and walks outside to the backyard, where there is a very big pool. He

put the things he was carrying on the table next to the pool and then looked back at me as he took off his shirt. My eyes followed his strong body structure; I didn't remember him being so buff. I bit my lip lightly when I saw his six-pack.

When I looked him in the eye, I felt my cheeks get hot and quickly moved my eyes to the floor while jumping over to my other leg and tucking a piece of blonde hair behind my ear.

"Can you spray me?" he asked, pointing to the sunscreen. I nodded and walked over to him. When I grabbed the bottle, his skin brushed against mine, which felt weird. Our eyes met.

I sprayed his back first, and after making sure it was covered in sunscreen, I moved over to his chest. I shook the bottle and kept spraying, trying not to look at anyone too much.

I said, "All done."

"Turn around." He takes the bottle from me.

"Why?" I ask stupidly.

Really Aria? Why? God, I'm such an idiot sometimes.

"So you won't look more like a tomato than you already do." Caleb laughs. "Am I that red?"

I shyly looked down to unbutton my shorts, and I could feel his heavy eyes on me. I put my hair up in a bun and he sprayed my back. The coldness of the liquid made me shiver. I turned around slowly to face him, and he started to spray my chest.

He says, “All done.”

We looked at each other for a while until I thought of something. I smiled at my naughty plan for revenge. Caleb broke my heart, but we were best friends long before this happened, so I felt safe with him. That doesn't mean I forgive him; it just means I can act like a kid around him.

“What's the smile—

I pushed Caleb into the pool before he could even finish saying what he was going to say. He fell backwards, and the water hit me all over, soaking me completely. I started to laugh hard right away, and my hand flew to my mouth as I did. He came out of the water, laughing and flipping his wet hair back.

Caleb laughs and says, “Real nice, Aria.” I looked at his clothes to see where the sound was coming from when a phone rang.

Caleb says, “Oh shit, can you give me my phone?”

I took his phone and walked to the edge of the pool, where Caleb was waiting. I bent down to give him his phone, but he also grabbed my arm and pulled me into the cold water.

I swam up to him and found him laughing. I said, “You idiot, I had your phone.” I looked around for his phone.

“I don't care.” Caleb pushed me under the water, and I swam back up to the top.

We were best friends before we became intimate, so it was easy for us to get along.

“You're going to get it.” I jumped on his back and tackled him into the water.

We swam and raced, but most of the time we just jumped on each other, and I forgot all about my problems and worries. Caleb is the best at making me smile when everything is going wrong, even if he's the one who caused it.

Caleb asked out of the blue, "Do you think about what life would be like if I didn't go to Louisiana?" We were both sitting on the steps inside the pool. I kicked my feet under the water to make it look like I didn't hear him. "Aria."

"I don't like to think about things that can't happen," I said.

"I think about it every day." Caleb moves a little closer to me, and I can see him getting closer through my eyelashes.

"You probably would have forgotten about me even if you still lived here," I said quietly. His tattoo was on full display, and wet droplets ran down his jaw. His hair fell perfectly. He got really close to me, and I took a big breath.

"I could never forget about you, even if I tried." His voice was soft, and I couldn't stop looking at his pale green eyes. I've always been so drawn to them.

I looked down and decided to swim away from him, so I swam deeper into the middle to avoid him, but he quickly caught up with me. He grabbed my wrist and pulled me back. My front hit him hard, and our faces were only a few inches apart. I looked into his eyes for something, anything, but all I saw was raw emotion.

My lips were getting closer, and so were his. My heart was beating so fast that I thought it might pop out of my chest at any moment. I wasn't going to kiss him because he was engaged, but I wanted to see how far the bastard would go.

He got very close to my lips, ready to kiss them, but I backed away with an annoyed look on my face. This just proves my point that no matter how hard he tries, he will

never grow up.

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“You’re really gross,” I said quietly before pulling away.

“My engagement to her is—” His eyes and words changed direction. “Sorry, I got carried away.”

Caleb ran his fingers through his hair and looked angry. “It won’t happen again.”

“I understand why you didn’t answer my call.”

Sebastian, who was angry, stood in front of us. Caleb immediately moved even farther away from me.

“Get out, Pumpkin, and get dressed. We have an important dinner to go to,” Sebastian said with a dry laugh and shook his head in disapproval. He took off his tie and then stormed back inside.

He shouldn’t be upset, should he?

I waited for Sebastian on the porch. I wore a black dress that was tight and elegant and fit me perfectly.

“How do you look?”

When I turned around, Sebastian’s eyes were wandering. When they finally focused on me, they got darker. He looked great in his all-black tuxedo. It was simple but sexy.

“Like my mother’s daughter,” I said angrily. It was getting on my nerves. How could I do this to my mom?

“I was going to say ravishing,” he says.

I looked down shyly, bit my lip to keep from saying anything mean, and just said thank you quickly. He took my hand and led me to his car in a nice way.

Sebastian’s mood swings are making me dizzy. One day, he likes me; the next, he doesn’t, and then he thinks I’m beautiful. It’s too much. The radio was playing soft music, which made things awkward.

“I hope you didn’t get Caleb in trouble,” I said.

“He’ll get more than that.”

I turned around to look at him, and he tightened his grip on the wheel. “I don’t belong to you.” I rolled my eyes.

“Did you just roll your eyes at me?” he asked.

“Yes, I did, and what are you going to do about it?” I asked angrily. Sebastian roughly pushed the car to the side, making my head hit the hard window.

“Don’t test me,” he said through clenched teeth, looking like a crazy person. Sebastian had a certain darkness about him. He’s slowly showing me how big of a monster he can be.

I slowly moved my hand up to my forehead until I felt something wet. I glared down at my bloody hand.

“You just made me f*****g bleed,” I said, out of breath. I mostly told myself that if I heard it come out of my mouth, it would make me realize how dangerous he really was and that he could hurt me and make me bleed like this.

Sebastian looked angry; he was about to explode, but when he saw how scared I was, his face changed completely. I could be wrong, but he looked like he was worried or even scared.

“Get yourself cleaned up before you get blood all over my car.” He threw a napkin at me, and I quickly picked it up and put it on my cut. I felt sick and dizzy because of how he was treating me.

Just call your mum and go home. Just leave and never look back.

My blood has dried up, and he looks more at ease. I’m so scared that I can’t even move a muscle.

Sebastian parked his car in the V.I.P. area. A man opened the door for me and helped me get out of the car. I didn’t look anyone in the eye; I kept my eyes on the ground. I probably had a big bruise on my forehead, and when I looked down, I saw Sebastian’s shoes right below me. He put his hand on the small of my back, and I didn’t even look up to see him. I just brushed it off. I was scared and angry. How could he do that to me? Has he ever done something like that to my mum?

Sebastian told the waiter in front, “Don’s party,” and the waiter took us right to the back. Because of the cigarette smoke, it was hard to breathe in this place. I tried to wave away the smoke with my hand, but it didn’t work. He quickly saw that I was having trouble breathing and gently pulled me to his chest, making sure to cover my nose with his scent. I breathed in his strong musk, which made my mouth water.

No, Aria, he really did almost knock you out in his car.

I kept my head inside of his suit to stay away from the awful smoke. There was loud music playing everywhere, and I could hear my heels clicking on the hard floor. I finally got the guts to look around and lift my head up, but I wish I hadn't. We were at a men's club, and the girls were walking around in nothing but heels.

"Keep your head down, Pumpkin," Sebastian whispered in my ear.

I listened to him and kept my head pulled between his chest and suit. We stopped after a few more steps, and I looked up.

There were a lot of men in the room and very few women.

"Mr. Devereux." A man came up to us and shook hands with Sebastian.

The old man quickly asked for my hand, and I gave it to him. He smiled at me as his rough lips brushed against the back of my soft hand. I almost threw up on this checkered floor in front of all these people. "You never told me your wife was so young and pretty." The old man winked at me.

He could really be my grandpa, wait, wife? No, sir, that's not right at all.

"I'm not his..."

"My wife is very young but very grown up." Sebastian nudged my elbow to warn me not to finish my sentence. I looked up at him and saw that I was still hugging him, so I quickly let go.

The old man pointed out the bruise on my forehead and said, "Looks like she doesn't listen very well." spa." I was mad that this person I didn't know talked about me like I was a dog.

I don't usually stand up for myself, but that made me want to grow some balls. I was going to say something bad about this guy, but Sebastian stopped me.

Sebastian softly pushed me behind him and then stepped up to the old man, his chest touching the old man's. "Talk about my wife like that again," he said. "And I'll kill you with my bare hands, cut you into tiny pieces, and then feed them to your wife and mistress." He growled angrily, and I could see his shoulders getting bigger and bigger.

"Okay, Mr. Devereux," the old man said with a stutter. Sebastian took my hand and led me to the table, where there were a lot of people. They all seemed scared to be around us. I straightened up and crossed my legs to fix my position. His hand was firmly on my thigh, and it made my whole body feel fuzzy. Isn't that crazy? Just one touch is all it takes to bring me back to life.

"I didn't know your fiancée was coming with us." A brave woman spoke up, and the word fiancée made my stomach flutter.

Sebastian said, "She surprised me." He didn't have the same stone-cold face as usual, so I was almost shocked to see a smile on his lips. "My fiancée means a lot to me, and you may or may not have heard that there are people after me and my new family. I need that to stop." Every word he said was full of power. I felt it, and these people did too.

"Someone told me about it, but I thought it was just a rumor. Who would be dumb enough to go against the devil himself?" another man said.

Devil, I didn't like that word, especially when it was used to describe him.

"I asked myself that same question when ten skulls with bullet holes in them showed up at my house," Sebastian growled. The memory of the bloody kitchen flashed

through my mind like lightning.

Sebastian says, “Dante won’t stop until he has my head, and he will kill anyone to get it.”

Dante, you kind of remind me of The Lion King.

“I want to make a deal.” Sebastian looked at me while he talked. He wasn’t talking to me, but I have a feeling it has something to do with me.

“Anything for you, Mr. Devereux,” said the man who had been threatened earlier.

Sebastian said, “If he does kill me.” “I’ll give up my cartel,” he says, and I don’t like where this is going. “I need my fiancée and step-daughter’s lives to be spared, and they need your cartel’s protection.” He whispered, but his voice was still loud enough to be heard.

Is he out of his mind?

“Please put them in a safe place and erase their names from everything. I also want them to be financially stable.”

“Are you crazy?” I turned all the way around to look at him, and my face was full of different emotions.

“This isn’t your business, Pumpkin,” he growled.

“It’s all about me. You think we’ll be safe with another cartel?” I yell angrily.

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He didn't pay attention to me; he paid attention to everyone else.

"You have my cartel's word," the man says.

"And if I find out that any of you know Dante, I'll burn this place down with everyone in it." Sebastian shook hands with all the men at the table, daring them to say anything about his threat.

"We swear that your fiancée and stepdaughter will be safe and unharmed." The same woman from before said.

I looked at her, and tears started to well up in my eyes. "I want to go home right now," I said.

I was mad that these people looked happy and that my mom and I would just be passed on to another cartel.

"I'll keep in touch." Sebastian stood up and tried to grab my hand, but I ran away. I picked up the end of my dress and ran quickly without looking back.

I got outside and it was pouring. The rain soaked me all the way through. The stars were shining brightly in the dark sky above me. Sebastian finally caught up with me and pulled me back to face him. He looked mad.

"What's wrong with you? I just made a deal to save your a*s." He said that water droplets were sliding down the side of his face.

“Don’t you get it? If being safe means you dying, then forget it. I don’t want it,” I yelled.

I don’t even know why I’m so mad. I should be grateful that he made a deal to save my mom and me, but I’m not.

“Aria, I’m going to die one day, and I’d rather die knowing that your mom is safe.” The rain was getting heavier, and it was getting harder to talk. “I need to know that your mom is safe.”

“I’ve had enough of this game with you. When will you see that I’m more than just a body?” I yelled. — “I get it, you love my mom, so stop screwing with my head because I’m going crazy.” I tried to turn around, but he stopped me.

“Are you f*****g kidding me?” he yelled angrily. “All I care about is you. Every day I worry that you won’t make it through another. You are all I think about.” He shook my shoulders a little, and his face was full of something I couldn’t put my finger on. His hair and clothes were wet.

I said, “You’re making me into someone I don’t want to be.” “You care about my mom one minute and then you care about me the next. I really think you’re just messing with both of us.”

He shakes his head. “I care about you, I do, but I’ll always love your mom.” He let go of my shoulders, and his eyes were completely black and empty.

The water splashed off his mouth and onto my cheeks. His hair was now messy, unlike the way he always slicked it back. I was hurt, so I stepped back with tears in my eyes. My stomach hurt so much that it felt like it was doing cartwheels, and my throat felt tight. My heart was broken and my legs felt like they were floating.

“That’s the problem,” I finally said. He looked deeply into my eyes and watched me. “You love her,” I whispered, my voice sounding broken.

“Aria”

“Sebastian, take me back to the house.” I got in the car, and he stood there for a while before getting behind the wheel. I looked out the window and prayed that this was just a bad dream and that I would wake up soon. But it was real, my new reality.

“I should probably check out your forehead.” He drove into the driveway and parked the car.

“I feel fine,” I said.

He nodded and got out of the car. I stayed in the car and looked at myself in the mirror. My makeup was running down my cheeks, my wet hair was covering my neck, and the bloody cut on my forehead was now a big black bruise with a small cut in the middle. I took off my heels before getting out of the car and slowly walked to the front door of the house.

When I got to my room, I broke down. I slid down my door and cried, holding my stomach the whole time. He is playing with me, and I am just a dumb girl who wants someone to love her. I crawled over to my bed and cried some more into my sheets. I quietly screamed in pain, the pain of making a mistake and the pain of loving someone who doesn’t love me back.

My mum doesn’t deserve this; she should be happy and loved. I’m just like my dad, and my mind is just as messed up as his. I don’t hate my mom, so why did I do this to her? Sebastian will always love her, and she will always love him. Was it some kind of revenge against my dad?

The door to my room opened, but I didn't look up to see who it was. I just lay on my bed with tears running down my face.

"Aria," Caleb whispered.

I looked up at him, and he took my hand in his big one. He looked over my body and face before gently wiping my tears away with his finger. I held his hand tighter, and he looked down at our hands and kissed my knuckles lightly.

"I need you, Caleb."

"I'm here, Aria." He holds my face in his hand, and I feel his warmth.

"Why?" I said softly.

"Why did you leave me?" I asked, my voice shaking. His hand stayed on my cheek. I looked deeply into his eyes, hoping to find some truth, but all I saw was regret.

He looked down, and I could tell he was having trouble finding the right words, which made me even more anxious. I just need to know why, maybe that will help me understand why everyone else has left me.

He says, "I was a dumb teenager who took things for granted. I knew I had made the biggest mistake of my life when I left you."

He came a little closer to me, but I stayed where I was. We were only a few inches apart, but I didn't feel anything. "I never stopped loving you, Aria."

He said my lips were his, but they weren't. I really felt sick when his lips touched mine. They shouldn't have been there, but I couldn't pull away. I just wanted someone to comfort me and take away all the rejection, which is bad because he's

getting married. I know I'm a bad person.

I kissed his lips harder and ran my fingers through his hair. He picked me up and put us on the bed. I gently wrapped my legs around his waist. My hands moved up to his cheeks. We kissed one last time, then we both pulled away to catch our breath. We closed our eyes and put our foreheads together.

“God, you're getting married.”

Caleb whispers in a soft, humble voice, “Let's worry about it tomorrow.”

No way, jerk.

“Caleb...” I was trying to get him to see reason.

He said, “I love you, Aria,” and then he put his head between my neck and chest and breathed in my scent. I didn't answer because I don't love him the same way he loves me. Instead, I closed my eyes and let the guilt wash over me.

The next morning

The sun was shining through the blinds, and a strong, heavy arm was around my waist. Caleb was fast asleep, with me close to him. I slowly ran my finger from his forehead to his chin. He smiled and pulled me closer.

“Good morning, Aria,” he whispers with his eyes still closed. His hair was a mess, which made me think of the sleepovers we used to have when we were younger.

“Morning,” I said, and his eyes opened to meet mine.

The door opened just as I was about to say something.

“Caleb...”

There was a voice in the room that I didn't know. When I looked at the door, he sat up right away. He knew the voice. His beautiful fiancée came in with a shocked look on her face, and tears started to flow down her painted cheeks.

“Nina,” he gasped. Her eyes met mine, then his, and then they went back to mine.

“You whore,” she said. Her voice was broken, and she wiped her tears and ran out of the room. I know that Caleb didn't look at me; he ran after his fiancée instead.

I put my hand over my mouth, and guilt flooded my body again. Tears started to fill my eyes.

I ran with the sheets wrapped around me. My mascara had dried on my cheeks from last night, and my red lipstick had smeared on my lips. I was still wearing my dress from dinner. I ran in the direction I saw them leave, which was in the living room.

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I paid close attention to what they were saying.

He tried to explain, “Nina, it wasn’t like that.”

“Did you do anything with her?” She screams with tears in her eyes.

Caleb looked down in shame and said, “I kissed her.” It was so quiet that it was hard to hear.

“Do you love her?” She wipes her tears and tries to get answers from him.

He took a few seconds to answer, and what he said shocked me. “I do love her, but not enough to lose you,” he said, looking up at her.

“Did you feel sorry for her because you loved me?” She asked with a little more content.”

“Yes, I had unfinished business with her, I’m sorry.” He says this while holding her close in a loving hug.

I didn’t realise I was crying until I felt something wet fall on my arm. I let go of the sheet and held my stomach in pain, feeling like I was going to throw up.

“He’s engaged, Aria.” I heard a voice I knew from behind me and quickly turned around.

For a moment, I thought my mom had found out about Sebastian and me because she

was standing in a robe with a hurt look on her face.

“He is getting married. You know how I feel about cheating; your father did it to me.” She sounded ashamed and looked at me with disgust.

“Mom,” I tried to explain.

“Especially since they’re having a baby together, you want to ruin their family.” My mom yells at me, and the coldness of her voice makes me jump.

A child, she’s pregnant. He’s a big liar.

I turned around and saw Caleb looking at me with regret. “She’s pregnant?” I turned my head to look at him, and tears filled my eyes again.

“What the hell is going on?” Sebastian’s voice sounded annoyed.

“Yes, you homewrecking slut,” she yells. I know how it feels to have the truth hurt.

I hugged myself and looked back at my mom and Sebastian. My mom didn’t even try to defend me; she just stared. I looked back at Caleb, who wasn’t even looking at me or saying anything to defend me. How the hell did I get into this situation? I’m not wanted here, and no one wants me here. It’s always going to be like this. I ruin families like my dad, and my worst nightmare finally came true: I’m just like my dad.

“I’m so sorry,” I said to Nina. Then I turned around to look at my mom and ran away.

I ran to my room and clawed at the door to open it. Once I was inside, I leaned against it.

“I have to go,” I told myself. “I’ll go to the one place where I know I’m wanted.”

I wiped my tears, put my hair in a bun, and ran to my closet to get all my clothes. I stuffed them all into my duffel bag. I waited until night, and no one came to check on me, not Caleb or Sebastian. I waited until twelve and then got some paper and a pen.

I left my letter for my mom on my bed and then took my things. I took my mom's car keys off the empty kitchen table and ran outside to her car. I looked at the house for a second, knowing I'd never see Sebastian again. All I can do is hope they have the best lives without me.

My mom is beautiful and smart, and she deserves a happy ending. I don't deserve one. I picked up the phone and called him while I started the car.

"Hey?" A voice answered, a voice I hadn't heard in years. I could hear him breathing on the phone, and I could almost feel his breath on my cheek.

When he realized it was me, his princess, his pride and joy, his negotiation, his breathing slowed down.

"You know what will happen, right, princess?" He asked. I know it all too well; I remember that fight from years ago. He's the man my mother has been keeping me safe from, and he'll always have my heart.

"Yes," I said, my eyes full of tears.

He says something else on the phone that I know I have to answer because I feel the same way. I can't be rude to him because he's the reason I'm still alive.

"Love you too, Dad."

It's been six months since I left Solmaris and three months since I got engaged. I guess my dad had a bigger deal for me, and the biggest one was that he offered me to

a drug lord. The bad thing is that I can see a future with my fiancé, Henry Benorik. He's dangerous, but he has a good heart and has been taking really good care of me. I think I could love him.

"Good morning, beautiful," Henry whispers in my ear and kisses me softly on the lips. I pulled the soft sheets over me and tried to go back to sleep. "We have that gala tonight, honey." He uncovered me, and my messy hair covered my face. I kissed him before getting out of bed.

I felt good about myself after six months. My hair was platinum blonde, my eyes were bright green again, my skin was clear and perfect, and my body looked great in my black lacy nightgown that barely covered anything. I've worked out every day since I left, and now my body is slim and fit. I had a huge dragon tattoo on my thigh that was beautiful, but it was connected to my dad's mafia.

I smiled at how far I'd come, took off my clothes, and stepped into the warm water.

I let the warm water run down my back, which made goosebumps run up my body. My face felt great under the water. I was so relaxed and distracted by the shower that I didn't hear Henry come in with me. He wrapped his strong arms around me from behind and kissed me up my neck as I threw my head back slowly.

He whispers, "So beautiful."

I turned around and kissed him. Henry's lips were so different from Sebastian's and Caleb's. They were softer, and I could feel how much he wanted me and needed me.

Henry didn't wait; he picked me up and I wrapped my legs around his strong body. I moaned, "I want you in me now."

He gently pushed me against the shower wall and kissed every part of my body.

