



Sexy Killer (Lemme Fatale)

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Category: Action&Adventure

Description: Lena Little presents her FEMME FATALE series

Hell hath no fury like these women.scorned or not scorned!

Book # 1

SEXY KILLER

a strong female lead, second chance, revenge romance

Chelsea Emerson:

The last thing I expect when meeting Dad for dinner is to walk in on a robbery. Two men ransack my fathers jewelry store and then turn their sights on me. All my years of fight training give me an advantage, but not for long, as I end up unconscious beside my father.

When the sound of my ex from a few years ago stirs me awake, I open my eyes to the hottest detective Ive ever seen. Detective Victor Bennett is even sexier than the last time I saw him, but hes questioning me like Im the enemy. Our past relationship must not mean much, and thats fine as long as he stays out of my way.

Nothing and no one is going to stop me from getting revenge against the men who left me and my father for dead. Since Victor Bennetts hellbent on linking me to this crime, Ill let him get close enough to get what I need, but lust and love have other plans. We rekindle what we used to have while I play a dangerous game of cat and mouse. The closer we get, the closer I am to making the men behind the robbery pay for their crimes. I just hope my pursuit of vengeance doesnt end up costing me a second chance at love.

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CHELSEA

The sound of glass shattering as I step inside my father's jewelry store puts me on high alert. The alarm isn't blaring, and the light chuckles of men rummaging through the shop's display cases shift my alert to rage. My father works his fingers to the bone creating custom pieces, only for these animals to destroy what he's built.

My line of work, masquerading as a firearms and safety instructor, kicks in as I crouch down and reach inside my bag to retrieve my weapon.

Fuck.

Of course my gun is in the car because why would I need it to go out to dinner with Dad?

My phone is the next best thing as I dial 9-1-1.

"Mapleton Police. What's the nature of your emergency?" the dispatcher answers in a tone that's annoyingly sweet.

I try to keep my voice at a whisper as I tell her, "There's a robbery in progress at Francine's Jewelers. 2210 Main Street."

"I'm sorry, ma'am, I couldn't hear you. Did you say a robbery?"

"Yes," I hiss into the device, but I don't get to say anything else as heavy boots approach, and I drop my phone on the floor.

It's a beige floor tiled with specks of gold, black, and silver that Dad buffs once a week. Four long rectangular glass display cases frame the small shop, with two lining the left and right walls. The other two sit in a line in front of a mahogany wall. It doesn't take long for me to try to hide behind the display case.

"You know I can see you through the glass?" the masked robber states with a snicker. "Come on out here, sugar. Don't make me drag you out."

The sound of his gun tapping on the top of the glass display case makes me comply as I rise to my feet. He tips his head to the side to take me in from head to toe with a slight nod. I can only imagine he's licking his lips behind his black-knitted ski mask, sending tremors of fear down my spine.

At just shy of six feet, the guy's stance tells me he's not prepared for me to put up a fight. 160 pounds, black shirt, black pants, black gloves—nothing to identify him but dark brown eyes and a sinister voice.

"Please don't hurt me," I beg in the most submissive tone I can muster. For good measure, I add a shakiness to my voice to reveal a morsel of fear rippling through me. However, adrenaline steadily overrides my fright. Once I catch a glimpse of my father's unconscious body bleeding on the floor, adrenaline and rage eclipse every other emotion.

"What did you do to him?" I screech and attempt to rush by the burglar.

A thick arm wraps around my waist to pull me back, stopping me from checking on Dad. "Oh no, you don't. Stay put until we're done. We'll be out of here in a second."

I immediately jerk my head backward, connecting with the center of his face. My elbow follows up with a blow just under his ribs as I break free of his grasp. He pulls his mask off, the blood dripping from his nose.

"BITCH!" He spits on the floor and charges me. The way his shoulder connects with my torso knocks every ounce of air out of me. My feet stumble over each other as he drives me backward until I'm slammed against a display case that rocks as I slide onto the floor.

I refuse to stay down, using every bit of strength in my powerful legs to kick violently. Every kick is frantic, mixing with panic and anger. The sound of a gun cocking behind me stops me immediately, leaving me panting on the floor.

"Stop now, and you won't get hurt. We'll be done soon." The gunman's restraint puts me at ease, but the one with a bloody nose is less than compassionate.

Stringy, sweaty, light brown strands of hair stop around his chin, clinging to a scruffy beard and mustache that's clearly struggling to connect to his sideburns. Brown eyes shoot daggers at me from above his fingers, which are pinching his nose closed to stop the blood from dripping profusely.

"Fuck that," he snarls, dropping his hand long enough for me to get a good look at his face. However, the moment isn't long enough for me to react to him. He grabs me by my shirt and slams me onto the ground. The force of my head smacking against the floor is enough to send shockwaves across my skull. Everything around me fades to black.

The dull sound of machines beeping creeps into my mind, pulling me out of a deep slumber. There's nothing to remember. No dreams. No memories. Only the black.

When a stern voice speaks over me, it's a blast from my past. Feelings of safety and

lust wash over me as I force my eyes open to see a man so different from the person I used to date.