When he thrust into me, I arched my back hard. I screamed when he fully entered me with his long length. The water made my legs slippery, so he held on tight. He didn't stop; he kept thrusting inside me. With every thrust, my whole body banged against the wall behind me.

"Oh my god, Henry," I moaned into his neck. He quickly found my lips and sucked on my neck, leaving his mark.

Henry was very possessive of me. He liked that people knew I was his. My dad loves him and thinks he's the one for me. I started to think the same thing.

We both walked out of the shower with our fluffy towels. I put on my makeup while he got dressed.

"I'm scared," I said as I brushed my hair and then grabbed my curling iron to curl my blonde hair.

"Don't worry, sweetie. I should be scared because you're so beautiful. "You know how many guys are going to want you." He kissed the love bite on my neck from behind, and I shivered.

"I have to admit, I'm excited to meet your friends." I smiled softly.

While I was standing up and walking to my closet, my robe fell off. I chose a long-sleeved, dark green dress that hugged all my curves. He watched me get dressed as I slowly pulled my black lace leggings up my long, silky legs.

"Don't make me f**k you against this wall, Aria." He laughed darkly as he clipped his watch to his wrist and struggled with his tie. I quickly walked over and tightened it for him.

“I wouldn’t mind, but we have a party to go to.” I bit my bottom lip and batted my eyelashes at him like I didn’t know what to do.

“After the party, dear.”

We both got dressed and then walked down the stairs to see my dad and his wife sitting on our couch. My dad cheated on my mum with this woman, and I don’t really understand why. She’s nothing like my mum; she was a rug compared to my beautiful mother.

My dad sold me to Henry, not for money but for information he wanted about another mafia. I had no idea my dad was a cartel leader; I had always been kept away from this kind of life. I knew he was involved in shady business, but I never knew he was a leader of a cartel.

Henry has probably been watching me for a while and couldn’t say no to my dad’s offer to marry me in exchange for information. Henry and my dad made me stronger; I trained with their crew and am now a member of their crew.

If my mom found out what I was up to, she’d literally drag me out of the house. Too bad I don’t care.

“Hey, Daddy. Hey, Maria.” I kissed my dad’s cheek and then Maria’s, who is my dad’s wife.

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Henry and my dad shook hands after that. “Aria, I heard that your mother would be at this gala. Are you still going?” My dad asked. He was worried that I would go back to being weak and not be able to handle it, but he was wrong.

“I have my fiancée, my dad, and my other mother. I’m fine.” I smiled at Maria.

To be completely honest, I’m using Maria. My mom didn’t take my side; she hurt me, so I will hurt her the same way. The only way I can hurt her without killing her is to use Maria.

Henry and I drove our own car, and Maria and my dad drove theirs. I’ve changed a lot in the last six months, both mentally and physically. I don’t want to see him because I think it will make me sad. Will I regret having this engagement ring on my finger? Henry must have sensed my worries because he gently put his hand on my thigh and smiled softly. I smiled back and put our fingers together.

When the party saw me, my heart raced and my sweaty hands let go of his dry hand.

You are strong, Aria.

I was so busy talking to myself that I didn’t see Henry get down and open the door for me. My dress was tight as hell and came down to my knees. I couldn’t even breathe. I would have worn my favourite sweatpants and a long-sleeve hoodie if I could have. My dad and Maria got there soon after. My dad helps Maria down, and Henry and I hold hands.

I felt sick to my stomach and couldn’t stop myself from throwing up. I was scared to

see people from my past because I was so weak then and I'm not like that anymore.

"Henry Benorik, Aria Benorik." He tells the guy at the door who is taking names and making sure no rivals try to get in.

"Who are the people behind you?" the security guard asked, pointing at Maria and my dad.

Henry says, "My in-laws are Jack Callahan and Maria Callahan."

The security guard quickly regretted it; everyone knows who my dad is and is afraid of him because he was so ruthless when he was younger. My dad has come a long way and changed, sort of.

"Little boy." My dad hisses at the poor guy, and I start to laugh.

"Be nice, Daddy." I laughed even harder.

Henry bends down to my ear level, and I can feel his warm tongue licking my earlobe. Henry whispered, "I thought you only called me daddy."

If he only knew...

"Back off, horny a*s." My dad put his arms in front of me and Henry, and I couldn't help but laugh. I've never been happier than I am right now.

So I thought, "F**k."

We took our tables, which had the words "Benorik Family" on them. My dad didn't like that very much, but I reminded him that I'll be a Benorik in less than a month when I marry Henry.

The theme for the gala was white and diamonds, and it was beautiful. A lot of people at this party were in the mafia, so there were a lot of drugs and prostitutes.

Everyone was dancing, and I was watching and wishing. Henry saw this.

“Dance with me.” Henry stood up and held out his hand for me to take. I smiled at my dad, who smiled back.

I put my arms around the back of his neck, and he put his hands around my waist. His eyes were a dark grey colour, and I had grown accustomed to them over the past six months. I smiled softly at him. Ben was a beautiful man. He has a great personality and is very good looking. I felt a spark looking into his eyes, a spark I’ve felt before and one that scares me to have again.

Will he hurt me?

He asked softly, “What’s wrong, honey?”

Henry turned me around and pulled me roughly back to his chest. “Just thinking about how we’re getting married soon.” I gasped because I was afraid I might fall.

“I can’t wait.” His breath smelt like mint and blew across my face.

His love made me feel like I was in a trance, and I slowly leaned in. His soft lips covered mine, and now my hand is on his cheek, making the kiss deeper. His lips took me to a different world, one where I don’t feel pain and he makes me stronger.

He pulled my body even closer to his, and both of my hands were on his cheeks. I kissed him harder because I needed and wanted him more.

“Aria.” A voice I hadn’t heard in a while woke me up from my trance.

“One man, one woman.”

“One woman man.”

When I turned around, I saw Sebastian and my mom.

“Want you all to myself, don’t want anyone else.”

I gulped, and Henry tightened his grip on my waist, pulling me closer to him. He quickly moved to protect me when a stranger came up to us. He didn’t know them.

Sebastian also acted out right away and grabbed my mum, making her get closer to him.

I rolled my eyes when he told her to leave me alone. “This is my mother and her fiancé,” I said, and Henry’s hard stare stayed on my mother.

“Don’t look at her like that,” Sebastian growled.

“Don’t tell my fiancé what to do.” I got in front of Henry before he could do anything. He wouldn’t touch my mum, but Sebastian, I couldn’t say the same thing.

“Fiancé?” Sebastian raised an eyebrow.

“You heard right.” My dad and Maria walked over to stand next to us. My mom’s body tensed up when she saw my dad and his ex-mistress.

“Are you okay, dear?” Maria put her hand on my shoulder. I wanted to push her hand away from mine, but my mom was watching very closely.

“Get your hands off my kid,” my mom said, but Sebastian pulled her back to his side.

I glared at her, then turned to hug Maria. She smirked and kissed my cheek, showing off to my mom.

I said, "I think you guys should leave." I pulled up the end of my short dress to show off my dragon tattoo on my leg.

I wanted to make her even more angry, just because I could.

My mom gasped and put her hand over her mouth. Sebastian's face was blank, like always.

"You let her join your group." My mom is mad at my dad, and he rolls his eyes.

"Just walk away," my dad said.

Sebastian grabbed my mom's wrist and pulled her away. I could finally breathe, but a part of me felt bad. Henry quickly grabbed my hand and brought me back to reality.

"You'll be fine, princess." My dad kissed my forehead, and I felt better knowing he was there for me.

"I need to go to the toilet," I stuttered.

"I'll go with you," Henry said right away, and I turned around to face him.

"No, I just need to be alone for a while." I smiled softly, kissed his lips, and then walked away.

I felt like that weak little girl again, the one who loved her stepfather and wanted to be loved.

I ran through the halls, crying, trying to find the bathroom. I was almost to the toilet when someone pulled me into a room.

I was almost in the toilet when someone pulled me into a room.

I was scared because I didn't know who it was when a hand covered my mouth. I kned the person in the back, hitting their lower member, and then I started swinging my arms. The person groaned in pain and turned me around.

"Sebastian," I mumbled.

His dark blue eyes took me to a whole other world. When I realised he wasn't going to kill me, my face relaxed. I shivered when he put his hands around me. It's been six months since I felt his touch. He was looking at every part of my face.

"Hi," I whispered like a complete idiot.

Aria, you really just said hi. What the f**k?

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Sebastian asked angrily, “What do you think you’re doing?” I was surprised. Why was he so angry?

I was confused and said, “What?”

Sebastian growled, “You married a drug lord and joined his crew.” “You have a f*****g tattoo that ties you to them.” His chest rumbled; he was really angry. I could almost see the fire in his eyes, and he held me tighter, making me squirm.

“And? Just so you know, I really love Henry,” I said, turning away from him. I was angry because it was my choice and mine alone.

“Is that so?” he asks.

I nodded.

“Tell me Pumpkin, does Henry touch you like I do? Does he take control in bed? Does he hit every spot like I do?” He pushed me against the door and put his hand around my neck. I held his wrist and looked him in the eye.

“Tell me the truth: you’re marrying him because your dad told you to.” Sebastian put more pressure on my neck, but not enough to hurt me.

“Maybe my dad did make a deal, but I love him; he’s a good man.” I said softly, which made me sound weak about my choice.

Perhaps it’s because I’m unsure about my feelings right now. As I’ve said before,

seeing Sebastian makes me question everything about myself.

I looked into his eyes, and he stopped talking. So did I. I haven't seen him in six months, and I missed everything about him. He loves my mum, but he might love more than one person, just like I do. I love him even though he's cruel, cold, and unemotional. His hand relaxed a little, but my hand stayed on his. Sebastian somehow got closer to my face. I could feel his hot breath on my cheeks and it made my nose itch.

"We shouldn't," I whispered, and my voice came out dry. Our noses were touching, and my body was on high alert. My legs felt like jelly. I was on the edge of my toes, and it felt like I was in the Twilight Zone.

"I know." Sebastian puts his other hand on the wall behind me, which makes me swallow the big knot in my throat.

We both kissed each other hard, and I gasped as my body rose with his. As we kissed harder, my hand moved to his hair and pulled it in my direction. I moaned in his mouth, and Sebastian let go of my neck. He then guided my hands down my thighs and picked me up, making me wrap my legs around his body. Our lips were having a hard time deciding between love and l*t. Sebastian put me on the bed and lay on top of me, with my hands around his biceps. My blonde hair was all over the place, and his kisses were going down my neck. He grabbed my leg with his hand, and I pulled him back to my lips by grabbing his cheeks.

Before I pulled away, I kissed him one last time. "I'm engaged," I said, out of breath. My forehead gently touches his.

Sebastian said, "So am I."

I said softly, "To my mom." My voice had a hint of guilt in it. I said, "You need to let

me go; you don't love me," and I pushed him away and sat up. I was looking at the wall, and his eyes were moving down my body.

"I know," he said.

I wanted to cry, but I won't let him see me like that anymore. A piece of my heart broke even more. I would win, not him.

I got up, pulled my dress down, and fixed my hair. Sebastian stood up after me, fixed his suit a little, and then took my hand. My back was still to him. "That doesn't mean I don't care about you, Aria." Sebastian turned me around.

"Why do you keep doing this to me? You know I'm happy and engaged, and now you just want to ruin it for me," I said angrily. "You know what? Maybe it's me. Maybe I don't want to mess with little boys anymore after being with a real man like Henry." I said this to hurt him as much as I could.

Sebastian pulled me close to him, and his eyes were a darker shade of blue. I swallowed hard. "That kiss wasn't just nothing." His voice got deep and dangerous.

I didn't know what to say to him, so I stayed quiet for a few minutes. Was I going to lie and say that the kiss didn't mean anything? Or be honest and tell him that the kiss we just shared meant a lot to me. Sebastian definitely looked different; he looked like he'd been through hell. His beard got darker, and I could barely see the bags under his eyes.

"Sebastian, you need to stop—"

Bang

Bang

The sound of gunfire from outside cut me off. That's what I thought when I ran out the door and left Sebastian behind: my mom, my dad, and my fiancé. I ran so fast that I didn't think about what was out there. When I got to the end of the hall, I saw people running, blood on the crystal white floor, and people screaming. I saw the shooters, five men dressed in all black.

I picked up a gun that was on the floor and slowly and carefully ran to the corners where I last saw my mum. There were so many dead people that I kept stepping on them. I ran really fast to find my mum. Sebastian was nowhere to be found, and the gunfire didn't stop. I was almost there when something or someone drew my attention.

"Just catch him and get it over with." Henry's voice was rough, unlike how he usually spoke. Henry was talking to the masked men who were killing people.

Goddamn it

I did what I thought was best because I was upset and didn't know where my mum or dad were. I shot the guy he was talking to in the knee and pointed the gun at Henry. Henry raised his hands in the air as the man in the mask screamed in pain and crouched down to try to ease his knee.

"Aria, this isn't what it looks like. Put the gun down," Henry said, still holding his hands up.

The other four guys in masks aimed their guns at me. I didn't think about that.

Henry said, "Don't you dare point your guns at my fiancée," which made things even more confusing. The guys put their guns down. They looked just as confused as I did.

There were more shots fired from another gun behind me. I turned my head, but I still

had my gun pointed at Henry. Sebastian was shooting to get our attention, and there was blood on his suit. I almost ran to him to see if it was his blood.

“Aria, he works for Dante, and so does your dad,” Sebastian said, pointing at Henry. I moved out of the way a little.

Henry said, “Dante is your father.”

I was so tired that I lowered the gun, which gave him a chance to take it from me and point it at Sebastian. Henry pulled back the gun and got ready to shoot it. “Your father never wanted you or your mother to be hurt. He wanted to kill Sebastian before he could kill you or your mother.”

It was scary when he smiled. “That son of a bitch, he almost killed his own blood,” Sebastian yells.

I remembered the whole thing that happened in the kitchen. “Did my dad send those men to kill him?” I asked.

Henry says, “They were sent there to kidnap you and your mum. If you and your mum are out of his life, your father sees no point in killing him.”

Sebastian said, “You know how much I care about you and your mother. I would never let you guys go, even if you didn’t want to.” He motioned for me to come over to him.

I looked at my fiancé, and he was holding out his hand for me to take. I had to choose between two men.

Sebastian said, “Your mother is waiting, Pumpkin.”

“Princess, don’t.” My dad’s voice came from the side. “Sebastian is called devil for a reason; he killed his whole family. I won’t let him do the same to mine.” My dad said this in a calm voice.

I looked back at Sebastian. He looked sad and guilty. How can someone kill their own family?

“Where’s my mum?” I asked Sebastian, who was now in front of me.

Sebastian asked, “Why can’t you trust me with your life? She wants to come with me in the car.”

“Because you’ve hurt me before and I can’t trust you anymore, they are my family now too.” I said right away, because I wasn’t going to sugarcoat how he had mentally abused me.

Henry tightened his grip on the gun. I can admit that I wanted Sebastian to hurt, but not to the point of death.

“Do it,” my dad said out of the blue. At first, I was confused, but then the guns went off. There were two guns and two guys I care about.

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Sebastian thought he was shooting at me, so he jumped in front of me and took a bullet in the shoulder. Sebastian's gun shot went through the wall behind us instead of hitting us. My head was spinning because everything happened so quickly.

"Sebastian." I knelt down next to him and tried to stop the blood from flowing.

"Get him and take him to the house," my dad said to Henry, who was already trying to pick him up. "Help him carry the bastard, idiots!" My dad yells at his masked men.

"Oh my god, Sebastian." My mom ran to him to try to comfort his hurt shoulder. I got in touch with my mum, and she cried on my shoulder while I hugged her.

I whispered in her ear, "He's fine, just hurt."

"Jack, please let him go." My mom begs my dad to be nice. My dad moves closer to us and gently brushes my mom's hair back from her face while looking at her.

"I do what's best for my family." My dad kissed my forehead and then my mom's. I didn't expect my mum to hit him in the face. I jumped up because she scared me.

"You're doing what's best for yourself, you selfish bastard," my mom said with tears in her eyes. My dad laughed and licked his numb lip. My mom turned around to look at me.

"Mom," I said softly.

"Why didn't you go with him, Aria? He just wanted to go home," my mum said in a

loud voice.

Maybe I made a mistake by not going with him. But then it would start all over again, with me wanting what I can never have. I don't want that pain anymore.

"I couldn't, even if I wanted to," I said.

I was mad at my mom because she didn't see that her daughter was in love with her fiancé. Was she really that dumb?

"Are you coming?" Henry asked, and I nodded.

"You are too, mother." I rolled my eyes and went after Henry.

How was I going to get Sebastian out of this mess now?

My mum tries to pull her arm away from my dad's stone grip and says, "You can't do this, Jack."

"I'm doing what's best for you," my dad says as he drags my mum up the stairs. I stayed right behind them. I never really understood why my dad cheated on my mum. They seemed so in love.

"No, you're doing what's best for you." My mother pulled her arm back again, this time to fight my father.

"Stop it, Dad and Mom," I said. I remembered my childhood, when I saw my parents fight every night, my father storm off to study, and my mother cry in the kitchen while trying to act like everything was fine. My dad let her go right away, and my mum touched her wrist before going into her room and slamming the door.

“She’s mad at you, Dad, and she has a right to be,” I said, almost in shock. I put my arms across my chest. I said, “You lied to me,” while looking at my mother’s door and not being able to look him in the eyes.

My dad said, “I did what was best for you and your mother.” There is no doubt that my dad loved me with all his heart, but he shouldn’t have lied. He doesn’t have to take care of my mother anymore, but he still feels like he needs to protect her.

I ask, “You still care about her?” I now look into his greenish eyes, which were so familiar to mine that it felt like I was looking into my own eyes.

“She’s your mother, and I will always care for her,” my dad says.

I shook my head no. “Do you still love her, in a romantic way?” I made my question more direct.

For a moment, my dad didn’t say anything. “Maria is waiting for me. I need to go to bed. You can’t see Sebastian before I go.” My father said this with his finger right in my face, and he meant it. I just nodded. What was wrong with him that he didn’t answer my question?

“I need to check his wounds, Daddy,” I said.

“No, Aria. Your fiancée is in there with him. I’d be surprised if he’s still alive after that.” My dad laughed and walked away. My heart almost stopped when I saw Henry hurting him. Sebastian was already hurt and couldn’t take any more.

Forget Aria. I’ll just wait until Henry leaves the basement.

I slowly put my hair up in a bun and went to the couch, where I could hide from Henry after he left. I was there for a full two hours, and my eyes started to wander

when the basement door opened. I curled up on the couch to hide my body as best I could.

“Boss, he’ll die if we don’t get a doctor,” someone said. I slowly pulled the blanket away from my ear so I could hear better.

Henry yells at the man who has gone silent, “I don’t give a f**k, no one touches my Aria.” Touch? I don’t get it. Sebastian didn’t touch me in front of Henry. Henry didn’t sound like himself; he sounded possessed. “I’ll kill him myself if he’s still alive tomorrow.”

The man said, “Yes, sir.” I heard them go out of the living room.

I got up and ran to the washbasin right away. I got a bowl and filled it with warm water. I was able to maintain a balance between the vodka and water. I could use it to clean his wounds. Before going down to the basement, I also got a cloth. I shivered when my bare foot touched the cold cement. I couldn’t see where I was going on the stairs, but that didn’t stop me. I was horrified by what I saw when I got to the bottom of the stairs.

“Sebastian.” I gasped and put my hand over my mouth. I put the bowl and everything else on the floor and ran to him.

Sebastian was hanging from the ceiling, and the ropes were cutting into his wrists. I pulled on his cheeks and lifted his head with my hands. I looked for any sign of life on his face. Sebastian’s dark blue eyes met mine, and I let out the breath I didn’t know I was holding. I ran over to the hook that was holding Sebastian up and pulled the rope back with all my strength, but it didn’t work.

Sebastian groaned in pain, “The...axe...” I looked around the room until I found the axe. I quickly picked it up and walked over to the hook. I leaned back and hit the axe

hard. Sebastian's left hand came loose. I went to the right hook and did the same thing. Sebastian fell to his knees and could barely keep himself up.

I bent down to his level and raised his head. His eyes were lighter than usual, his face was pale, and there was blood on every part of his body. I slowly let go of his head and crawled over to the bowl of alcohol and water. I put him in a sitting position and dipped the cloth in water. I slowly rubbed the cloth against Sebastian's rough skin, and every time I did, he grunted in pain.

"I'm so sorry." My voice shook, and I was about to cry, to be honest. He didn't answer, which made me think he was mad at me. I didn't even notice until just now that Sebastian was shirtless. There were marks all over his body and a big bullet hole in his shoulder. I take hold of the bottle of vodka. I said, "This is going to hurt," when I opened the bottle.

"Wait," Sebastian growled in pain. Sebastian took the bottle from me and drank some vodka. He coughed in disgust and handed the bottle back to me. I turned the bottle up so that the vodka could flow down Sebastian's body. Sebastian grunts in pain, but his grunt sounds more like a scream.

I turned my head because I couldn't see him this way. I feel like it's all my fault.

"Aria, it's fine. I'm fine," Sebastian says.

I yell, "No, you're not fine, and it's all my fault." I'm mad at myself for hurting someone so much. Sebastian rubbed my chin with his thumb, which made me turn my head to look at him.

Sebastian quickly wiped away the tears that had fallen. "It's not your fault," Sebastian grunted.

“I have to get you out of here before Henry kills you,” I said, and Sebastian nodded as I snuggled into his hand.

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Sebastian asked, “Is your mother safe?”

He’ll definitely ask about my mom because he loves her.

“She’s fine.” I hold back my anger and smile softly. You can’t make someone love you, Aria.

I clean all of his wounds by rubbing the cloth over his chest. I put the cloth on the bullet hole when I got there. “Keep it there,” I said to Sebastian. Sebastian put his hand on his hurt hand.

“I have to kidnap you,” Sebastian said as I tried to clean up the mess I had made. I turned around, confused. “They won’t just let me go willingly especially since your little fiancé knows about us.” Sebastian grunted.

“No, he can’t. I’ve never told anyone.” I said in shock, “That’s not possible.”

“Well, he knows.” Sebastian held his side in pain. My stomach was a mess. What if he tells my dad or, even worse, my mum?

“How are you going to kidnap me when you can barely stand up?” I ask softly.

Sebastian said, “You need to call Caleb.” It felt like Sebastian hit me with a lot of bricks all at once. What can I say to Caleb after everything that happened?

“I can’t.” I shook my head yes, very dramatically.

“There’s no other choice, Aria. I’ll die,” Sebastian said in pain. I gently put my hand on his shoulder and rubbed my thumb against his skin to try to calm him down. Sebastian mumbled, “Caleb has a sister—your best friend. Call her to pick us up.”

“Sebastian, she can hardly kill a fly, let alone f*****g humans!” I’m angry, tired, and worried. Maya can’t help, and there’s no way she can even pick up a gun. It could be dangerous and deadly to involve Maya.

Sebastian said, “Call her. You think she doesn’t know anything because her brother is very trained.”

“Okay,” I said, annoyed. Sebastian nodded right away when I said, “I’ll be right back.”

I ran back up the stairs and into my room, where I forgot Henry would be. Henry was reading a book on our bed when I walked into the room. I took my hair down from the bun and acted more relaxed. I picked up my phone from the nightstand.

Henry asked, “Where were you at?” as he turned the page in his book. I made up a story in my head. I’m not very good at lying, so let’s see how this goes.

“I am with my mom,” I said, putting my hands on my hips and leaning on one foot. Before looking at Henry, who had put down his book, I looked around the room.

Henry smiled and said, “Can I get a kiss, love?” I won’t deny that I’ve grown to love Henry, but it’ll never be the same as the love I have for Sebastian. His smirk has always been charming.

I nodded and went around the bed to his side. I put my hands behind his neck and he kisses me softly on the lips. Henry always kisses me with all the love he has, and this kiss is soft and warm like the others. I pulled away a little and rested my forehead on

his to try to catch my breath.

Henry whispers, “I love you, Aria.” My hands went back to his cheeks, and I pulled our faces apart to look deeply into his eyes.

His eyes told a great story about love and need. With Henry, it was so easy; I didn’t have to sneak around or hide. I wouldn’t be hurting anyone.

“I love you too,” I said before I left.

I had to keep a straight face, but I was really scared on the inside. Henry made it a lot easier for me to choose. I went into the kitchen and called the person who has hurt me so much and left me with scars that will last a lifetime.

“Caleb, Sebastian needs your help,” I said on the phone. “I need you to come to my dad’s house. Come in from the back, where the basement is.” Caleb has been here before, so he knows where everything is.

“On my way.”

I put down the phone. When I realised I hadn’t taken any air earlier on the phone, I took a breath. His voice didn’t change; it sounded the same. I thought he would be more surprised, maybe even happy, but it sounded like he was done with me. I calmed down before going back down to the basement. Sebastian was lying on the floor.

“I told him that Caleb was coming to get you.” I lifted his head up and felt torn between love and hate.

“You mean us,” he said. I looked at him, and his eyes were boring holes in my face.

I shook my head and said, “Just you.”

“They won’t let me go unless I have a hostage.”

“Yes, they will. They’re sleeping, so you just need to stay away from my mom and me.” I said while biting my lips. “You can’t marry my mum. If you do, my dad will kill you.”

I said, “He still loves her.”

Sebastian grunted, “What about you? What if I choose you?” Even though he was in a lot of pain, he still tried to sit up. I put my hand on his chest and pushed him back down to the floor.

“You can’t, I can’t. You love my mom and she loves you. I love Henry, I choose him.” I said with confidence, even though I knew I was lying to him and myself. The truth is that I want Sebastian in every way possible.

Sebastian asked, “You love him?” in a deeper, meaner voice.

“Of course I do; he’s never hurt me or made me feel bad.”

There was a knock, and it came from the wall. I quickly got up and opened the door. I pulled it back. Caleb’s face came into view again, and there was my other weakness. Caleb’s eyes moved down my body until they landed on my tattoo. I quickly pulled down my pyjama shorts. I crossed my arms over my chest and stepped aside to let him in.

“Boss.” Caleb tried to talk to Sebastian, but he pushed him away.

“Get me the hell out of here. I’m fine.”

Caleb puts Sebastian's arm around his shoulders and lifts him up. Caleb began to walk outside, and I quickly followed him. Sebastian stopped Caleb when we arrived at the car and used all his strength to get closer to me.

"Sebastian, you should lay down—" I tried to say before he cut me off.

Sebastian says, "I can't leave without a hostage. I won't get your mum back and pay back for this blood." "I love your mom and want to marry her. I won't leave here without any hope of getting her back, but your life is everything to those men inside." He catches me off guard, and I start to back away from him before he can grab me. "With you as a hostage, your dad and Henry will surely hand her over." My heart was racing. Was that all he cared about? Revenge is a bitch.

Sebastian yells, "Get her, Caleb!"

I looked at Caleb, and he looked lost. Caleb didn't listen when I shook my head.

"Sorry, Aria." Caleb lunges at me, and I kick him in the balls. I started to run, but Caleb grabbed my ankle and pulled me back. I fell forward, and everything started to blur when I tried to get up.

"I think I fell," I mumbled as I fell back down, but before I could touch the floor again, a pair of hands grabbed me.

"F**k"

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I woke up in a dark, cold room with my hands tied to a chair. I couldn't stop thinking about Sebastian and how he hurt me to save my mom. I was finally ready to let him go and move on, but no. He'll just keep leading me on because he's so selfish. I've been in this basement for at least two days and haven't seen anyone. Caleb and Sebastian didn't come to check on me, and I haven't eaten. My body hurt all over and I felt weak.

The door opened, and it felt like God himself heard me. Sebastian walked in with Caleb behind him. Caleb was holding something in his hands. I was so focused on what Caleb was holding that I didn't even see Nina walk in right behind her fiancé. Nina smiled the biggest smile I've ever seen. She saw me and laughed. When I heard her dumb laugh, I tossed and turned in the chair.

Sebastian is across from me, watching me while Caleb works on this thing. I could have sworn I saw regret in Sebastian's bold eyes. Nina wore a pink skirt and a white crop top with heels that were bigger than her ego. Her bump was definitely bigger, which made me hate her even more.

I asked, "What the hell is this?" as I fought with the chair again. Sebastian puts his hands behind his back and appears to be recovering from his wounds.

"Sorry you don't get the VIP treatment, Princess." Princess is a nickname my dad gave me, and Sebastian was aware of it. He just wanted to get on my nerves. I angrily stared him down.

"Let's just make this quick," Caleb says, getting everyone's attention. I was staring at him until I gave up and looked down at my lap.

Nina smiles and says, “Wow, it looks like little Aria is finally giving up.”

You are so lucky to be pregnant.

Sebastian hissed, “Caleb, if you don’t shut up, I’ll kill your dog.” I don’t know why, but what Sebastian said gave me a little bit of hope that he might really care about me.

“Get out.” Caleb turned to his future wife. Nina was surprised that he would actually side with Sebastian, and she looked at me. I couldn’t help but smile. She turned quickly and walked out.

Caleb clicked a button on the device again. I asked, “Is this supposed to give me superpowers or what?” I can tell by the way this thing looks that I would definitely become the next black widow or something. I promise that if I get power after this, I’ll kill that bitch Nina.

Sebastian said with a straight face, “You’re very funny,” even though he didn’t find it funny at all.

I don’t trust Caleb anymore because the phone he was holding started to ring. The screen against the wall turns white when he plugs the phone into the machine. I should have known that it was a screen projector before now.

Henry was on the screen with my dad next to him. I said “Henry” while wiggling against the rope. I pulled on my hands, which only made the rope rub against them hard, hurting me.

“Aria.” Henry almost came through the screen when he saw me. Caleb was watching us closely, unsure of my relationship with him.

Sebastian said, “Aria, you must really love Henry if you’re willing to fight more.” He looked at my burned hands.

It looked like my dad was going to blow up with rage.

Sebastian walked behind me, and I stayed still. Sebastian said out loud, “Poor little Aria, she just wanted to play with the devil.”

“What do you want?” my dad asked.

“Caleb, give me the thing.” Sebastian said to Caleb. Caleb reached into his pocket and gave Sebastian a knife.

There’s no way he’s going to hurt me, right? Caleb won’t let him do it.

Sebastian walked in front of me and bent down to my level. He looked at my face, and his expression softened. My lips were shaking.

“Please don’t, Sebastian,” I begged him.

“I’m sorry, but I have to.” He whispers so quietly that I almost miss it.

Henry yells, “Don’t you dare touch her!”

Sebastian turned to face the camera. Sebastian smirked and said, “Oh Henry, we’re so past that.”

Henry’s eyes darkened, and through the screen, his breathing grew heavier. Caleb looked at me and Sebastian with interest, but I was too busy trying to stay alive to look at him.

My dad looked confused but didn't say anything. He just kept looking at Sebastian's hand, which was holding the knife.

Sebastian turned around to face me again. He seemed reluctant to do it.

He leaned over and began to unbutton my jeans. I tried to fight it off, but he was too strong. I heard Henry, Dad, and Caleb mumble, but I didn't pay attention to any of them. Sebastian pulled my jeans down, leaving me in my pink lacy knickers. I was wearing a crop top, so my knickers were on full display. Sebastian slammed the knife into my leg so hard that I could hear it hit my bone before I could say anything.

I screamed in pain so loudly that my heart raced as if it were about to pop out of my chest. My body shook in pain, and I was in shock. I tilted my head to the side to try to numb the pain.

"Aria!" Henry yelled. "I'll f*****g kill you, Sebastian. I'll rip your f*****g head off your body."

"You said we were just going to scare them," Caleb said, pushing him away from me and bending down to my level.

I shot my head back in pain, and Caleb grabbed it. He tried to make me look at him by pushing my chin in his direction.

"Look at me," Caleb yells nervously.

Henry's voice sounded like a faraway scream when he said, "Baby, I'm coming for you." Everything was getting dark and blurry.

Sebastian growled, "I want my fiancée back in a month. I think I'll spend some time with my stepdaughter to get to know her better."

There was a lot of red blood everywhere, and I was starting to feel dizzy. Caleb ripped off his shirt and tied it around my thigh.

“Leave her alone, this is between you and-” My fiancé was yelling before Sebastian unplugged the device. My vision was blurry.

Sebastian pushed Caleb away from me, and he looked like he was about to lose it. Sebastian tore off the rope that was tied around my hands and then tore off the ones that were tied around my feet. I felt so dizzy that my head was falling forward.

Sebastian raised my head. “Don’t give up on me now, Pumpkin,” Sebastian whispered as he picked me up like a bride.

My head hit his arm, and I screamed in pain. It was getting so dark that I could hear people yelling. Sebastian looked down at me and looked really scared. My head fell to the right, and there was no light.

I woke up to a beeping sound and slowly opened my eyes, not knowing what to expect. I was praying that this was just a bad dream and that it wasn’t real. I heard something moving next to me while an IV was pumping through me. Caleb was sleeping in the chair, and he didn’t look comfortable. I looked around the room and saw that I was in a hospital. I sat up and groaned in pain. He did stab me, and my thigh was wrapped in a white bandage.

A deep, tired voice says, “You’ve been out for two days.” I looked into Caleb’s eyes as he sat up and rubbed his sleepy eyes. “I had no idea he was really going to hurt you. I would never, ever put you through physical pain, Aria,” Caleb says as he stands up and walks towards me. He bends down to my level.

When he put his hand on my cheek, I jumped in fear. He seemed upset by how I reacted, but he calmed down when I put my hand on his.

“It doesn’t hurt less,” I said in a rough voice.

“I broke up with Nina,” Caleb said. I couldn’t think or talk. What did he want me to do? Jump into his arms and say, ‘I loved him forever.’

“I stayed with her because I thought that if I left, I would never see my child again. I never loved her. I never loved anyone as much as I love you. “Seeing the life leave your body changed me. I started to think about life without you, but I couldn’t.” Caleb’s eyes searched my face for a reaction, but I was numb. I couldn’t go through this again.

“Nina and I had s*x once, and she got pregnant and made me date her.”

“Where is Sebastian?” I asked, “I don’t want to see him, but I want to know what the jerk is doing after he almost killed me.”

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Caleb stood up and said, "I just wanted to know if Sebastian has come to see me."

"After he stabbed you, he was scared. He took you to the hospital and then left. He hasn't been back since. With his back to me, he says, "He just doesn't care enough."

Caleb whispers so softly that I almost miss it: "There's something between you two."

"You are crazy." I tried to play it off, but I couldn't risk it. Caleb would hate me, and so would everyone else.

"Don't f*****g lie to me, Aria. You think I'm stupid." Caleb turned to me and pointed his finger down. "I see how he looks at you. I've never seen Sebastian care about anyone as much as he does about you, not even your own mother."

I was going to argue with him, but then the door opened behind him. I got my hopes up like a fool. I thought it was Sebastian, but it turned out to be Maya.

"Oh my god, you're awake." Maya ran into my arms, and I hugged her tightly. I was watching Caleb while I hugged her, and he looked angry. He turned back around and ran his hand across his face.

Caleb said, "I'm glad you're okay," before opening the door and leaving. I felt bad because I was messing up my mom, Henry, and now Caleb too.

"What got into him?" Maya smiles at me and pulls away.

I started to laugh, and Maya looked at me funny because I was laughing so hard. My

laugh got drier and drier, and then it turned into a sob. I started to cry in a big way.

“I’m...a...horrible...person.” I cried. My body shakes, and she looks at me longingly.

“Are you okay, Aria?”” Maya puts her hand on my shoulder and tilts her head.

I felt betrayed by her for siding with her brother, but right now I just need my best friend.

“I’m f-fine.” I started to breathe too fast. I could barely cry because I was having trouble breathing.

“I...I’m okay,” I yelled.

“Aria, shhhh, it’s okay.” She hugs me and rubs my back up and down. “Breathe, Aria,” she whispers.

“I can’t...I can’t.”

She raises my face with her hands to make sure I am looking at her. “You’re having a panic attack,” she says.

“Breathe with me,” she says, and I do what she says.

I did what she said until I started to feel better and my breathing became more even. She had tears in her eyes as she watched me breathe.

“I’m so sorry to see you like this,” she whispers.

“Nobody gets it; I don’t even know why I care about him.”

“He’s a terrible person, and he uses me.” I cried when I heard, “I’m a stupid girl, a stupid girl who just wants to be loved.”

Love is a dangerous game, and I always lose. It’s remarkable how someone can hurt you so deeply and yet your love for them never truly fades. I feel like this pain will never go away; he’s always going to hurt me, but I can’t let go.

I didn’t have to love Henry or marry him. It was forced.

She looked confused; she didn’t know who I was talking about.

“He stabbed me, Maya.” I yelled, tears streaming down my face. I looked up at her, a confused expression on her face, which began to soften. Her eyes lit up when she realised who I was talking about.

“Mr. Maya says, “Devereux stabbed you.”

I felt like a huge brick had been lifted off my shoulder. I wiped my tears with the back of my hand and looked down at my wrapped thigh.

“He hurt me again,” I said softly.

When I was seven, Maya and I promised to always be there for each other. As teenagers, we always had each other’s backs and defended each other. Maya and I have grown apart over the years, but our love for each other has never changed. We could never stay mad at each other, no matter how hard we tried.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” She asked.”

I looked back up at her and said, “That’s why he’s my mom’s fiancé.”

“Why didn’t you tell me? I’m your best friend.” She got up and looked angry.

I took her hand and my eyes started to plead.

“Please don’t be mad,” I said quietly. “I couldn’t handle that either.”

She glared at me for a moment before nodding and sitting back down on the bed. I tightened my grip on her hand.

Maya whispers, “You’ll be fine.” I sniffed and looked down at my hands, which were getting wet with tears.

“I-I think I’m broken,” I said, stuttering.

She lay down next to me and patted the empty space next to her head. I lay down across from her, and she pulled the hospital blanket over us. I snuggled up to the warmth of the blanket. She looked into my green eyes, looking for an answer, but I didn’t have one. My body relaxed as I felt calmer with her around; she has always known how to make me feel better.

“Aria, you’re not broken. She says, “You’re smart, beautiful, kind, and strong. You have an amazing heart.” “You deserve the love you give to others.”

What she said made sense: I love too quickly and give my all when they give me nothing in return. To move on, I have to love myself. Maya gently patted my head to comfort me and started singing the song my mum used to sing to us when we were kids.

My body was completely relaxed and ready for sleep, and my eyes began to close.

Sebastian stabbed me a week ago, and he hasn’t been seen since. I came home two

days ago and he wasn't there. Caleb and Maya have been hanging out, and things have been really awkward between Caleb and me.

Every day I've begged Caleb to let me go home. Sebastian told Caleb he couldn't let me go home or call Henry, and even when he's not here, he's still in charge of my life.

Maya yells, "We're going out tonight!" I put the book I was reading on my lap down.

I tilted my head at her as she went through my closet looking for something to wear.

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“I’m not going, Maya.” I yawned and picked up my book again.

She gets my book out of my hands and throws it on the floor. With her arms crossed over her chest, she shows off her resting bitch face.

“You can’t just stay in this room and think about that man. You should be having fun, partying, and getting laid all the time,” Maya yells.

“Ugh, no.” I said, “Maybe she doesn’t understand that I’m really engaged.”

I took my hand away from her mouth when she nodded. I rolled my eyes and looked at my open closet. She had a sly smile on her lips.

I asked, “You’re not going to quit, are you?” I already knew the answer. She laughs and nods, then goes back to my closet.

I deserve to have some fun, even if it’s not the right time. When is?

Just enjoy yourself.

“Fine,” I said as I picked up my book.

While I got out my curling iron and makeup, she started blasting music. When she turned up the radio and started dancing, I glared at her.

I started to get ready by putting on a very light layer of makeup. I chose to stick with blush, mascara, and lip gloss. A lot of songs have been played over time. Maya was

getting ready for tonight while I curled my blonde hair. I heard her heels clicking behind me, so I finished the last piece of hair and then turned around.

Her long-sleeved cheetah print crop top and short black skirt made her look stunning. Her straight, brown hair fell perfectly on her pale tan skin. She came over to me with my clothes in her hands and held them up for me to see.

“Maya, where are my clothes?” I looked at her with a blank look.

“Right here.” She grins and shows me her white teeth.

“I can’t see it because there’s not much there,” I said as I stood up. “I don’t want to wear that.”

“Yes, you are,” she says.

I stood there in the sexy outfit she chose for me and looked at myself in the body mirror.

Let go, Aria.

If I do say so myself, I look great. A little fun won’t hurt anyone. I messed up my hair by tossing it around a bit.

I told myself, “You can do this.”

Maya picked out a snake-skinned, tight dress for me. I walked out of the bathroom, having trouble pulling the zip.

I turned around and whispered, “Maya, a little help.”

Caleb was in the middle of my room, and he had a smirk on his face. He wore a grey polo shirt with the sleeves rolled up and ripped black jeans. I was wearing a slutty dress and he was in the room with me. Good job, Aria.

“I-I thought you were Maya.” I crossed my legs and put my hands behind my back, making them look messy and sloppy.

“I can help.” His voice was smooth and calm, maybe too calm.

I looked at him with suspicion, but I quickly gave up and turned around. I heard him walk over to me. It took a few minutes for me to feel his warm hand on my back as he slowly pulled the zip up.

After he zipped it up, his hands moved to my shoulders. I turned my head a little to see what he was up to. Maya walked in with chips in her hands before anything else could happen. I pulled away from him.

“Shake skin looks good on you, Aria,” he said before walking out the door.

As Maya walks towards me, she wiggles her eyebrows and says, “Don’t even say anything.” I pushed my hair back and put on my black heels.

“Okay, so you want to f**k my brother?” She laughs and puts on her heels. I shook my head and laughed a little.

I raised my hand and showed off my diamond ring. “I’m happily engaged,” I said.

“He bought you, so it doesn’t count,” she says. That hurt because she wasn’t lying. I think that’s why I could never really love him; I’ll always know he bought my body.

“You’re such a bitch.” I nudged her a little and laughed. She quickly joined in.

When we left the club, she drove us there, but Caleb was nowhere to be found. I was going to ask him, but it felt weird, and I wanted to have fun tonight. I think Maya was a lot more excited than I was, which was fine. I think she wanted more than just a fun night with drinks; I think she wants to have s*x tonight.

Maya lost her virginity to Jeff, her stupid ex, and their relationship ended badly. I lost mine after that. She has always been the fun friend, the wild friend, the sassy and sexy friend, the friend who would sleep with anyone, even if those guys were mean to her. She just ignores it. I have only slept with three men: Caleb, who I lost my virginity to, a random guy from school, and Sebastian.

Maya and I walked arm in arm into the club. The lights were flashing everywhere, and the dance floor was full of people. There was loud music and a strong smell of s*x and whisky in the air.

Girls wore tight little dresses that looked a lot like mine, and guys wore suits with buttons. I needed to drink alcohol before I could dance and talk to anyone, so Maya and I went to the bar. The bad thing is that I don't really drink, and I don't like the way my throat feels when I do.

"Two shots," Maya says to the hot barman, who looks her up and down. He puts the shots in front of us and starts working on them.

He asked Maya, "I'm leaving already. Want to dance?" She looks at me and takes her shot. I take mine after her. I bit down hard on the lime to get rid of the bitter taste in my mouth. It worked, sort of.

"Do you have a friend?" she asked while twirling her hair around her finger and batting her eyelashes at the barmaid.

"That would be me."

When I turned around, I saw a guy. He was a little taller than me and had blue eyes and ginger hair. He looked fine, but I've seen better.

"Hi, I'm Gary." The redhead reached out his hand to mine, and I smiled and took it.

"I've got a ring on it," I said with a smirk.

Maya rolls her eyes and leaves with the barman to dance, leaving Gary and me alone. We just looked at each other for a few seconds. The whole time, I was thinking about Sebastian.

He asks, "What colour do you like best?"

I laughed and looked away when he asked, "What's your favourite colour?"

Before straightening up, Gary laughs. Gary says, "You have a beautiful smile." He looks me in the eye again after taking a sip of his drink.

"Thanks," I say.

We talked and drank, and I didn't do anything bad. I was drawn to this guy, especially because he's ginger. After six shots, I was definitely in a different world. I could feel the alcohol.

This song that started playing was more s****l. Gary asked, "Why don't we dance?" I laughed and looked at him, then I grabbed his hand and pulled him to the dance floor.

I started to move my hips to the music, and he put his head on my shoulder and stood as close to me as he could. I didn't want this; the music got louder and the lights got brighter. I tried to pull away, but my body was too weak.

He whispered in my ear, “You’re so hot,” and then his hands started to move all over my body.

I tried to pull my dress down, but he hit my hands away. I would have never done this if I had known he was going to act this way, especially with a stranger.

I put my hands on his chest and tried to push him away, but my arms were too weak.

“How about you make this night a little more fun for me?” he said, his eyes full of desire.

Gary put his hands around my neck and slammed his nasty lips against mine. His mouth tasted like whisky and cheese. I was sickened and tried to pull away again, but he wouldn’t let go. My drunk self couldn’t do anything else.

Again, my sloppy arms tried to push him away, but it didn’t work. He tightened his grip on my throat and pushed his tongue into my mouth.

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Is this how my night is going to end? Being raped.

He was suddenly taken from me, and I gasped for air. The fight started when the music got louder and louder. Everyone was watching. I was tripping over my feet, and my clumsy hands ended up on my cheeks.

Sebastian was hitting him, and before he stood up, he hit Gary in the face one last time.

“Don’t ever touch her again or any other girl.” He stomped on his ribs, and I could hear them breaking. Gary was bleeding on the floor, and everyone else was drunk but still looked scared of Sebastian.

Sebastian turned back to me and grabbed my shoulders. “I think someone...Maya.” I said. “I need to find Maya...” I pulled away from his hands and tried to walk, but my legs were giving up on me.

“Caleb has her,” he said as he picked me up and I rested my head on his chest.

“Why did you leave? Why did you stab me?” I cried softly. I was losing my train of thought because I was feeling so many things at once.

“Go to sleep, Aria.”

“I’m sorry, my little pumpkin,” he whispers in my ear, thinking I was sound asleep.

I woke up in my bed, and I was home again. I thought about last night, when I almost

got raped and Sebastian beat up the guy who almost raped me. I sat up and put on my sheep pyjamas. Did he make me different?

“Don’t worry, I didn’t change you.”

I turned my head to see where the voice was coming from. Sebastian was lying on my couch with a blanket around him. He slept in my room and watched me.

How sweet, f*****g a*s

Sebastian says, “His name is Larry Johnson, and he’s a s*x trafficker. When he’s out with his brother Justin Johnson, he goes by the name Gary to trick young girls, then he kidnaps them and rapes them.”

I was shocked. The barman didn’t look like his brother or a s*x trafficker, and he didn’t look like a pervert. This is why I don’t like redheads; they’re the worst.

“He didn’t look like it,” I said quietly.

Sebastian yells, “You could have been kidnapped, raped, or killed. You put yourself in danger last night.”

I’m angry inside. How could he? Doesn’t he know that just loving him and knowing him puts me in danger every day? Because of him, I’m always in danger. I pulled the blanket off of me, got up, and walked over to him.

“Don’t you dare act like you care,” I yelled. “We both know you don’t care about me at all.”

Sebastian laughed in a way that made me feel uneasy. There was something scary about this laugh that made my stomach turn. He had me pinned against the wall with

his fist inside the wall in a flash.

I gasped.

I wasn't scared of him; I was angrier than ever. This man in front of me is the most hated person I've ever met.

"You're a murderer; you killed your own family; you're nothing but a lonely bastard, and you'll always be one." I screamed at the end, "I'm tired of living like this; I can't do it anymore."

"You don't know anything about family," he whispers harshly. "Come on, your father left you because he didn't want you. No one does."

I felt nothing but betrayal right now; his harsh words made me doubt everything about myself.

"I wish you had died," I yelled. He quickly realised what he had said and his eyes filled with regret right away.

He moved closer to me and tried to touch my arm, but I pulled away, hard. I looked out the window, which was the only thing that could take my mind off of things.

"I—" His words faded away, and guilt filled his body like it had before.

"Leave," I yell angrily.

He was going to say something before he gave up. He ran his hand over his new beard, then he turned sharply to the right and left the room, slamming the door behind him. After he left, I cried so hard that my body shook with pain.

I slowly made my way to the mirror, afraid to look at myself and see how badly he had hurt me mentally.

I am so dumb.

Tears were running down my neck and onto my shirt, making me cold.

Maya opened the door to my room and skipped over to me until she saw that I was crying.

“He’s a f*****g d**k for making you cry.” She hugs me and I put my head between her neck and shoulder.

“Did he send you?” I ask.

She shakes her head. “There’s a business event tonight. Everyone who runs a cartel will be there, including your dad and Henry.” She told me.

“Sebastian told me to help you get ready because you’re going out with him tonight.”

“Henry...” I said his name softly. I missed him so much. He’s not just my fiancé; he’s also my friend.

“Maybe they can take you home,” she says.

I softly shake my head from side to side. Sebastian said they wouldn’t be able to, even if they tried. He said he’d have to wait a month and a month. Not me, my dad, or Henry can do anything. He’s in charge.

She just looked down, and the little bit of hope she had was gone. I know she felt bad for me, but I couldn’t comfort her because that’s how I feel every day.

It was hard to get ready; I felt numb to everything. Maya kept trying to make me feel better, but it didn't work. I thought I shouldn't be alive or even breathing.

I'm hurting my mum for that piece of shit, that thing that calls itself a man but is really just a little boy.

Before I met him, I was Aria Callahan. Caleb's betrayal broke me, but I put myself back together piece by piece and got stronger. Now, though, that's all gone.

My mom wanted happiness and love, but she couldn't have them because I was so selfish. I was so desperate for someone to love me that I'm hurting everyone around me as I try to make it happen. Henry picked up the pieces and tried to put them back together with new ones. I just cheated on him for the devil.

Sebastian chose a long, pretty, white dress for me to wear tonight. It made me think of the dress I wore when I first met him.

I whispered, "I can't wear this," and put the white dress back on my dresser. Maya stood back and looked at me.

I looked through my closet for another dress, but I couldn't find one.

"Put it—"

"I don't want to wear that white dress." I cut her off in the middle of her sentence, and she nodded. It made me think of a lot of old memories that I didn't want to remember. "Stay here," I said to her.

I pulled my robe tightly around me and opened the door. I walked down the hall to find a room that wasn't being used. I found Sebastian's office, where I did my wrong and where it all began. I ran my fingers over the wall, and the pattern has always

stood out to me.

I never saw this before; there was a door hidden in the pattern.

I didn't feel this when he was banging me against the wall. To be fair, I didn't feel anything after that.

I was interested in this room, but the door knob was missing. What could the great Sebastian Devereux be hiding behind this door?

What if something came to mind?

I kicked the door and broke it. I poked it one last time before it broke all the way open.

Damn, do you think he'll notice? No kidding

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This secret room was so big that it wasn't even a room; it was a closet. There were a lot of women's clothes and a few men's suits in it. I ran my fingers over the fabrics as I walked up to the drawer in the middle that had jewellery on display. I picked up the picture frame that was leaning against the drawer. It was a picture of a girl. She looked beautiful in a dark red dress. Her skin was flawless, and her hair was dark brown and perfectly pinned back. This must be Sebastian's long-lost lover or something. Why else would he have a whole room full of her stuff?

Also, why does this make me so mad?

I keep telling myself that I'm mad because he's dating my mum and has a room with this other woman, but what if I'm mad because he never told me about her? Anyway, screw him and his perfect face.

The red dress stood out from all the other plain dresses. It wasn't just any red; it was a deep scarlet red.

I quickly grabbed the dress and carefully stepped out of the closet. I looked back at the door and saw that Caleb had done it. I smiled as I walked back to my room.

I can't wait to see his face when he sees me in this.

My black heels made a noise on the shiny floor. Maya was also wearing a lovely pale yellow dress. Caleb looked at me and seemed to be struggling with his feelings. He tried to grab my arm, but I gently pushed him away.

"I want to walk in by myself," I said with a smile. Caleb understood and nodded.

Caleb hooked his arm with his little sister's. I just now noticed how much Maya and Caleb look alike. Caleb and Maya were in front, and I was right behind them. The red dress fit me perfectly, and my hips were swinging back and forth smoothly. I decided to follow the picture directly. My hair was in an elegant bun, I wore red lipstick, and my eye shadow was made up of warm n**e colours. Caleb took us down to a room that looked like a basement. I've never been here before.

"Is it down here?" I ask.

"Yes. It happens once a year, and people from all over come to celebrate the Devereux name." Caleb answered my question and told me more.

The lights were flashing, and the music was slow and hypnotic. Before going in, Caleb stopped and reached inside his suit. He took out three masks. Two were black and one was red.

"You wear the red one," Caleb said as he handed me the red mask. I looked down at it. What's the deal with red?

I asked, "Why?" "Shouldn't I have the same mask as you guys?"

Caleb told me, "You're his date, so everyone knows who you're with." I was still worried, but I just listened and did what he said.

Before we went into the room, we all looked at each other's masks. This basement was huge. People were wearing pearls, diamonds, and expensive suits and dresses. It seemed fishy. The music was so loud that I couldn't even hear myself think. Everyone looked so classy and nice.

I held the red dress so I wouldn't trip as I walked down the long stairs. When I got to the bottom, I started to feel nervous, but I don't know why. I looked around and saw

that I was the only one wearing a red mask. This seemed to get everyone's attention. Maya and Caleb seemed to be pretty at ease.

"Find Sebastian," Caleb whispered to me before walking over to a table full of men. Maya followed him.

Awesome

"Mrs. Devereux." A man in a black tuxedo and a black mask came in. I'm pretty sure I've never met him before.

"Who are you?" I ask.

The man didn't say anything for a few seconds before answering. "A friend of Sebastian," the man said with a smile that made me feel uneasy.

"Speaking of Sebastian, I really should—"

"I can't believe you're wearing Debra's dress," the man said. That girl in the picture must be Debra. I didn't get any friend vibes from this guy; he was definitely creepy.

"Debra?" I ask.

"My fiancée before Sebastian killed her," the man said, and his voice got dark and angry. This wasn't Sebastian's friend; this was his enemy.

"I-I."

He grabbed my elbow and started to pull me through the crowd of people. The lights were flashing and making noise so much that I couldn't see where he was taking me. I tried to pull my hand away from his strong grip, but it wasn't strong enough. I kept

tripping over my heels until I finally kicked them off while he dragged me.

“Let me go,” I yelled. The loud music made it hard for anyone to hear me.

Finally, the music stopped, the lights stopped flashing, and we stopped moving. The cold air touched my pale skin, and I shivered. We were on the roof, outside.

I yelled, “What do you want?” The man pushed me back, and I almost fell to the ground, but I was able to keep my balance.

“Sebastian Devereux is the devil. He took everything from me. He hides behind his money and power, but I don’t need either of those things. I just need his pain,” the man growled. He took off his mask and showed me his face, which was all burned. I realised what was going on and my eyes got big.

“Please don’t do this,” I begged.

“Sebastian has a lot of secrets, and you’re about to find out his biggest one.” The man came a little closer to me, and I backed up slowly. “Debra is his sister.” Sebastian has a sister.

I was shocked and gasped. That girl was his sister. I’m wearing the dress of the sister he killed. I hated myself for taking that wardrobe. It was hers.

“He started the fire because he wanted his father’s power, and Debra was the firstborn, so she was going to get the cartel.” The man laughs dryly. The man held up his hand to show off his wedding ring. “Sebastian wasn’t having any of it,” he yelled. “I ran into the fire to save my wife and unborn child, but it was too late,” the man said, tilting his head to show me his burns.

This can’t Rodger is really a monster. I can’t breathe. I slept with a killer who was

cold-blooded.

“Sebastian told me, ‘She knew what was coming.’” The man suddenly pulled a gun out of his suit, and my heart raced.

“Don’t... Please, be better than him,” I said softly.

“Take off your mask,” the man said.

My hands were shaking as I reached for the string on my mask and slowly unwrapped it. When the mask came off, my lips shook. He looked shocked, and his face turned ghostly pale.

“Who are you?” The man aimed the gun at his head. I jumped up in fear. I don’t want to see anyone die; that would ruin me.

I put my hands up to show that I wasn’t a threat.

“Aria,” I said right away.

“Why do you look so much like her?” the man yelled. I felt bad because Sebastian ruined this guy’s life just because he loved his sister. “Sebastian picked you because you look just like Debra!” the man yelled in anger. I slowly walked up.

The man pointed the gun at me again, and I stopped completely. I bit my lip and tears ran down my cheeks.

I asked, “What’s your name?” to get him to stop thinking about the gun he had in his hand.

“Tyler Diego.”

“Tyler, I’m Aria Callahan. My mum is engaged to Sebastian,” I said. I held up my hand to show off my engagement ring. I then put my hands out, palms down, to show off my engagement ring. “I’m engaged to another man, not Sebastian.” My voice shook because I was so scared.

“No,” the man yells. “I know everything. He’s in love with you but engaged to your mother.” The man c***s the gun and moves closer to me, ready to shoot.

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“Okay,” I said softly. This guy was so wrong; Sebastian is f*****g me but loves my mum.

Tyler smiled wickedly at his plan: “If I kill you, I hurt him the same way he hurt me.”

All I could think about was getting away. Everything happened so slowly; it all took so long. I started running, and my hair, which had been in a bun, was now floating in the air. My feet felt like they weren’t even moving. I jumped over the rail and onto the other part of the roof. I was shot at, but I was able to avoid all of them. I was basically hanging off the edge of a wall that was connected to Sebastian’s office. From up here, the ground looked so small. I put my head against the wall behind me and tears started to fall.

“Debra, where are you?” he yelled, and I cried in fear. This guy is insane; he thinks I’m his dead wife and wants to kill me. I put my hand over my mouth to keep any sound I might make from getting out.

I had to move back to solid ground because I was going to fall if I didn’t. He was pointing his gun at me and standing in front of me.

“I told you to kill him that night, but you didn’t listen,” Tyler screams through tears. He hit his head with the gun and then aimed it at me again.

Is this how my life is going to end? I looked over at this crazy man who was about to kill me. He was in so much pain.

Tyler says, “This is all for you, Debra.” I shut my eyes because I didn’t want to see

my death.

Bang

“No.”

Before I was pushed back, I heard someone yell. I fell to the floor and waited for the pain to start. I opened my eyes because I didn't feel any pain. All I saw was blood, and it wasn't mine. Maya was lying in a pool of her own blood, trying to get air.

“No...no,” I cried as I crawled over to her and pulled her onto my lap.

Bang! Bang!

Tyler's body fell to the floor, dead. Sebastian and Caleb were both there, and Sebastian put his gun down.

“It's o-okay,” Maya says, choking on her own blood. She gives me the biggest smile she can.

“Hey, Maya,” Caleb whispers.

He fell to the floor next to me, and she smiled up at her brother. He began to freak out. “You're fine, look at me,” he cried. She slowly looked up at him again, and blood poured out of her mouth.

Everything seemed to move so slowly. My eyes followed her body as it hurt, and my hand over her legs looked so blurry. My mind was completely blank and full of fear.

“Everything is fine, little sister.” He puts his hand over her open wound to stop the bleeding.

“Th-th-thank you,” she says, and I nod my head and bite my lips, tasting the salty tears. “I love you.” You could hear the pain in her voice as her body slowly shut down.

“Hey, don’t say it like you’re saying goodbye.” Caleb kissed her forehead and brought her hand to his lips. The scene in front of me broke my heart.

She took her last breath and closed her eyes. Her spirit left her body. My lips shook a lot and tears fell faster than seconds.

“I love you.” My voice shook as I leaned in closer to her and touched her stomach with my head. I couldn’t hear her heart beating or the oxygen that would be going through her body if she were still alive.

When her hand slipped out of his, Caleb mumbles, “Maya.” That’s when his mind finally understood that she was gone. “God no, please.” He started giving her CPR to try to bring her back to life, but it was clear it wasn’t going to work.

“Caleb,” I said softly, and my hand on his shoulder made him brush it off.

“Come on, Maya,” he yells as he pushes harder against her chest. He was covered in her blood, and sweat was starting to drip down the side of his head. “Don’t go, you’re all I have.” He yells louder and keeps pumping.

Sebastian turned around as if he couldn’t handle what had just happened. It was all his fault.

“You’re all I have,” Caleb cries out, and his hands stop moving and he falls back. He realised that cpr wasn’t going to help when reality hit him in the face. “You’re all I need.” His voice was shaky and very quiet, and he looked at me like he was waiting for me to tell him the truth.

“She’s left.

My past has hurt the one person I really care about. Aria is nothing like her mother; she is full of life, funny, loving, and carefree. Now, her world is black and white; I turned it upside down. I always ruin people I love; it’s in my blood.

At first, it was just s*x, but everything changed when I saw her with Henry. It made me remember that she could easily move on, and I didn’t want her to.

Maya was innocent; she was Caleb’s little sister and Aria’s best friend. I felt like I was to blame for everything that happened because I am.

Driving Aria to Maya’s funeral is worse than I thought. Caleb left Aria, so all she has is me, a killer, a cartel leader, and an abuser. I was dressed in all black, and so was Aria. I thought of a way to make Aria feel better during the funeral. I called Jack and let him step on my property for just this day, only him.

Aria and I both got out of my car and walked over to the tent where the funeral was taking place. Aria hugged a man and a woman. The man had dark brown hair and was well-dressed, while the woman was a mess and had light brown hair that looked just like Maya’s. It’s her parents. I stood away from everyone else who was under the tent because I couldn’t bear to act like I wasn’t responsible for Maya’s death.

Flashback

“Mom, look what I made!” I yelled to my mother, pointing at my art.

My mom and dad were fighting. They always fought about everything. My dad had anger problems and would snap at anything. My mom just nodded and gave me a sad smile. She always tried to seem happy for me and my sister.

My father slapped my mother in the face, and she fell to the floor.

My older sister Debra pulled me into her room to play more. There was a lot of screaming, glass breaking, and crying.

“Look, brother,” Debra said as she made a star out of thin rope with her fingers. My sister would always pull me into her room when Mom and Dad were fighting to keep me from getting upset.

My mom yells, “Alejandro, enough! Your kids are watching!”

I heard more glass breaking, which made me jump in fear. My sister hugged me and kissed my forehead.

Well, if you can’t give it to me, I’m pretty sure your daughter can. My dad’s voice was scary; it was so deep and evil. I didn’t get what he meant until I saw my sister start to panic. She ran to her door and tried to lock it, but my dad had already opened it.

“No.” My mom tried to stop my dad, but he hit her in the face and she passed out.

My sister was crying and trying to get away from my dad’s strong grip. I stood up and didn’t know what to do. My sister was pulling on the arm that my dad was holding.

“Turn around, son,” my dad yells at me. I wasn’t sure if I should until I saw my sister weakly nod yes.

I sat down and faced the wall in the corner. My sister screamed and cried. My dad grunted and whispered. I started to rock back and forth and sing.

I whispered very softly.

Over memory

I looked at Aria for a second. Her father was holding her. It was like she could feel me looking at her, because she looked at me from a distance. I took off my sunglasses, which were covering my blue eyes.

I wasn't right for her; I'd already hurt her enough. Henry is perfect for her; he loves her. She has a family that loves her; why would I want to keep her from them? I'm a selfish bastard, but I can't be selfish with her anymore.

Aria needed to say something, so I put my hand in my pocket. She looked broken, sad, and like she'd given up. Her hands shook as she tried to say something.

"I miss you." Aria laughs and cries at the same time, her beautiful cheeks wet with tears. "My mind knows that you are in a better place where there is no pain, you are at peace." Aria cries. "I understand that, I just wish I could explain it to my heart. I know we'll see each other again one day, but for now, I have to live without you.

Her watery eyes met mine, and my eyes softened. She shook her head as if to say, "Stop it." Aria put her small hand on Maya's casket and cried. Jack walked up next to her and wrapped his arms around her.

The last thing that happened at the funeral was burying Maya's casket six feet deep.

"Sebastian, let me take her home with her family. It's where she belongs," Jack tries

to tell me. Aria looks confused by that. It seems like part of her wants to go home and part of her wants to stay.

“No, she stays,” I said.

Jack was about to make his point when Aria stepped in and stopped him.

“Thanks, Dad.” “I love you, tell mum I love her too.” Aria kisses her dad on the cheek and smiles at him. Jack smiles back and walks away, where his security guards are waiting for him.

I was worried because the ride home was completely quiet. I know what I have to do, but I don’t want to do it. It’s going to be hard to lose her again, but I have to. My past is long and dark. Tyler isn’t the only one looking for revenge, and they will do anything to hurt me. I won’t risk losing Aria to death, which I’m used to.

Venessa knew our marriage was over when I stopped having s*x with her. It was all over when she saw her ex-husband. Now she’s just waiting for Jack to notice.

I knocked on Aria’s door and waited for her to answer. It was scary. I had never been scared before meeting Aria. The door slowly opened, and Aria was broken. Tears were streaming down her cheeks, her nose was red, and her blonde hair was messy and covering her face.

“Sebastian, what?” Aria puts a piece of hair behind her ear.

“May I come in?” “Please,” I say.

She nods and opens the door wider so I can come in. She closes the door behind me. I looked around her room and saw that there were books and picture frames all over the floor.

“I was looking at pictures of Maya and me,” she says as she sniffs.

I whispered, “You don’t have to explain.”

She sat on her bed and quickly moved her hair out of her face. She looked like a broken piece of art, so beautiful. I quietly walked over to her and bent down to her level.

“Sebastian, don’t,” she whispers.

“Death and violence have been my whole life.” “I like hurting people and putting them in danger, but I can’t do that to you anymore.” I said as I put my hands on her cheeks and looked into her green eyes. “Your mother somehow looked past the monster.”

She looks down, and her eyes are full of tears.

I said, “You changed the monster.”

She looks me in the eye again and tilts her head a little. She didn’t understand what I said.

“I love your big green eyes and your smile.” I love that you know what I’m thinking when no one else does. I love that you see past all the bad things. I love that you stand up to me and challenge me. I love that you didn’t give up on me.

I whispered, “You’re so wrong for me, and I love every bit of it.” “I love you, Pumpkin.” My hands tightened around her cheeks, and her hands found their way to my wrist. She put her hands on mine, and tears fell down her beautiful face.

“Don’t say that; it makes it harder,” she says.

I quickly brushed the loose strands of her blonde hair out of her face. “I was a coward for not saying it back to you that night.” I put my forehead against hers, and her hands went down to my elbow.

“I never loved your mother; I liked the idea of loving her.” I say, “You deserve someone much better than me, and I know that now.”

She wiped her nose, which was running. “I can’t say it back anymore.”

“I know I deserve that, but I just wanted to tell you.”

Sebastian, one last kiss

I leaned in to meet her soft lips, and her hands crawled up to my hair. Her lips got heavier on mine, and I liked the kiss. I leaned more into her, and she lay on her bed with me on top of her. I pulled her leg against my side with one hand and held the side of her neck with the other as I kissed her more deeply.

My body was used to hers, her moans, and her kisses. Her whimpers filled the room. It was different with her; she was different. I can’t change who I am; all I can do is save her from my lifestyle. Now I understand why Jack left her and Venessa; he did it out of love and safety.

I looked at her sleeping body; she was lying on her stomach with the sheets wrapped around her. I gently stroked her rosy cheek, and when she moved a little in her sleep, I smiled. She still reacts to my touch even when she’s sleeping.

I have to treat her fairly.

I picked up my boxers from the floor and put them on. I was careful not to make too much noise because I didn’t want to wake her up. I walked to my office and poured

myself some whisky before picking up my phone. I called Jack's phone number and it rang once before he answered.

"I'm leaving town without Aria," I said right away, not wanting to waste any time.

Jack: "Why?"

"Because she should be happy."

Jack: "How do I know this isn't a scam?"

"I wouldn't joke about something that has to do with Aria."

Jack: "It seems that the devil can love after all."

"Please come here in an hour and look after her and Venessa."

I hung up the phone and drank my whisky. I told my men to pack up the whole house; everything will be gone. Aria will only remember me as a fading memory, which is how it should be. I went back into Aria's room, where she was snuggling into the pillow. I put the letter I wrote for her on my side of the bed and kissed her cheek.

I whispered, "quotes, "Goodbye, Aria Callahan."

“I’m sorry.”

For the first time in twenty-eight years, I was about to cry.

“The car is ready.”

It was harder to look at her for the last time than I thought it would be.

“Okay.”

Being a cartel leader means I can’t have her because I love her. We are the bad guys, so we don’t get a happy ending. The house was getting farther and farther away until I couldn’t see it anymore. She could finally live the life she deserves without me. My life would never be the same, and it shouldn’t be, especially after having her.

“You did the right thing.”

“She’ll hate me.” I leaned back in my seat and let the cold air touch my skin. “More.”

“She’s going to hate both of us.”

“Caleb, you’re a good friend,” I said.

Caleb didn’t say anything; he just kept looking at the road. Caleb wasn’t just leaving Aria; he was also leaving his child. He saw how dangerous our world can be after his sister died. He would rather his child grow up without a father than be in danger every five seconds.

I have always been a sick man. I saw how my dad treated my mom and how it hurt her mentally and physically. I don't want to put her through that, and I don't want to be like my dad either.

I remembered things about Aria. When I first met her, she was wearing a white dress and her hair was wavy and messy. She looked beautiful. I first saw her green eyes, then her warm smile. The first time I saw her, she looked so beautiful in her pyjama shorts as she walked through my office. I remember how her fingers traced the pattern on the wall that my mother picked out so long ago.

"Florida?" Caleb says.

I look out my window. It was nice to see the sun start to set.

"Florida it is."

Four years later

Sebastian left me in that empty house four years ago, and I was heartbroken and alone.

It's been four years since I lost my baby. Being pregnant was a blessing, but it went away just as quickly as it came. The baby that Sebastian and I had was stillborn. I hated Sebastian Devereux right away when I saw my baby. I hate him more than anything. After that, life was hard. I thought it was my fault too. Maybe my baby would still be alive if I hadn't mourned Maya's death so much.

My mum and dad were always there for me and supported everything I did. I learnt to like my mum and dad more.

My housekeeper said, "Mrs. Benorik, you have a guest."

“Thanks, Alex.” I smiled.

Three years ago, I married Henry. Those have been the best three years of my life. Henry is so special and caring that loving him is unlike anything I’ve ever felt. Henry was okay with my baby from the start. When he found out that our baby was born dead, he was horrified and broken. He felt everything I felt.

I fell in love with him right away, and seeing how much he cared for our baby and me made me love him even more. As I walked down our long staircase, my heels clicked on the cold tile.

“Well, don’t you look beautiful?” Naomi says with a smirk. Her beautiful red hair falls naturally over her shoulder.

“Isn’t this a nice surprise?” I laugh and give her a big, loving hug. Naomi and her husband now live nearby. I put my hand on her growing belly, and when she kicked, my hand bumped a little against my other hand. My face lit up with interest; this baby really likes me.

“She’s been kicking a lot lately,” Naomi says as she rubs her belly.

Seeing pregnant women or kids in general hurts, of course. I wanted that, I wanted my baby and everything that came with it. Maybe that’s why I hate Sebastian so much; I hate him for not staying and being there for me. Without his help, I had to go through this awful thing. It was his child. Naomi saw that I was zoning out and put her soft hand on my shoulder.

“Let’s go shopping; I want to spoil my godchild today.” I clapped my hands together in excitement.

Naomi says, “If you say so,” and then she wobbles out the front door. I quickly

grabbed my purse and met her in the car.

Maria and my dad are going to have their first child together. It was hard on my mom because my dad was going to leave Maria for my mom, but a child changes everything. My mom was sad, but she knew there was nothing she could do. For the last four years, Mom has cried every night, but not for Sebastian. She cried for my dad.

Isn't it strange how love works? My mom clearly didn't love Sebastian. She cared about him, but not like she does my dad. Henry and I live with my mom, and Henry was very happy to have her. Mom is now a preschool teacher, which is something she's always wanted to do. He said that Dad and Maria haven't really been around because he has to stay low until their baby is born. That makes sense, because if other cartels found out about the youngest Callahan, they would kill him or her right away.

Naomi turns on the radio and says, "I've never seen you happier, Aria." I thought about what she said, and I have to be happy. What's the point of living if you can't be happy?

"Why not? Henry is great," I said.

"It's crazy to see you now and think about where you were four years ago, both mentally and physically."

"I know."

Naomi seemed happy to be around baby clothes and things. Seeing Naomi pull out some clothes and pretend her baby could see them made me think of my dead son. My baby's name is Miguel Devereux. Miguel was named after my grandpa, Miguel Callahan. Sebastian didn't deserve it. He didn't deserve to have my kids' last name, but he was still Miguel's dad, and I wouldn't have taken that away. I wanted a girl at

first, but when the doctor told me Miguel was a boy, I was happy and didn't say anything.

Naomi asked, "This is cute, right?" I was so happy when I held up a pink tutu and a long-sleeved fluffy shirt.

"Very." I laughed.

When Naomi asked me to be the godmother, I was so happy that I would get to be a mother to someone.

Naomi said, "Josh's little brother got our daughter a little sheep outfit. It's so cute." Her husband's name is Josh. Josh is a great guy who loves Naomi very much. He and Henry get along very well.

"Tell him to stop trying to beat me; I'm going to be her favourite." I said this while kissing Naomi's belly. Naomi smiled and rolled her eyes in a funny way.

As I walked next to her, Naomi wobbled to the next store. When I walked into the store, I remembered that this was the first place I bought baby things after I found out I was pregnant. I remember this store so well from when I was 34 weeks pregnant and happy. It has changed since then.

I turned around and saw Naomi trying to run with baby clothes in her hand. Why did she look like she had just seen a ghost? It's really funny to see her have trouble. Before Naomi got to me, I laughed a little.

"You know what? This store isn't for me."

That's when I saw Nina. There was a little girl running around her legs while she was behind a rack of clothes. She looks a lot like Maya and a little like Caleb, but not at

all like Nina. When Nina saw me, a sad smile spread across her face. Was that pity? Or smallness? Nina came out from behind the rack, and I was shocked to see how big and round her stomach was. Nina wobbles over to me with the little girl right next to her. I didn't know what to do; I really wanted to run away and hide in a corner. I heard Naomi clear her throat, which was weird, and it made it even more weird that she did that.

“Hey,” Nina says.

“Uh...hello,” I said, not sure why she was talking to me. She wouldn’t stop talking about how much she wanted me to die the last time I saw her.

“I’m so sorry about Maya. She was a good person with a big heart.” She smiles and puts her hand on her chest.

Was I going insane? Maybe all this baby stuff was driving me crazy, but did I hear her right?

“I know we didn’t always agree, but I really loved Maya.”

I said, “Me too.” I tried to change the subject because I didn’t want to talk about Maya. “Congratulations.” I told her about her big, growing belly.

It worked.

“Thanks,” she says. She holds the little girl’s hand with one hand and rubs her belly with the other.

“Mommy, I want a toy,” the little girl whines, pointing to the little elephant on the shelf.

The girl looked like she was about the same age as Miguel would be if he were still alive.

“Okay, sweetie,” Nina says.

Nina has grown up and become more mature. She is now the mother of a little girl and will soon be the mother of another one. She has clearly moved on from Caleb and is now living a new life with someone else. She’s lucky. I really want what she has.

I bent down to talk to the little girl. The little girl held onto her mom’s leg and hid her face.

I ask, “What’s your name?”

Naomi and Nina saw me ask the little girl a question.

“Amara.” I could barely hear her soft voice; it was so small and cute.

I looked up at Nina. Amara was Maya’s middle name. I felt tears welling up in my eyes, but I quickly blinked them away.

“That’s a really pretty name. I’m Aria,” I say to them. The little girl finally came out from behind her mom’s leg and hugged me. I was surprised, but I was happy to hug her back.

“Don’t cry,” she whispers in my ear, and I rub her back gently.

Nina is smiling, so she must be very happy right now. Nina really did a good job raising her. She’s loving, caring, and open-minded, just like Maya was.

“You guys made friends.” A man who looked to be in his late thirties came up behind Nina and hugged her.

“Daddy.” The little girl ran to the man, and I stood up to watch them.

“This is an old friend of mine.” Nina has a hard time explaining who we are to her husband, but she gets over it pretty quickly.

Pedro Neizan,” the man says as he reaches out to me.

”

“Aria Benorik.”

We all went our separate ways after talking and sharing a few stories. Naomi wouldn’t stop talking about how Nina, the cold bitch, grew up to be a grown-up. I thought that buying her food would make her be quiet for a little while, but I was wrong. She kept talking and talking until I finally decided to take her home. I was so happy to drop her off.

I was angry that Nina got the ending she wanted. I know it was selfish of me because everyone deserves to be happy, even Nina, even though she was mean in the past.

I drove home thinking about what had happened in the store. Amara was beautiful and looked just like Maya. I had a gut feeling that I would see Amara Wolfe again.

My feet hurt so much that I was ready to go to bed. When I got home, I saw that Henry’s car was the only one in the driveway. Usually, our housekeepers and my mom’s car are parked here. It was nice and relaxing to walk into my house. I saw rose petals and candles lit all over the place, and soft music was playing as the lights went down.

“Hello, Mrs. Benorik.” Henry walks into our living room in a suit and with a bouquet of sunflowers. My favourite.

I smiled and slowly took off my heels before walking over to him. Henry put the

flowers down and grabbed me. I kissed his lips softly and then pulled away a little to look into his eyes. I rubbed my thumb smoothly against his cheek while he watched me.

“I don’t want to wait....” I whispered, hoping Henry would get what I meant.

Henry wanted to wait three more years before trying for another child. I know he was scared of losing another baby, and I was too, but I’m ready to start a family. Seeing Nina today with her daughter and pregnant with another child made me want one even more.

Henry looked confused. His eyebrows were knitted together, and his face was full of questions.

I held his cheeks and kissed him, and Henry didn’t pull away. He kept kissing me with everything he had, and his hands slid behind my head while he almost ate my lips. I pulled on his shirt to tell him I wanted it off. Henry pulled back and put his forehead against mine while we both caught our breath.

Henry asks, “You want to try for a baby?” His face was normal and not affected.

I sigh and then nod. I understood why he was a little scared about having a baby. I know Henry thinks I’ll always love Sebastian, and he doesn’t want to bring a child into the world if I’m not sure how I feel. To be honest, I still love Sebastian, but my love for Henry is much stronger than my love for Sebastian. Henry makes me feel loved and beautiful, and he brings out the best in me. I don’t know what will happen in the future, but I do know that I want Henry to be a part of it.

“Henry, I know you’re scared. I am too, but I love you and I kn-”

Henry stops me by slamming his mouth against mine. He slowly unbuttoned my dress

and put his hands on my shoulders. It slid down my arms and chest, leaving me in my lacy red pants. His lips move from my neck to my shoulder, and his hand wraps around my neck while his mouth catches one of my nipples. When he nibbled on it, I leaned my head back.

Henry picked me up roughly and made my legs wrap around him. Henry was nice, but in bed he was rough and mean. I trust him, though, because he's my husband. Henry pushes me against the wall, and I pull on his shirt until it comes off. He bites and licks my neck while I try to unbuckle his trousers. Finally, I got it. He quickly pushed his pants to the side, and before I could say anything, he ripped my pants off. I gasp because he is being extra rough today. He pushes himself into me, and I lean my head back against the wall.

"H-Henry...e-easy." It was hard for me to talk while he kept pushing into me. He was hurting me with every move he made. This has only happened once, and it was on our honeymoon when he was doing it for himself.

His hands suddenly wrapped around the small of my neck, and he pushed harder and harder. I didn't like this because it felt like my insides were going to break.

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“Stop!” I yelled as his hands got tighter around my neck and I couldn’t breathe. This is definitely going to leave a bruise. I quickly raised my hands to try to get his hand off, but it was too tight. I looked up at Henry and saw that his eyes looked possessed. This wasn’t Henry.

“Stop right now,” I yelled in pain. He either can’t hear me or doesn’t care that he’s hurting me. He sometimes yells at me and is mean to me, but this was different; this was physical abuse.

He doesn’t stop; he keeps going for another hour, moving us around himself. His tight grip on my neck made me feel like my eyes were about to pop out. My body felt weak and tired. Henry finished and let me go. I lay on the couch, naked and in pain. My arms and legs wouldn’t even move. Henry got off of me and picked up his boxers from the floor. He put them on. I turned my head so I wouldn’t have to see him.

Henry and I went to Louisiana for a month after our wedding. I don’t remember the first night we were together, but I do remember being in a lot of pain. The next morning, I had bruises all over my body and was bleeding between my legs. I didn’t let Henry touch me for a while, but once we started having s*x again, everything was fine until now. I couldn’t believe what just happened. S*x is supposed to be a way to show your love for each other. Sure, you can be rough during s*x, but not so much that the girl is begging you to stop.

I heard him walk into the kitchen and pop open a beer. A tear rolled down my cheek.

“Go to the room,” he says in a cold voice.

I turned back to look at him. Was he really serious? Not even going to say sorry? I felt a rush of anger rise up in me. I slowly got up, grunting because my legs hurt. Henry drank from his beer while I stood up. I looked him over before slapping him in the face.

“You said you wouldn’t do that again,” I yelled. He was looking down, and his hand was on his red cheek.

I huffed, maybe violence wasn’t the best way to go. I should have talked to him. My hands were shaking like crazy. He raised his head and bit his red lip. A rush of air hit me, and pain spread all over my body. I lay on the floor in shock. Henry just hit me in the face. I held my cheek as blood poured out of my mouth and tears filled my eyes.

“Look what you made me do.” He throws his beer at the wall, breaking it I jumped when I heard it break on the floor.

He bent down to my level and grabbed my cheeks hard. When he touched the cheek he punched not long ago, I groaned in pain. What was going through his mind? He just hit me and touched me. I’m in shock because he’s never done this before. I couldn’t stop the tears from falling; the man I loved just hit me.

“I’m sorry, baby.” He kisses my forehead, and I close my eyes in fear, pure fear.

We didn’t talk about any of it the next morning. I had to cover up a big black bruise on my cheek with makeup. Henry went to work like nothing happened. This morning, he even tried to kiss me and got mad when I didn’t kiss him back. I drove to the pharmacy with my sunglasses on to hide my bruise even more after he left. I walked down the aisles looking for it, and I finally found it. I’m not going to have a kid with a man who almost killed me.

I want a baby, but what if he hurts my child? I won’t let my child go through that.

Before I picked up the box, I took a deep breath. I walked over to look. The woman looked at it but couldn't help but give me a strange look, like she was disappointed.

"A baby is a blessing." She smiled sweetly at me; she was an older woman.

I agree, but my new husband might hit the kid.

I couldn't say that, no. I said, "It's for a friend." The woman just sighed and put it in a bag.

I drove home quickly after leaving the store, not knowing how long Henry would be at work. I saw my mom's car parked when I got home. Damn, she's already home.

Fine, I won't take off my sunglasses. I will tell her that I'm sick and that I will be in bed all day. I put the box in my bag and made sure it was hidden. I was so nervous that my mom would find out that Henry hit me or that I'm taking the morning after pill that my heart was racing when I walked into my house. I did my best to take off my heels quietly, but I almost fell, which made a lot of noise.

"Aria, is that you?" My mum yelled from the kitchen, where it sounded like she was having a meal.

"Yes, Mom," I yelled back.

"Come here."

"Mom, I don't want to go—"

"Come in here, Aria," my mom says, and there's no way to argue.

I left my purse on the stairs and made sure that my hair covered my face a little. I

went into the kitchen and went straight to the fridge so she wouldn't see my face. I took a water bottle and looked inside the fridge to avoid her.

"Pumpkin, it doesn't take that long to pick something to eat," my mum says with a laugh.

When I turned around, she looked confused as to why I was wearing sunglasses inside.

"Mom, Auntie called me. She wants to do a girls' night." My mom didn't ask me why I was wearing sunglasses, which I was glad about.

"I can't go, but you should." I said quickly as I walked towards the kitchen door.

"Sweetie, are you sure you're okay?" my mum asks. The warmth of her voice comes to me. I wanted to tell her, but I knew it would cause problems for my dad. I didn't want my husband to die, even though it hurt me. I still love him.

"Of course, I'm not feeling well. Please excuse me while I go lie down," I said.

"Love you, Pumpkin," my mom says before I can leave.

I nodded, and tears came to my eyes. As I walked out of the kitchen, I said, "I love you too."

I took my purse. I fell apart as soon as I got to my room. I threw my purse against the window, which made everything fall out. I then threw the picture frame that was above my nightstand, which was a picture of Henry and me on our wedding day, against the wall. It broke into a million pieces, and I burst into tears. God will never let me be happy, so I'll never be happy. I rubbed my stomach a little bit.

“I’m so sorry,” I said in a low voice.

I rushed to get the box from my purse. I sat on my bed with the pill in one hand and a bottle of water in the other. Although I want to have kids, it’s probably for the best that I don’t. I put the pill in my mouth and then drank a lot of water. I cried as I swallowed it. It was getting late, so I started to clean up after sitting on my bed for a while. I didn’t want Henry to see what I had done. I picked up my purse and put it on my bed. I made sure to throw the box away, but I covered it with other trash so Henry wouldn’t see it. I also picked up the picture and the broken glass. I took another frame and put our picture in it.

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Henry must be home because I heard the door open downstairs. I quickly put on my pyjamas and made sure everything was back in its place before going to bed. I turned my back to the door and covered myself with my blanket. I was scared of Henry now, and my body was shaking with fear.

He walked in right on time. I tried to calm my breathing down, but it didn't work; my chest kept rising higher and higher. At first, he was quiet, and I couldn't hear what he was doing, which scared me the most. I saw his shadow on the wall as he walked by me. I closed my eyes and hoped and prayed that he would think I was asleep and leave me alone. He kisses my head gently before going to the bathroom, the trash can. I was more scared because if he saw the box, I would die.

He was taking longer than usual, and I had a lot on my mind. I quietly opened my nightstand and took out a pair of scissors, which I kept close by. My eyes were closed when the door opened. He must not have seen it because there was no screaming, hitting, or killing. Henry walked over to the other side of the bed, and I let out a sigh of relief.

I was so wrong to think he didn't see it.

It happened fast; he was on top of me with his hands around my neck. I scratched his hands to get him to let me go.

Henry said, "I'm not dumb, baby," and his voice was full of anger. "You killed our baby, just like the other useless one," he yells.

I kicked and punched, but nothing happened. He didn't let go; he was shaking me

while he choked me to death. I took the scissors and said, “If I don’t stop him, he’s going to kill me.”

“Please s-stop,” I yelled. Because I wasn’t getting enough oxygen, my voice was cutting out. I decided to stab him because seeing it didn’t help.

I stabbed him in the stomach with the scissors, and he fell off of me, grunting in pain. As I caught my breath, my hands slowly and carefully wrapped around my neck. I got out of bed, put on my hoodie that was next to my bed, and grabbed my car keys. Then I ran like crazy. I ran down the stairs and out the door to my car. I started the engine and pulled out of the driveway so quickly that I almost hit the curb. I drove down the highway, which is the same one I always take to get to my dad’s house. I hate that I’m involving my dad, but if I don’t, Henry will kill me. My dad will know what to do if he doesn’t kill him first.

My neck, face, and body hurt so much that tears were running down my bruised cheeks as I gripped the wheel tightly. How can he treat me like this? I thought he loved me and that we were finally going to make a life together. It was pouring outside, which made me drive a little more carefully. I had a lot of things on my mind.

Finally, I got to my dad’s house. I got out of my car and ran to the door. It was scary to stand in front of his door and knock so hard, but no one answered. I started to freak out. What if Henry is already here? I knocked on the door harder, and it opened. When Maria saw me, her smile turned into a frown.

“Jack!” Maria screams as she catches me. My legs gave out on me. I leaned my head against her shoulder and tried to rest my body.

Maria pulls me inside, away from the rain, and I hear a lot of running. She tries hard to keep me up but doesn’t let me fall.

“Princess!” my dad yells as he grabs me. Maria locks the door and turns to face my dad and me. I look like I got hit by a truck, died, and then came back to life.

“H-Henry isn’t who I thought he was.”

“Jesus Christ.”

I recognise that voice. It’s been a long time since I’ve heard it. I was suddenly taken out of my dad’s arms and into another person’s. I closed my eyes and tried to figure out who this person was. I could tell who it was once my vision got better and the blur went away.

I only saw Sebastian’s scared face before everything went dark.

Thoughts of what happened raced through my head. I jumped out of bed in fear and looked around the room, which I didn’t recognise. I got up too quickly, and my body hurt. I lightly touched my cheek and felt pain. My throat hurt a lot too.

I turned my head to look out the window, and it was dark. Was it the same day? I walked over to the door and looked out, but all I could see was darkness. This doesn’t look like my dad’s house; it looks more like a penthouse or something. I tiptoed as I closed the bedroom door. I tried not to make any noise, but it was hard. I passed by some other doors that I didn’t want to open. Finally, I got to the living room.

“What’s going on?” a voice asks.

The voice scared the hell out of me, so I jumped up and put my hand over my chest. I turned around to see where the voice was coming from, and the lights came on to show Sebastian sitting in a chair. I was very surprised to see him again after four years. I looked at his face and thought he looked older in a sexy way. He raised an eyebrow after taking a sip of the whisky in his hands.

“W-what?” I stammered. I can’t believe he’s here; this wasn’t supposed to happen.

Sebastian puts his cup down on the table and looks at me. “How long has the abuse been going on?”

I swallowed hard. Our baby was stillborn, so I tried to get Henry pregnant, but he almost killed me while we were having s*x. Then I took the morning-after pill, which also almost killed me by Henry. I can’t tell him everything, and I don’t want to either.

“One day ago.”

“Why didn’t you come a day ago?” he asked, his voice deep and rough. Sebastian stood up, untied his tie, and unbuttoned his shirt as he walked up to me, getting closer and closer.

“I-I love him.” I mumbled an answer to his question, but I couldn’t even think straight. My mind and eyes were just so focused on his body. “I didn’t want my dad to kill him.”

I could smell his minty breath because his face was so close to mine. I did something I didn’t know I could do when he started to lean in. I took a lot of steps back from him, looking scared. His eyes got bigger, like he wanted me to stay where I was.

I said, “No, Sebastian. I’m not doing this with you anymore.” I put a piece of hair behind my ear.

“I miss—”

“You don’t get to miss me. You left me in that damn house alone, confused, and heartbroken again. You left me after my best friend died, and for days I couldn’t eat, drink, or sleep.” I shout, my chest heaving up and down and tears streaming down my

face. Four years ago, I promised myself that if I ever saw Sebastian again, I wouldn't forgive him or want him. He would just be a stranger.

"I thought I was doing what was best for you," Sebastian yelled back. His anger was coming out just like mine. He shouldn't be mad; I should be.

He really thought I would greet him with open arms and a kiss on the lips. He has always gotten what he wants; no one has ever told him no, and he has never been turned down.

"No, you jerk. You were doing what was best for you," I said while pointing my finger down. He's a selfish bitch. I was so angry that I told him something he shouldn't have known. It fell out of my mouth.

"I had to deal with everything by myself, even our son's death." I was crying so hard that I couldn't stop. When I realised what I had said, my mouth dropped open in an O shape.

Sebastian stood there, his face not changing. I had to sit down, so I did. I sat next to him on the couch. I couldn't believe what I was seeing, so my hands went up to my mouth. Sebastian took a step back, almost falling over before he got back on his feet. His hands were in fists, and his face looked serious. He always kept his feelings from me, so why was I surprised he did it now?

I haven't talked to anyone about Miguel's death because it was hard for me to even think about it, let alone talk about it. Naomi has always tried to get me to talk about how I feel about my son, but I never did. I buried it deep inside me and tried to hide from the pain.

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“I found out I was pregnant a month after you left me. It was hard to think about raising a child on my own, but Henry said he would help. Henry took really good care of me and our baby. I wanted my child to have a father.” I said this while crossing my arms over my chest. My lips shivered as I remembered Miguel’s birth.

Four years ago

“Push, Aria!” the doctor yells as I grunt in pain and roll my head back while I push. I put my head on Ben’s hand, and my sweat dripped on it.

My whole body shook from the pain, and my breathing was heavy and uneven. I thought contractions were bad, but giving birth is a whole new level of pain. I screamed as I pushed my son out, and my body fell back in relief. Out of nowhere, everyone started to freak out and run around. I read enough books to know that babies are supposed to cry when they are born.

“What’s wrong? Why isn’t he crying?” I tried to hold my head up, but Henry wouldn’t let me. I pushed his hand away, but he just held me down with the other one.

Henry bent down to kiss my forehead and said, “You’re going to hurt yourself. He’s fine.” I believed him and lay back down.

My body was taking me into a deep sleep, and I was tired. I tried to stay awake, but it didn’t work.

I woke up to a beeping sound coming from the machine I was connected to. I sat up,

ignoring the pain that was all over my body. All I wanted to do was see my son. The room was completely quiet, and the window showed that it was morning. I could feel something wasn't right in the pit of my stomach. My mum opened the door and was shocked to see that I was awake.

I asked right away, "Where's Miguel?" I didn't care about anything else but him. I could tell my mom's face was swollen and her eyes were red, like she had been crying. She walked slowly towards me, and I felt more and more panicked. My mum sat on my bed and put her hand on mine. She looked down at my hand and cried.

"Sweetie-

"No, I want my baby now!" I yell.

My dad came in right after I said that. I could tell my dad had been crying because his eyes were red.

"Daddy," I cried. I didn't get it; Miguel was fine. He couldn't leave; I still needed him. Henry told me everything was fine, but I haven't seen him yet.

"Please, he's all I have left."

My dad gets on the bed with my mom and puts his hand on my cheek. He was trying to calm me down, but it wasn't working. I looked into his watery eyes, and he started to talk, but I only heard two words.

"Princess, he's gone."

My heart stopped, my world stopped, and everything got quiet. I started to cry when I saw my mother talking. Her mouth was moving, but I couldn't hear what she was saying. All the kicks I've felt and all the heartbeats I've heard are gone. Everything is

just gone now. I tried to get up, but my dad held me tightly and wouldn't let me go. I screamed into his arms while my mum cried.

“No, no,” I said over and over again, not wanting to believe what I had just heard.

Flashback ends

Sebastian brings me back to reality by asking, “What's his name?” I blinked away the tears that had formed in my eyes.

“Miguel.” I smiled when I said his name.

I looked up at Sebastian, and he was looking right at me. I finally saw feelings on his face. He looked sad and sorry. I wanted him to feel that way, but I also know how it feels. A part of me wanted to comfort him, but my mind told me it was a bad idea, and for the first time, I listened to it.

I can't hate Sebastian now that I know Miguel looked just like him. I don't hate my son, but hating him makes me feel like I do. He sat next to me with enough space for me to feel at ease. I didn't think this would happen; I didn't know he would care this much. Sebastian leaned forward, resting his elbows on his thighs and rubbing his hand against his beard.

“God.” Sebastian sounds like he's crying and his voice is shaky. I turned around, and he was really crying.

He turned his head the other way to try to hide from me. I've never seen him cry before.

This is what I've been waiting for for four years. I wanted to see him hurt as much as I was, and I wanted to see him broken the same way I was.

This time, I didn't listen to what my mind said. I listened to what my heart said. I turned around slowly and saw him cry more. I was finally getting to know the real Sebastian Devereux. I reached out to gently rub his back, but Sebastian turned all the way away from me. I held him close and rested my head on his shoulder.

He whispers, "My kid is dead." I could hear the pain in his voice. "Dead is the only person who could ever love a monster like me."

I didn't say anything because I didn't know what to say. He was still trying to hide his face so I wouldn't see him cry.

"Please don't hide from me anymore," I said.

Sebastian's shoulders and body became stiff. He took a long time to turn around and face me. I wiped away his tears with my thumb. Our faces were so close together again that his knee was touching mine.

"Aria, I'm sorry—"

The sound of his phone ringing cut off his sentence. Sebastian let go of the air he was holding in, and so did I. He took his phone out of his back pocket and looked down at the screen. I could see the anger in his eyes. I was curious, so I asked even though it wasn't my place to do so.

I asked, "Who is it?" while I straightened my back against the couch.

Before looking up at me, Sebastian moved his jaw.

"Henry f*****g Benorik."

Sebastian whispers, "What the f**k?"

I couldn't help but pay attention to him because his eyes were glued to his phone.

What did Henry say?

I asked, "What did he say?" and stared at him for a few seconds, waiting for an answer, but nothing came. I got nervous and took his phone from him. He let me do it.

I saw the text message, and a picture of a boy came up. The boy had brown hair, big green eyes that looked just like mine, and scars all over his body.

Hold on, he looks just like Sebastian.

There were two words under the picture: "Miguel Devereux."

No, that boy can't be my child. I stared at his face for a little longer, trying to figure it out.

"Pumpkin, he looks just like me," Sebastian says. He must have known I was unsure. I turned back around to face him, and tears filled my eyes.

My heart sank and shivers ran up my back to my neck.

"No, I held his dead body in my hands, Sebastian. He was dead." I was able to say. I thought my son was dead for the last four years. Every night for the past four years, I had to sleep next to his kidnapper. It made my stomach turn.

Sebastian said, "I'll kill him," pointing at Henry. His voice was cold and cruel.

beep

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We both looked down at the phone and saw another text message. The text message says, "Tomorrow I'll send you the place where we can trade your son for my wife." I looked up at Sebastian, who was reading the message.

I mumbled, "He wants me in return for Miguel." My voice was barely audible.

He looked at me after turning off the phone. "Not happening," he said right away.

I can't take the chance. I won't let my child suffer even more because of me. He's only four years old, and a little boy shouldn't have to go through all that pain. He has scars all over his body. I would rather have scars all over my body and be in pain every day than have my kid go through that.

"Sebastian, he's your blood and my blood. He's our little boy, and we can't let him suffer anymore." My lips trembled as I said this.

"I'll find another way; I already have men working on it."

That was quick; he hasn't even talked to anyone yet. He must have seen that I was confused. "I have cameras in here. Trust me, they're working on a plan," he says.

I just nodded. "Should we just wait?"

"That's all we could do for now." He pours himself some whisky.

I wonder if he was able to be happy with someone else.

I asked, “Did you find anyone else?” to change the subject or at least get my mind off the fact that my crazy husband has my son. He turned around and got quiet, which made me think he’d been with other girls, which I don’t really care about.

“It’s okay—”

“I haven’t been with a girl since I left you alone in that house,” he said. His eyes showed the truth, but I still didn’t believe him.

I don’t understand why he has to lie.

I laughed as I stood up, and then I started to walk to the door when he grabbed my arm. He pulled me back, and my chest hit his. My eyes followed his up to his, and his breath blew on my face. Those eyes, those stupid eyes. I hated them with every fibre of my being and how they made me feel. His hand let go of my arm, and my eyebrows scrunched up.

It’s hard but possible to figure out Sebastian, like finishing a Rubik’s cube.

He chuckles dryly and says, “I’m telling you the truth, I can’t even touch a girl without thinking about you. I can’t even look at one because all I see is you and that smile.” “I see your blonde hair and those green eyes that I love so much.” He let go of my arm and moved his hands to my cheeks.

“I hated you, I hated you for so long. You’ve hurt me so many times that this time I thought there was no going back.” I told the truth, and tears threatened to fall from my eyes, but I didn’t let them.

Sebastian asked, “How do you feel now?” He looked all over my face for a sign of how I felt.

“I shouldn’t forgive you; I should hate you,” I said.

“To be honest, a part of me still does.”

Sebastian’s hope fades quickly after I say those words.

“But most of me doesn’t.”

“I love you, even though you’ve made my life hell.” “And I hate it because you made me go through hell.”

“I hate myself for that. I was a scared boy, not a man, because a man wouldn’t have done that,” he says. “I’ve grown, I’ve lived, and I’ve learnt. I just want you, and maybe that’s selfish of me, but it’s true.”

“I don’t know if that’s good enough for me. I’m scared,” I say.

“I’m scared too, Pumpkin.”

We looked at each other for a little while longer, taking in everything about each other. There was a lot to see because we hadn’t seen each other in four years.

It was a huge relief for me to know that Miguel was already being looked for. We just had to wait for Sebastian’s men to get back to us.

He slammed his lips on mine, and mine immediately responded. I pulled on his brown hair with my hands as they crawled up to it.

His hands moved all over my body, and they felt great. We both pulled away from each other, trying to get the air we needed so badly. We both put our foreheads together, and I closed my eyes.

“Finding him will take time, but I promise we will,” he whispers.

“I get to kill Henry,” I said.

“We both get too,” Sebastian says with a smirk.

I pulled his body close to mine and scratched his cheek with my hands before kissing him. My body pushed against his, and his arms were around me. I put my legs around his body and his hand around my waist. His other hand was against my cheek.

The kiss was full of desire and passion. I pushed my lips against his even harder. His tongue went into my mouth, and I moaned softly, which made Sebastian growl.

He kept kissing me as he carried me from his office to his bedroom.

Sebastian put us at the foot of the bed, and my lips stayed on his. I kissed him one last time and then pulled away. His lips were full and his nose was red from my kisses. His hair was messy from my fingers running through it.

It was like I could see his dark, broken soul in his dark blue eyes. I’ve learnt to love and accept him. I slowly took off the strap to my top, then the other one, while still looking at you. Sebastian looked at my naked body before slowly taking off his shirt. There was a tattoo on his chest that wasn’t there before.

My fingers brushed over the skull, and my eyebrows scrunched up in confusion.

“It’s my symbol,” he said quietly before kissing me again.

He put me on top of his bed and lay on top of me. One of his hands gripped my thigh and pulled it up against his side, while the other held my neck gently.

Sebastian's lips weren't moving quickly or roughly against mine. They were moving slowly, as if he were enjoying the moment. His lips then moved down my neck, which made me moan deeply.

I started to get worried. This doesn't feel right all of a sudden. I still wore the ring even though he was a crazy person who kidnapped my unborn son.

I loved Henry. Shouldn't I be sad that he's crazy? Shouldn't I feel like I'm broken?

I took off my ring and put it on the nightstand next to me. Sebastian watched me do this.

What if Sebastian hurts me again?

I was so scared that I almost got up and left, but then I looked him in the eye. That's why I hate them so much; they make me lose my mind and everything else.

I know it's bad to say this, but I feel alive when I'm with Sebastian.

"What's going on in that little head of yours?" he asked as he hovered over me. His thumb brushed my cheek. "I'm not going to go on until I hear from you."

I can't stop loving him, even though it hurts me. When I touch him, my body gets warm. When I look at him, my heart races. When I talk to him, I feel better. I put my hands on his cheeks, and he looked worried.

"I love you, Aria." He smiles a little. Sebastian said, "We can wait. I can wait until you completely forgive me. I'll wait as long as you need me to." I liked this side of him that was so vulnerable.

"Please let us just lay here," I said.

“As long as you lie next to me,” he says with a smile on his lips.

Sebastian falls next to me and slowly pulls the sheet up to cover my naked body.

“Did you feel lonely?” It was a simple, random question.

He looks at me and holds my gaze while he thinks of words. “It was the same every day and every night.”

He turns away and looks up at the ceiling. The room is quiet.

“I thought a lot about Maya. It was all my fault, and I’m really sorry about that, Pumpkin.”

“The world went quiet after she died.” I said.

We both stayed quiet for a few more seconds.

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“I’m not very good at timing, but I need to get this out.”

Sebastian gets up and is naked. I liked the view of his bare b**t. He has always had a nice round b**t. He pulls up his boxers, then grabs his jeans and reaches into the back pocket to get something.

He comes back to me with a smile.

“Aria, you taught me how to love again, something that’s only brought pain and misery to me.” Sebastian chuckled a little, and I sat up with the sheets around me.

“I hurt you, I hurt you really bad and I’ll never forgive myself for that.” He bit his bottom lip and looked down. “It was the hardest thing I’ve ever done to leave you in that damn house. It took so much to leave you.”

“But I did it to keep you safe from this way of life and from me.”

“And I also wanted to learn how to be a man, a man worthy of you.” He says this to finish.

He stopped for a moment before looking back up at me. His eyes were full of feelings.

Sebastian says, “I’m hard to deal with and cold-hearted, but I can’t be heartless with you.”

“You made me who I am today, and I’ll always be thankful for that.”

Tears ran down my face. This is all I've ever wanted.

What the hell is he doing? He gets on one knee. He takes a small box out from behind him and opens it to show a beautiful diamond engagement ring.

"I love you a shit tonne, Aria Callahan."

"Will you marry me?"

I couldn't believe what I was hearing; so many things were going through my mind. Was I really ready to let go of all the pain he had caused me? I looked down at the box that held my future. This one ring could change my whole life.

"Boss, we found them," Caleb says as he bursts in with a computer in his hands. I held the sheets tightly against my body. Caleb's jaw clicked angrily when he saw me.

Caleb was with Sebastian the whole time, and every day I missed him. I thought he left to get away from this business, but he was just a coward and left Sebastian behind. He looked at me, then turned his head to look at Sebastian.

"Your son means that Aria is the mother?" He moves closer to Sebastian.

Sebastian stood up and walked forward, just like Caleb had. "Yes," he said, and then he stopped.

"Can you all stop and tell me where my son is?" I stood up, still holding the sheets tightly around me.

Caleb scoffs and then looks back at me, looking disgusted. He doesn't have the right; he left me when I needed him most as a friend. He chose his job over his sister. Maya would be very upset with him.

Caleb says, “Henry has been keeping Miguel in a warehouse right off the shore.”

“Great. Let’s go.” I smiled and tried to walk to the door, but Sebastian pulled me back by the arm.

“Pumpkin, you’re forgetting that you’re naked and we need to hear the plan first,” Sebastian whispers.

“Keep going,” he says to Caleb.

Before looking back at us, Caleb types something into the computer.

Caleb says, “Henry Benorik is a trained hitman, which means he works for someone higher, like Sebastian. We don’t know who, but it’s someone who’s making Henry do all their dirty work.”

Sebastian asked, “How did we not know this?”

“Believe me, he didn’t want us to know, but for some reason he let us find out.”

“That’s why he knew so much about guns, about combat, and about me.” I said to myself.

“Henry never signed the papers for that marriage. This has been his plan all along. My best guess is that he wants Sebastian to suffer, and the best way to do that is to mess with the women he loves and his child.” Caleb’s voice gets deeper when he says “women he loves,” which is clear that he was uncomfortable. I don’t blame him.

“That said, get ready. I have men picked out just for this.” Caleb turns to the door.

“Thanks, Caleb.” He says this before both men nod at each other. After that, Caleb

left the room, leaving Sebastian and me alone.

Sebastian just asked me to marry him a few minutes ago, and the awkwardness was killing me.

“I’ll have an answer for you after we get Miguel, but right now I just want to focus on getting our son back,” I said.

Sebastian’s jaw tightened before he nodded. “I need to talk to some people, get ready, and meet me in the living room.” He was about to leave when he turned around and kissed me. I kissed him back.

He told his housekeeper to get me some clothes. I went to the living room after I was done because I heard voices coming from there. I saw men getting ready and women getting weapons when I turned the corner. I gulped. I’ve never really met Sebastian’s gang. I saw Caleb sitting on the couch and putting a gun behind his jeans. Why was Caleb getting dressed?

I went over to him. I asked, “What are you doing?”

Everyone looked at me for a second and then turned away. He looked at me in shock. He laughs and then grabs an even bigger gun. He straps it over himself and stands up to meet me.

“Getting dressed.” He says quickly.

“I know that, but why? You’re not coming.” I crossed my arms over my chest. I don’t want to lose Caleb because he is the only thing I have of Maya. My best friend would kill me if I let him put himself in danger because he has a daughter who will miss him.

“Listen, Aria. I’m the underboss, which means I’m second in command. My job is to keep Sebastian and his family safe, even if it means dying,” Caleb whispers.

What?

“You took the position, how could you?” I pushed against his chest, and he fell back a little, but his face stayed the same.

Caleb signed his life away. He won’t be able to see Amara again without putting her in danger.

“You didn’t think about Amara?” I pushed his chest again, but he grabbed my wrist before I could do it again.

“Amara?” he asked.

He didn’t even know his daughter’s name; he never asked about her or Nina.

“Your daughter.” My voice was full of anger. “You never even checked on her,” I said quietly. His face didn’t change.

“I hate to ruin your dreams, but we both know who’s going to take over the black skulls, and it’s not you.” I said in a harsh whisper. Caleb’s eyes flashed with rage, and his jaw clicked like it always does.

I saw Sebastian standing on top of the stairs out of the corner of my eye. His eyes met mine, then they moved down to my wrist. I pulled my wrist out of Caleb’s grip and walked away from him. I can’t even stand next to Caleb because he makes me sick.

“Get Miguel and kill anyone who tries to stop us,” Sebastian yells, getting everyone’s attention. He tells everyone who seems okay with everything, “No one kills Henry;

the bastard is mine.” They don’t even care that they’re risking their lives for my child, who isn’t even related to them.

Everyone starts to leave, and I walk over to Sebastian, who is currently loading up on weapons.

“I need to let you go, Sebastian,” I said quietly. His back muscles tightened against his black t-shirt, which fit him perfectly.

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I'd give my life for my child any day. I just don't want him to think otherwise.

He slowly turned around, and his lips fell into a thin line. He suddenly took my hand and slipped the engagement ring on my finger. "I don't need an answer right now. I just want you to wear it, just in case."

I told Sebastian, "He wants me, not you. Nothing is going to happen to you."

"Please just wear it," he begged. I quickly nodded in response.

Caleb yells from outside, "We should go before it gets too late."

I saw Sebastian's eyes, and in a second, his lips were on mine. Sebastian was already out the door when we pulled back. I quickly followed with a question stuck in my head. It seemed like he was keeping something from me. When I got outside, I saw Caleb's eyes and everyone else seemed ready. What is he putting everything on the line for? He doesn't have to.

Then I looked back at Sebastian. It was hard to see two men I love fighting for my son, knowing that one of them could die. Who am I willing to lose? I'm sorry, but none.

"Let's go," Sebastian says to them.

Caleb and two other guys got in the car with Sebastian and me. Sebastian started to drive, and I looked back at the house we were leaving. Will I come back? I pushed that thought out of my mind. I couldn't help but think that I was made to lose people.

That's all I've ever known. I lose people just like Sebastian does. Caleb took out a small laptop and held it up for Sebastian to see quickly.

Sebastian steps on the gas pedal to make the car go a lot faster. "F**k, he's on to us."

"What does that mean?" I asked, and my voice sounded hoarse.

Sebastian says, "We might be walking into a trap."

I can't let these people risk their lives for me and my child. If anyone should risk their life, it should be me. I blinked away the tears that were welling up in my eyes.

"Sebastian, you have to make the exchange." I told him, and his hands tightened around the wheel. I swallowed the big lump in my throat.

"Are you crazy? He'll kill you, Aria." Caleb's voice came from the back, making me look at him.

"I have no choice; I'm not going to put you guys at risk because of my mistake," I yelled. "I owe Maya that much. She would hate me if something happened to you."

Caleb just looked at me. He knows I'm right. I look back at Sebastian, who is still quiet.

"That's it, we're not doing the exchange."

I didn't say anything; I just turned around and looked out the window. The car finally stopped, and when I looked out the front, I saw a warehouse. The other five cars also stopped, and everyone got out with guns and other things. I took my gun and put it behind my jeans. Then I took the strap that went around my thigh and held my knife.

Sebastian told Caleb, “You stay with Aria. You follow her everywhere. If there’s a bullet, I want you in front of it.”

I turn to Caleb, who nods. Was he crazy? I glared at Sebastian, who had just told Caleb to put his life on the line for mine.

“No,” I said to Sebastian.

“It’s his job,” he says quickly before walking away with his men.

I turned around and looked at Caleb before following Sebastian. Sebastian has men all around the building, so no one can get out. I didn’t go through the front door with Sebastian; instead, I found a staircase that led to another door. Caleb followed me up the stairs.

He whispers-yells, “What the hell are you doing?” when I open the door. I slowly crept inside with my gun in my hand.

“Taking a different route. We need to see everything from a higher point of view,” I whispered back.

We got in safely. I chose the best way because it gave me a view of everything and was in a different room. We both crept over to the window and bent down next to it. I carefully looked, and Henry’s men were lined up. I saw Henry with his dirty hands on my son’s shoulders. Henry was talking, but I couldn’t hear him. I looked over at Caleb, who was shaking his head quickly. He already knew what I was thinking, so I quickly smiled, left the room, and locked the door behind me so he couldn’t follow me.

Caleb came into view through the window and mouthed, “Open the door.” I shook my head; I wasn’t going to let him out just so he could put his life in danger for me.

I stayed low while I watched them by the railing. Miguel was tall and looked strong. It's crazy to see my own flesh and blood.

Henry tells my son, "You have to do it, Miguel." I could hear them perfectly now. Henry's voice was deep and scary.

"Yes, father," Miguel said. His voice was very low and broken. He didn't sound like a four-year-old; he sounded like a soldier. I could hear his pain. He called Henry "father," which means he must think Henry is really his dad.

A door opened from the bottom, and I couldn't see who it was. I crawled to my left, where I would be much more visible, but that's okay. What the f**k? Sebastian was being held against his will. That wasn't part of the plan, damn it. They threw him on the floor, right in front of Miguel. Sebastian raised himself halfway up before stopping. He must have seen Miguel.

Henry tells his men to "chain him." Sebastian gets chained up because they follow his orders.

Think about Aria.

Oh my god, Henry pointed his gun at Sebastian's head. Sebastian wasn't scared; he was as calm as ever.

Henry spits out, "This man is your pathetic biological father." Miguel looked back at Sebastian, as if he were trying to understand that Sebastian was his dad.

"Father, please stop," Miguel begs through his tears.

Henry stiffened and lowered the gun. He stopped paying attention to Sebastian and started paying attention to Miguel. No, don't touch my child. Please, God. Henry hit

Miguel in the face, and he fell to the ground.

“I didn’t raise a bitch, little boy.” Henry kicked Miguel on the floor. I shot my gun up at the ceiling without thinking, and it got their attention right away.

“Touch my kid again, I dare you,” I yelled, pointing my gun at him. Henry raised his gun, which was now aimed at Sebastian.

“Pull the trigger, and Miguel will see his dad die,” Henry says with a smirk.

“Don’t do it, Aria. Leave,” Sebastian yells, and one of Henry’s puppets punches him in the face.

Someone grabbed me from behind and held me tightly. Henry’s guys started to pull me down the stairs to them. Miguel coughed up blood when I got close. I tried to get close to comfort my son, but they wouldn’t let me.

“Not so fast, honey,” Henry says with a wicked smile.

They put tape around my hands and tied them behind my back. I was kicked to the ground and fell to my knees. They took Sebastian down from the chains, taped him up, and kicked him to the ground. Henry bent down to my level, but I was mostly looking at Miguel. I wanted to check on him. Henry grabbed my cheeks and made me look at him.

Henry pointed to my son and said, “Isn’t he beautiful?” “My sister Beth sure had a good time with him,” he said, licking his lips.

No.

I was so angry that I leaned back and hit my head against his.

Henry yells, “You f*****g bitch,” as he gets back up. He held his head in pain, and I laughed.

Honestly, that hurt like hell.

I yelled angrily, “You’re a horrible person. You’ll burn in hell for what you’ve done to my son.”

I didn’t even see it, but Miguel was already standing up. His nose was bleeding, and there was a deep cut on his cheek from where Henry punched him. When I saw his eyes, they softened. He looked just like Sebastian. Miguel slowly walks towards me, and my heart skips a beat when his tiny hand touches my cheek. I couldn’t help but cry; it was real.

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“Mommy,” he says softly.

That word makes my heart melt. Henry pulls him back to his side, which means I can’t enjoy the only time I have with my son.

Henry gave him a gun, and I tried to move against the tape, but it didn’t work.

Henry mumbles, “Miguel, I want you to kill them.”

Miguel’s face showed fear, and his eyes started to fill with tiny tears.

“Don’t do this, Henry. What do you want? Is it my business? I’ll give you everything, just don’t make my kid kill us,” Sebastian yells. He also wiggles against the tape. Sebastian knows what it’s like to be haunted by the past. He didn’t want Miguel to have to deal with the death of his parents.

Henry laughs. Henry says, “Before my son kills you both, I want to introduce you to someone.” A woman walks in with a coat tightly wrapped around her body, which makes her face look darker. I squinted my eyes to try to figure out who it was, but I couldn’t.

She got closer to Sebastian. When she stopped in front of him, she pulled down the hood to show her face.

“Miss me, my sweet little Sebastian?” the woman says in a flirty voice. I thought she would be prettier, or maybe even younger.

Sebastian whispers, “Mom...” in disbelief.

Is that his mum? I thought he killed everyone in his family and set their house on fire. My eyes filled with shock; this was so messed up.

“Y-your supp-”

“Yes, I’m supposed to be dead.” His mom finished his sentence for him, which made me even more confused. “After I burned down the house and you thought I was dead, I had to run away.”

“Because of you, I thought I killed you all. You made me think I killed my own sister.”

“No, she’s dead, but I killed her.” “Your dad was angry and you were unconscious, so I did it. She was going to take over the business and leave you with nothing. My son, you were made to be powerful and feared.” His mum said as she brushed his hair back.

“She was your daughter, your only daughter.” His voice was so broken.

“She wasn’t mine; she was the result of your father’s affair. That little bitch deserved to be raped by your dad; she deserved it all,” his mother yells.

This woman sounded insane. This is all insane; she was alive the whole time. Sebastian became cold-hearted because he thought he had killed his whole family and blamed himself.

“Henry is also your brother, so you should know that.”

“Your dad wasn’t the only one cheating,” she said.

I couldn't believe it when I heard this. What the hell? I was having s*x with Sebastian's crazy brother and didn't even know they were related. Sebastian's mom walked over to Henry, and he stepped back to let her be in front. This was his boss, and she planned everything. She wrapped her old hands around my son, and I pushed forward.

"Don't touch my kid, you crazy bitch!" I yelled.

She laughs and says, "He's my grandson, and I need someone ruthless to run my business. That's exactly what your son will become." Then she whispered in Miguel's ear, "Now, Miguel, kill them."

Miguel shakes as he moves towards Sebastian. I turned to look at them, and Sebastian's face showed no fear.

I told my son, "Miguel, don't."

"Do it, Miguel." Sebastian's mum smiles and says, "Then this is all over and we can go home."

Miguel's little arm goes up, and the gun is aimed right at Sebastian. His little arm shakes violently, and I watched in horror.

I heard Henry say, "Do it."

"I'm sorry," Miguel says.

Bang

Sebastian's body fell to the ground, dead. I cried and felt empty. Miguel stood there with snot running down his nose, and his little body shook violently. I couldn't

breathe, and my head hung low.

Before I could look up, there were a lot of gunshots. I rolled over to my side and saw Miguel curled up in a ball with his hands over his ears. I felt hands behind me taking off the tape. It was Caleb.

“I’m sorry,” he says, looking at Sebastian’s body. He gives me a gun, and I turn around to see Miguel is gone. I look at the door and see Sebastian’s mom taking my son again.

My body ran over to Sebastian’s without me thinking about it. He was still taped down, so I bent down next to him, ripped the tape off, and flipped him over. I put my head on his chest and held on to his shirt as I cried.

“Sebastian, please... I-I love you,” I said.

“Pumpkin, I love you too.”

I looked back up at him and saw those blue eyes looking at me. What the hell? I’m really going crazy. Sebastian unbuttoned his shirt to show off his bulletproof vest. This was his plan all along, the f*****g jerk. I hit his chest with my hand over and over until he caught my wrist. He slammed his lips against mine, and I kissed him back with the same enthusiasm.

Miguel, what the hell?

“Your mom took Miguel,” I yelled. I didn’t even give him time to answer; I just ran to the door she had come through.

The bright sun made me squint, and I ran as fast as I could. Sebastian was behind me, trying to keep up. We got to a cliff, and Sebastian’s mom was at the very edge with

Miguel's neck in her arm and the gun pointed right at his head. I slowed down and stopped completely, and Sebastian did the same.

"So the devil lives on for another day. Sebastian's mom laughs before squeezing Miguel's neck tighter, which makes him whimper.

Mom, let him go. He's your grandson. Sebastian says.

Learn how to speak Italian, for crying out loud.

"Please let him go," I begged her.

She looked back at me, and her eyes were studying me. She smiles, but it's an evil smile.

"I can see why Sebastian liked you; you're just like her, and you look like her too."

Debra, she's talking about his sister.

Sebastian says angrily, "Mamma, I love Aria for who she is. Not because she looks like my f*****g sister. You're sick in the head."

What he says makes my heart melt. My mind was almost at peace until I remembered that she's holding my son hostage on a cliff. The voice in my head kept telling me to kill her. All I could think about was death.

"Let's make a deal," Sebastian's mum says to me.

"You take Miguel's place in my arms, and he'll live."

"No," Sebastian yelled.

No matter what, I'll do anything to keep Miguel safe, even if it means dying. Sebastian loves me so much that it makes him not think clearly. Miguel is still young and has a lot to learn and do.

I said, "It's not up to you; it's up to me."

I turned around to Sebastian, who shook his head no. I held his cheeks in my hands and looked deeply into his eyes. His eyes were getting bloodshot red, and he kept shaking his head back and forth. I opened Sebastian's heart and taught him how to love. He taught me how to live and that not everything has to be perfect.

I whispered so softly, "Yes, I'll marry you." I kiss him softly on the lips and then pull away.

I turned to face her slowly, making eye contact with her at the same time.

"Deal," I said as I wiped my tears away. "Let Miguel go first," I said.

"You think I'm stupid, girl," she yelled, gripping the gun tighter. Miguel started to cry because he was so scared.

"You have my f*****g words." Sebastian's voice was hoarse and weak. I knew Sebastian would make the right choice in the end, even if it kills me. He can't deny his love for Miguel, for his child. Just like I'm a mother, he's a father. You will always want to protect your child.

She looked worried, but she let go of Miguel, who slowly walked towards me. I grabbed him and bent down to his level. He was crying and had a sad frown on his face. I wiped his tears.

I told him, "Look at me."

Miguel listened, and our green eyes met. I gently touched his cheek and kissed his forehead. “It’s not your fault, just remember that.” I love you, baby. I took a breath and pushed him gently towards Sebastian.

“Aria.”

I heard someone yell from behind me, so I turned around and saw my mom and dad. My mom tried to run to me, but my dad stopped her by holding her waist. She punched, kicked and twisted to get to me, but my dad held her tightly against his chest.

“Please, you’re a mother, show mercy.” My mom begged the woman who was about to kill me. My dad must have teamed up with Sebastian, and my mom came with him to save me. That’s why they’re both here.

“Mercy? “That doesn’t exist,” she said to my mom.

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My mom cried in my dad's arms. I turned to look at Sebastian's mom.

I moved a little closer until I was right in front of her and dodged her hand. "Wait, I have a question before you kill me," I said.

"What's the point of this?" I ask.

"Where a devil stands, another follows."

She wants Sebastian to be ruthless again and tell Miguel about it. That's why she wanted to kill Sebastian: he fell in love and opened his heart, which she thought made him weak. I looked back at Sebastian and Miguel; he was holding Miguel in his arms. Miguel had his head between Sebastian's neck and jaw, which kept him from dying.

I said to her, "He won't hesitate after you kill me."

"Yes, but you'll be dead, and so will his heart."

I felt her cold arms wrap around my neck. She turned me around so I could see them. I swallowed the huge knot in my throat and slowly reached down to my back pocket so she wouldn't notice.

My dad nodded at me, as if he knew what I was going to do.

I turned around quickly and stabbed her in the throat. Blood poured out of her mouth as she held on to my arms. I looked into her shallow eyes while holding her hair and the knife in her throat tightly. I pulled her head closer to my mouth so she could hear

what I was going to say.

“I’ll love my kid so much more than your sick mind wanted him to be.” I pushed the knife in deeper.

“...The Reaper will...never...be...gone.”

The word “reaper” gives me the creeps. She’s talking about Miguel.

“Burn in hell, you evil bitch.” I gritted my teeth and pushed her off the cliff.

I fell to the ground and threw the knife to the side. I looked down at my hands, which were painted scarlet red. I had just killed someone. My dad was now in front of me, and his hands touched mine, bringing me back to reality.

My dad says, “You did what you had to do, Princess.”

I nod. He helps me get up, and my mom hugs me right away. She smells me and combs my hair back. I hug her back, and tears start to form in my eyes.

“God, I really thought I was going to lose you,” my mom said.

“I’ll be fine,” I said softly.

We broke apart. I looked over at Sebastian and Miguel. Sebastian’s face was wet from crying, and he looked broken but relieved. He was biting his lip. I walked slowly over to them and stopped just before I got to them. I threw myself into his arm and grabbed Miguel from Sebastian, holding him tightly to my chest. Sebastian held both of us as I looked at him.

Sebastian kissed me slowly and passionately this time. I kissed him back with the

same passion.

“Aria,” my mom yelled. Damn, I forgot she was right behind us.

I turned around and saw her smiling. She wasn’t looking at us; she was looking at Miguel.

“Can I please hug him?”

“Of course. “That’s your grandma,” I said. He looked at her like he was trying to figure out if she was mean or not. It was sad to see him so scared to talk to someone. I walked over to my parents with Miguel in my arms, and when we got there, Miguel threw himself at her.

As she cried into his neck, my mom wrapped both of her arms around him.

My dad was standing right next to her and looking at Miguel with interest.

“Looks like he has the Callahan gene,” my dad said, pointing to Miguel’s green eyes. “Beat that, Sebastian.”

Sebastian rolled his eyes in a funny way. My dad kissed Miguel’s forehead, and he did the same to my mom.

Sebastian says, “Thank God I called your dad for help.”

I nodded.

“I’m here.”

We all turn to see Caleb pointing his gun at the air. He looked confused at first, but

then he understood.

“God damnit, the bitch is already dead?””He huffs.”

“Yeah, you’re a little late,” I said with a laugh.

“That’s it for f*****g sprinting. Caleb says in a dramatic way, “I need to sit down; my blood pressure is probably high now.”

Everyone laughs.

Sebastian says, “Caleb, you are in perfect health.”

“Okay, doctor.”

Everyone laughed. I looked Sebastian in the eye. He finally looked at peace with everything. He seemed happy that he didn’t kill his family or his sister. He isn’t a monster; he thought he was for half of his life. I can’t imagine not having my mum or dad. I’ll never be able to understand that part of Sebastian’s life because I’ve never been through it. There is a reason for everything.

“Let’s go home.”

I was afraid to leave Miguel alone for even a few minutes. I needed to get some fresh air, but I didn’t want to be away from him. I put a blanket around me and went out to the balcony. I felt the cool air on my cheeks and looked out at the lights of the city. I looked down at my ring. Yellow sapphire is my favourite diamond.

“It’s a nice night out.” Caleb stood next to me and looked out at the city.

“Yeah.”

Caleb says, “I need to say I’m sorry for something.”

I turned around and raised my eyebrow. I’m definitely confused about how I feel about Caleb right now.

“Every problem you’ve had, I thought you wouldn’t be able to get through it.” Caleb faced me head-on, and I did too. He ran his hand over his chin and then put it back down to his side. “You just did.”

I turned my head so that I was looking away from him. “I don’t have that much strength,” I said softly.

Caleb said in a very serious voice, “You are stronger than you think you are.” Caleb has always been able to make me feel better with just his words. Not many people can do that.

“Sebastian gave me back my freedom, and I even got a cool tattoo out of it.” Caleb showed off his “Code of Silence” tattoo on his arm.

My fingers moved over it, and a smile came to my lips.

Caleb says, “I want you to come with me.” I put my hands back at my sides. Caleb then pulled them into his and lifted them just below his mouth. “Aria, just think about it. We can leave all of this behind, move to Louisiana, and start a family. I don’t care if Miguel isn’t mine; I’ll love him like he’s my own. We’ll finally be at peace.”

My eyes quickly moved to his. I thought about what he just said. If I leave with Caleb, I’ll have a normal life without worrying about who might die next, but I’ll never see Sebastian again. I can’t have both Caleb and Sebastian. I could hear Maya’s voice in my head saying, “It’s time, Pumpkin.”

“I’ve loved my little sister’s best friend my whole life.”

I put our hands down and rubbed circles on his wrist with my thumb.

Caleb says, “You’re not coming,” before I could.

I shook my head. “I swear I care about you, Caleb, but…”

Caleb finished my sentence before I could. “You love him.”

I could see the pain in his eyes, and it makes me feel terrible that I was the one who caused it.

I nodded my head again. He moved closer to me, and the air from his breath blew against my cheeks. He ran his thumb across my cheek, and I closed my eyes and then opened them again.

“I can’t lie and say I’m happy. I love you, Pumpkin. I always will. You were my first love, my first everything.”

“I know. You were too,” I say.

Caleb laughs softly. “That little boy in there is lucky. He has a great mum and dad who love him very much.”

I laugh too, then I stand on my toes and kiss his cheek gently.

“Be careful, Caleb,” I said quietly.

“See you later, Aria.”

Caleb goes out the door in the opposite direction from me. I looked up at the sky and saw that the stars were brighter than the sun that had been up a few hours earlier. I thought Maya was smiling at me, like she was happy that her brother was finally getting away from all of this. I couldn't agree with her more.

I went inside when it started to get cold. I locked the sliding door behind me. When I turned around, I saw Sebastian in the bathroom trying to clean up his cuts.

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When I walked over to him, he looked surprised to see me. “Shouldn’t you be with Caleb, Pumpkin?” he asked.

“I can’t stop you from being with him, but all I ask is that you let me have a relationship with my son.”

I looked at him to see if he was telling the truth. Did he really think I would go with Caleb?

“I didn’t kill your mother just so I could start a family with someone else, Sebastian,” I said.

Sebastian didn’t say anything before answering.

“I was praying you wouldn’t. It looks like God heard my prayers.” Sebastian smiles.

I smiled back and rolled my eyes before grabbing his wrist. I put him on the toilet, took the cloth from his hand, and carefully dipped it in alcohol before gently wiping his cuts. Sebastian didn’t say much as he looked over my body, as if he were trying to give me time to think about whether or not I really wanted this.

I know for sure now that Sebastian is what I want.

I think my mum didn’t say anything when she saw us kiss before because she knew all along in a really strange way. I wish Sebastian and I had met in a different way, but we didn’t, and I was okay with that. I stopped cleaning his wounds and put my hand on his bare chest.

“You’re a terrible person. You kill, you hurt, you ruin things. But I can’t help but feel most alive with you.” His eyes slowly found mine, and I was out of breath after my speech. “I love you, Sebastian. No matter who you kill or hurt, I’m always going to love you.”

He didn’t say anything, which scared me a little. Why wasn’t he answering? No, he does love me. His chest started to rise and fall, which made it look like he was having trouble. He calmed down and then took my small hand in his big one.

“Aria, that ring on your finger isn’t just any ring. It was my sister’s ring from her first boyfriend. She loved him more than anything else, and she told me to give it to the girl I love the most.”

“Debra was just like you, which might be why I was so mean to you at first,” he says. “I think she brought you into my life to show me that love isn’t just a word, and what my parents had wasn’t love but abuse.” He looked deep into my eyes without a hint of coldness, and his words were full of truth.

“I was scared to let you in because I knew I’d fall for you, and in my line of work, it’s dangerous to love someone, but I’d do anything for you and your mother.” He looked up at me.

“I’ve loved you for a very, very long time, and that’s the point.”

I smiled and wrapped my arms around his neck gently. Sebastian’s arms went around my waist. I felt safe and loved in his arms.

He was never defined by the word “devil.” Love defines him. I am completely happy with my life; I have everything I ever wanted and more. However, there was still one thing that worried me.

As Sebastian and I held each other, we looked at Miguel, who was sleeping soundly with his brown hair covering his face.

I was afraid of what would happen to Miguel in the future. I can only think of one question, and I'm sure Sebastian can too.

What the hell did she call Miguel, a reaper?

Five years later

A year ago, Sebastian and I got married. I love learning new things about him every day. He's changed so much. He is a loving husband and father to two boys and a girl who is on the way. Today, Sebastian and I invited my family over to tell them about our baby girl. Sebastian was overjoyed to learn that I was pregnant again. He was even more overjoyed to learn that it was a girl.

His little girl.

"Boys, you better be dressed," I yell while I set the table.

It was too quiet; this place is never quiet, especially when Sebastian is supposed to be getting them ready. I shook my head and smiled. I rubbed my small hand over my growing belly as I looked down at it. "Let's hope you have a father by the time you come out, baby."

I went over to the boys' room. Sebastian and I decided that the boys should share a room because they used to have separate rooms but would sneak into each other's rooms at night. They are so close that they have a strong bond. I hope they welcome this little girl, their baby sister.

Every week, Miguel goes to school and gets in trouble with the principal. Robert

stays home with me because he is still too young.

Miguel is grounded right now because he punched a kid in the face for looking at him wrong.

Boys.

I said, "This is why we can't have family dinners."

The boys were on top of Sebastian, who was on the floor. Paint was all over them. Three minutes before my family gets here, I have bright blue paint on my a*s.

Sebastian looked up at me and gave me a sweet smile, as if he was trying to get out of trouble. The boys smiled just like he did. Every day, Miguel looks more and more like Sebastian, and Robert looks more and more like me. Robert has my personality, my green eyes, and my blonde hair.

"Guys, Mama and Papa will be here any second." I glared at them.

"Babe, it's fine," Sebastian laughs.

I turned my head quickly at him. "Do you think this is funny?"

I blame the hormones.

Sebastian took a deep breath and then looked at the boys. He gave them a look that said he had a plan. The boys seemed to get what he meant because they both looked over at me. Miguel and Robert let Sebastian get off, which let him stand up. Sebastian pretended to grab the rag from behind me, but instead he rubbed his cheek, which was covered in paint, against mine.

“Get mommy!” he yelled so the boys could hear. My eyes got big when Sebastian carefully picked me up and put me on the floor in the paint puddle. As I moved around on the floor, the boys painted me softly.

“Stop!” I yelled, pretending to be angry. Sebastian stopped the attack right away. Everyone looked at me with fear in their eyes.

I smiled and picked up the paint bottle from the floor. Then I sprayed the paint all over him. Seeing that Sebastian’s eyes were the only part of him that wasn’t covered in paint made me laugh. The boys then agreed with me and painted their dad more. We all attacked Sebastian. I stood on his waist and poured more paint on him. The boys were smoothing out the paint on his face. I couldn’t stop laughing. I laughed so hard that I thought I might pee myself.

The door next to us opened, and we all turned to see my mum and Maria standing there with their mouths wide open. I looked at Sebastian, who was also looking at me. We both turned around to look at them again, but this time we smiled. The boys did too.

“You’d think they’d act like adults,” my mom said, crossing her arms and looking at pregnant Maria.

“Clean up; we’ll be in the dining room.” Maria laughs. As soon as my mum left, the boys burst out laughing.

I laughed with them and then wiped the paint off my face with my hands. I put my hand on top of Sebastian’s arm because he looked like he was in a train of thought.

I asked, “Are you okay?”

The boys were going to the toilet to wash up. My hand brought him back to reality.

He smiled at me and stood up, then reached out his hand for mine. I took his hand and he helped me stand up.

He says, “It must be hard for Maria to see your dad and mum together. I don’t know what I’d do if I ever lost you.” His eyes were locked on mine.

Maria got married again a few years ago and is now expecting her second child with her husband. My dad and her weren’t meant to be, but they love each other because they have a child together. They weren’t in love with each other, though.

No matter how much pain they’ve caused each other, my mum and dad have always loved each other.

“I’m not leaving you, Sebastian. You’ve made mistakes and paid for them. Now we get our happy ending together.” I said this while leaning over and kissing his lips. He put his hand on my cheek and deepened the kiss.

“I love you.”

“I love you too,” I say.

“Eww.” Miguel whined, and we both laughed and pulled apart.

We all cleaned up, but some did a better job than others. Miguel begged to keep his shoes on, which were covered in dry blue paint. Everyone was sitting down when we walked into the dining room.

Maria was sitting next to my little brother Bruce, who is her son. Mom and Dad were sitting across from them with their hands together. They all turned around when we walked in. My brother was happy to see his nephews.

Robert ran over to hug Maria and Bruce, and then he hugged my parents too. Miguel stayed with me instead. He has trouble trusting even his own family. Everyone gets it and agrees with it, but I know it’s hard for him. I hate that he feels that way.

“Hey, Miguel, I got you something.” My dad takes something out of his pocket.

We all took a seat.

He got Miguel a gun, a freaking gun. I couldn’t believe what my dad said, and neither could anyone else, not even Sebastian.

“Please tell me you’re joking, Dad,” I said.

“Jack, you idiot,” my mum says in a whisper-yell.

“He’s 9? That’s when I got my first gun. I was already training to take grandpa’s place. He should be training to take Sebastian’s place.” My dad said this calmly, as if

he wasn't crazy.

"Dad, Miguel isn't supposed to hear this," I said.

"Thanks, Papa." Miguel jumps out of his chair and into my dad's arms.

Sebastian's hand tightened around mine, and I could feel his body getting hotter. He was angry, like he was boiling. I didn't like that Miguel was happy about having a gun instead of going back to school.

Sebastian tells Miguel, "You're too young to get a gun."

He gives Sebastian a scary look, as if he were questioning what he said. He always says he's sorry with a sweet smile, so this is new for him.

"Yes, I am!" Miguel yells.

Sebastian yells even louder, "Miguel, I am your father, what I say goes."

Everyone is quiet and looks at what is about to happen. They always fight, Sebastian and him. They never seem to get along.

"You know what? I don't think this is a good idea anymore." My dad laughs dryly, and it stops when no one else joins in. He just looks around at everyone.

My mom whispered, "You think?" My dad gulped at her tone.

Miguel yells, "You're not my dad."

I look at Miguel with a confused face instead of my dad. What did he mean? Robert sneaks up next to me and wraps his little hands around my neck. I lift him up onto my

lap.

“Don’t yell at me, Miguel Devereux,” Sebastian says, sounding much calmer than before.

“Henry is my dad!” he yells loudly before pulling away from my dad’s arms and stomping off. I heard his bedroom door slam shut with a loud bang.

It got quiet in a strange way.

“My defence is that I wasn’t going to load the gun.” My dad was the first to speak up, trying to clear his name in Sebastian’s mind.

Sebastian’s veins were still sticking out, and he was still looking at the same spot where Miguel had been standing a few seconds earlier. I took his hand,, and he slowly turned around and kissed my forehead andfight.[T rail]

I made a cough. “Sorry, he’ll be fine. Let’s just keep going.”

Bruce asked, “Dad, can I keep his gun?”

I thought Maria’s neck was going to break off when she looked at her son so quickly.

“No way,” Maria says.

My dad put the gun down that he was about to give to my brother. My mom and Maria both shot daggers at my dad.

“I wasn’t going to give it to him.” My dad smiles and tries to make us believe him.

I tried to stay focused on the great dinner I made, but my mind kept going back to

what Miguel had said. He still believes that Henry is his father. Sebastian has been trying to forget about the past because he knows it hurt him to hear that from his own son.

I told everyone, “It’s a girl.”

“Finally!” My mom screams with joy and hugs Sebastian and me.

After we found out the baby’s gender, we all finished eating and cleaning up. Everyone went home, and Sebastian went back to his office to finish some paperwork. I brought Miguel a plate of food because he missed dinner. Robert was already in bed watching TV. Miguel was at his desk, looking at his pet fish. I bent down to his level and put the plate of food in front of him.

“Baby, talk to me,” I said in a soft voice so he wouldn’t think I was mad. To be honest, I can’t be mad at him. Henry did raise him for five years, but it was in a bad way. Kids can be confusing sometimes.

“I miss him,” Miguel says softly.

“Miss who, baby?” I say.

“My dad.”

“Sweetheart, he’s at work. I’m pretty sure if—”

“Henry.” He cuts me off in the middle of my sentence.

Miguel turns his body to face mine, and I gently hold his hands. I put my finger under his chin, and our eyes met. He used to have green eyes like mine, but when he got older, they turned dark brown, which was strange because no one else in our family

had brown eyes. Miguel's eyes made him stand out, but they also changed him as a person.

I told him, "Sebastian is your dad, baby." "Sebastian loves you so much, son. You're his pride and joy."

Miguel didn't say anything; he just turned back around and went back to his desk. I stared at him hard, trying to read his mind, but it didn't work. I got up and kissed him on the forehead. I went to Robert, who was already asleep, and kissed his tiny forehead before I left. I locked their door because Robert walks in his sleep at night.

I walked towards Sebastian's office. Sebastian was looking at some papers with his glasses on. Over the years, his eyesight has gotten worse, but I'm not complaining. He looks great with glasses on, like a big daddy. He was so busy reading the news that he didn't even see me in his office. He put the papers on his desk and wrapped his arms around me while I sat on his lap.

Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 7:21 am

“Sebastian, he didn’t mean it,” I said, talking about Miguel.

“Sometimes things are great between us, but other times I’m just the guy who takes care of him when his real dad isn’t around.” Sebastian takes off his glasses and throws them on his desk with a heavy sigh.

“You’re a great dad, and he loves you. It’s just hard for him to understand right now,” I said quietly. “Who wouldn’t love the great Sebastian Devereux?” I said with a wink.

“You’re the best thing that’s ever happened to me, Pumpkin,” Sebastian says with a laugh. “Thank you for making my life so full.”

His hand brushes my cheek, and his eyes are blue to green as they look into mine. There was no sound as we both admired each other. Sebastian has always been beautiful, but as he gets older, he looks even better. His hair is now a mix of grey and brown, and his jawline is more defined. I moved my legs so I could straddle him, and he put his hands behind my a*s and held them there.

“Mr. Devereux, I’ve been a very, very bad girl.” I whispered in his ear and bit his neck a little.

“I need to be punished.”

Sebastian moved so quickly that he picked me up by the thighs and put me on his desk. We both started to take off our clothes. He took off his tie and tied it around my hands. He cleared everything off his desk before laying me back on it. He kissed me all over while holding my tied hands above my head. I arch my back when he gets to

my lady part.

He whispered, "I'm going to break you tonight," against my p***y, and my breathing got faster. His dirty talk was making me even more wet than I already was.

"Stop talking and do it." My voice was shaky. I was so full of l**t that I could barely talk.

Sebastian's lips were on my clit, and his hands were holding down my hips, which were trying to rise up. He pushed his tongues deep into me, and my body began to shake. His mouth kept moving violently on my bottom lip, which was between my legs. My legs were around his neck, and my hands kept trying to break free from the tie, but they couldn't.

He moaned and moaned until he finally hit the spot, and I screamed in pure joy. He licked his lips before putting them on mine, and I could taste myself on him.

He picked me up and untied my hands, only to tie them back up again, this time behind my back.

"You're so hot, it's driving me crazy." He touches my neck and makes me moan.

"I don't want to be able to walk tomorrow," I whispered.

He hit me hard, and my hands were behind my back. As he thrusts into me, my legs wrap around his waist.

"Don't stop," I said, running out of breath.

His hand was around my neck, not too hard, but just right. He goes in and out of me without stopping, making it hard for me to breathe. I enjoyed every single second of

it. He pulled my leg up against his side and thrust harder and harder, hitting my g-spot with each thrust. I kept moaning and yelling, and I slowly turned my head in pleasure. He held me by the back and the leg. Every time we moved roughly, his desk squeaked.

He mumbled, “so tight.” At that point, we both reached our peak. I put my head on his chest as he fell apart inside me. We were both out of breath and sweaty.

“Does this mean we’re having twins?” He laughs softly as he unties my hands.

I put my hands on his chest, which was wet. “No,” I said, and I laughed. I wanted more because his d**k was still inside me.

He says in a warm voice, “You’re so beautiful,” and his nose rubs against mine.

I whispered into his ear, “Thank you, papi.”

Sebastian runs his hand down to my breasts and grips my left one roughly. “You want me to f**k you all over again, my little Pumpkin.”

I gasped and bit my bottom lip.

“Fill me up,” I said in a sexy way.

Sebastian kisses me and says, “I love you.” He kissed me slowly and passionately, and his lips felt great on mine like they always do.

“I love you more,” I said between kisses.

I saw the crowd come together, and my nerves were getting the best of me. Naomi made us have an outdoor wedding in December, but thank god it was snowing. I had my blonde hair pinned up in a curly bun, and some loose strands framed my face perfectly. I looked down at my wedding ring and thought about how he proposed to me a few weeks after he took my ring to have his name carved into it.

“Are you ready, Pumpkin?” my dad says as he walks in with my mum in his arms.

My mum started to cry as she looked me up and down. The back of my ivory sheath dress was shaped like a V and came up just above my b**t. I put on some n**e lip gloss to make my makeup look more interesting.

My mom hits my dad’s chest and cries, “You look beautiful.” “Doesn’t she?” My mum gave him a dangerous look that told him to say something nice about me.

“Of course. She looks just like you, sweetheart.” My dad whispers to my mom while kissing her. I turned away to look for my mother’s lacey veil.

I saw it on the chair behind me, and my dad came over to me.

“Can I?” my dad asks.

I nodded a little, and he gently pushed a strand of my hair behind my shoulder and put the veil over my head. He put it over my face and then kissed my cheek softly.

“Thanks, Daddy,” I said quietly.

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“Mommy.” Miguel came into the room wearing his little tuxedo and slicked back hair, just like his dad’s.

“Don’t you look handsome?” I laughed, and he raised his eyebrows at me.

When I bent down to his level to fix his messy bow tie, his small brown eyes met mine.

“You look so pretty, mommy.” He whispers with a smile that shows off his little white teeth.

“Thank you, my baby.” I kissed him on the cheek, and my parents were amazed.

My mum held out her hand to Miguel, and they both went downstairs to the venue. I wasn’t sure if I should do this because I was scared. Sebastian and I have been so good together that I don’t want to ruin what we have because marriage changes everything.

My dad could see that I was unsure; it was clear on my face. He reached into his pocket and pulled out an envelope. I was confused.

“One year after Sebastian left, he sent me a letter to give to you, but that awful Henry told me not to because it would ruin your happiness.” My dad gave it to me, and I gently took it with my fingers.

“After you read this, if you still have doubts, I’ll take care of the rest. But if you’re ready, I’ll walk down that aisle with you.”

Before he leaves the room, he gives me a reassuring nod. I watch the door close. I took a deep breath before slowly opening the letter.

“Dear Aria,

My Aria, before I met you, I was miserable every day because I didn’t have what I needed to be happy. The day you told me you loved me was the scariest and best day of my life. I didn’t know how to let myself love you, but I couldn’t lose you. Your love showed me how happy life could make me, and that alone made me the happiest man in the world. This time, you have a choice. If you don’t come to Florida, I’ll leave you alone forever. But if you do come, I promise to love and cherish you for a long time. “Aria, I will always be in love with you.”

I was crying, and all of my doubts went away. My worries seemed silly. He said he couldn’t be selfish with me, so he was going to give up his love and happiness for me if it made me happy. I carefully put makeup on my nose to cover up the tears, and then I put the letter against the mirror.

I was ready to marry the person I loved the most.

I opened the door and saw my dad standing there with his hand out for me to grab.

“You knew,” I said in a whisper.

My dad says, “I know love when I see it, and that man is very much in love with you.”

I smiled and grabbed his arms. When the big doors opened, my shoulders relaxed. Everyone in the crowd stood up and stared at me when the bright light came into the room. My dad and I began to walk, and I was terrified I would fall on my face, but I knew my dad wouldn’t let me. I saw Sebastian as we walked in a little more. He was standing right in the middle with the priest next to him.

When he saw me, his face lit up, and he opened his mouth to take me all in. I looked down shyly, with a big smile on my lips, and he still gave me butterflies.

When we got to the front, my dad kissed my cheek and put my hand in Sebastian's. When his hand touched mine, it felt like my body was filling with electricity.

He mouthed, "I love you," as he pulled the veil off my face.

"I love you too."

"We are here today to join these two people in marriage. They did not make this decision lightly, and today they are publicly declaring their love for each other."

We didn't look away; we kept looking at each other. The priest kept talking, and everything else went quiet. It was just the two of us, and my body relaxed because I knew he was there and would always keep me safe. I remember when we first met, the things we talked about, the fights we had, and the love we had.

"You are the reason my heart beats, and you are all I can think about."

"I love you, Sebastian."

My eyes fluttered when I saw Sebastian again, the way he gets to love and enjoy life after everything we've been through.

"Yes, we do."

"We do."

We both said it at the same time, and I could feel my chest rising and falling with the need to kiss him.

“I, Sebastian, promise to love and support you, Aria, every day with kindness, understanding, truth, humour, and passion. With this ring, I marry you.”

He takes my hand and Caleb gives him my wedding ring. He kisses my hand and then gently pushes the band onto my finger.

“I, Aria, promise to love and support you, Sebastian, and to love each day with kindness, understanding, truth, humour, and passion. With this ring, I wed you.”

I took the band from Naomi and put it on his finger. I then grabbed his tatted hand. I was waiting for the priest to tell us it was okay to kiss. God knows how badly I want his lips right now.

“You are now husband and wife. You can kiss the bride now.”

“I love you,” he said as he ran away.

Sebastian held my cheeks and kissed me softly. I wrapped my arms around the back of his neck and kissed him so passionately that my stomach turned. He dipped me while still kissing me. I smiled against his soft lips. When his lips touched mine, everything else went away. I kissed him even harder, getting lost in the moment.

“Mr. and Mrs. Devereux, I now present you.” The priest yells, and everyone cheers, which reminds us that we are at our wedding.

We pulled away, and Sebastian raised our hands and cheered. I thought he was funny, and my mom clapped and wiped her tears away. I looked to my right and smiled at Caleb, who smiled back. It made me think of Maya. I looked up at the sky and it felt like she was right there with me.

Sebastian whispers in my ear, “I guess you’re really stuck with me now, baby.”

“I guess so,” I said with a smile.

He picked me up and spun me around, and I laughed with joy. He didn’t forget about Miguel; he picked him up and spun us both around. Miguel held on for dear life, but he also laughed at how silly his dad was being.

No one knew we’d be standing here married with family and friends, and Maya, after everything we went through.

I can’t thank her enough for saving my life. If it weren’t for her, I would never have had my son.