Standing beside my bed, Victor Bennett has my emotions all over the place. Dark brown hair sweeps to the back of his head, barely reaching the top of his ears. A square jaw without prickly hair in sight shows some of the weight he's put on. The bulge of the muscles under his shirt brings a smile across my face.

There's an ache traveling down the side of my ribs, causing me to moan and stir, which gets Victor's attention.

"Holy shit, Chelsea. What the fuck did you do?" he asks, hooking a finger under my chin to survey the damage that landed me here in the first place. Pale blue eyes stare into mine. They hold so much compassion that I've lost, and always convince me to be a better version of myself. And when circumstances didn't allow me to be better, those same blue eyes saw the path I needed to take.

"What's the matter, Victor? Don't you think I'm the most beautiful girl in the world anymore?" I shift to sit up. A shard of pain causes me to inhale sharply, but I blow out a breath as if it will ease the pressure.

He offers me a timid smile with a slight stroke to the side of my face. "You're always the most beautiful woman, Chelsea."

I wince in pain as I lean into his touch. "Shit. It feels like I've been kicked by a horse."

"That's what happens when you botch a robbery. You get kicked and left holding the bag." His words are short as whatever sparked between us seconds ago fades, and he shifts into police officer mode.

That grabs my attention just enough to realize that my ankle is cuffed to the rail of the hospital bed. Machines beep endlessly around the off-white room, with a nurse standing by the door with her arms folded across a clipboard. Her eyes focus on Victor, but there's something hard in her gaze.

"I don't know what you're talking about, Victor. What the fuck is this? Why am I cuffed? Where's Dad?" I fire off one question after another while trying to kick the cuff off my ankle.

"Nigel Emerson is unconscious in a fucking coma. He's stable but in Intensive Care two floors up."

"Why does it sound like you think I have something to do with this? Do you actually think I'd get me and my father mixed up in a robbery of my father's own jewelry shop? That's stupid, even for you, Victor."

He shrugs. "Evidence puts you at the scene with the merchandise."

"Of course I was at the scene. Isn't that where you found me?" I roll my eyes, jerking my ankle to see how secure the handcuff is to my ankle. I'm sure I can pick the lock in a few minutes if an officer of the law wasn't standing beside me. "Victor, am I under arrest or not?"

"I just want to ask you a few questions and don't want you walking away, you know? Like the last time we spoke."

"Fuck you."

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VICTOR

Chelsea Emerson is even more beautiful than the last day I saw her. Memories of my fingers sliding through her soft red hair come back to me like a freight train. Her gorgeous hazel eyes have a way of melting the icy wall I've built around my heart to keep people like her out. Still, I have a job to do.

Even in a hospital gown, she makes my heart beat faster. She's not too beat up, but I know Chelsea's always been able to handle herself. It's one of the things I like most about her. She never goes down without a fight.

"Still tough as nails, Chelsea. You got hit pretty good tonight. Why don't you tell me what happened? Who were your partners on this?" I ask her. I don't want to think about her falling into our old habits. Given the way police officers found her at the scene, I want to get my hands on the bastards who robbed the place but not to put them in handcuffs.

Chelsea flips her hair to the side. "Why do you think I have anything to do with this? My fucking father is in a coma, Victor."

"I actually don't think you do, but I had to see it in your eyes when I pinned it to you."

"Fuck you, Victor." Chelsea chuckles as she glances at me, a glimmer of desire.

"I'd love to if you're up to it. I can't say I haven't missed ... us." My admission draws

a timid but fleeting smile from her.

She jiggles her ankle against the handcuff, securing her to the hospital bed rail. "I'd agree with you, Victor, but this isn't much of a welcome home. I mean, the handcuffs are familiar to us, but it's been a while since we've been familiar."

Three years is a long time, but not long enough to remember how my body reacts to her every time she's near. A breath pushes through my nostrils as I take a step toward the edge of her bed to unlock her. The pain splinters across her face as she reaches down to rub her ankle.

I can't stop my hand from covering hers to rub where redness blooms around her ankle. The way she moans under my touch melts that wall ice slightly until she stops my hand. My eyes reach up to meet hers as she draws the other leg up toward her chest. The way she rests her chin on her knee, letting her waves of hair cascade to the side, draws me in.

"Chelsea, I did it for your own protection in case one of those goons decided to come check on you to see if you were cooperating."

"I'll cooperate, Vic. I will always help you if I can. When I became a security consultant, your family helped me. I'm going to help you get these guys, but I need a favor." Her voice is soft, even though I know her intentions are lethal.

There's a reason Chelsea and I clicked a few years ago, but life took us in different directions.

"What kind of favor?" I ask.

Chelsea rattles off precisely what she wants. "I want you to get me out of this hospital. Next, leave me in the car while you go into your precinct to grab whatever

footage you siphoned off my father's cameras and anything else that will help me figure out who did this. And then? If I ... I mean, if we like what we see, you can take me to dinner."

"Same old Chelsea, I see. Always trying to tell me what to do and how to do it. Don't you know it's the other way around, love?"

She giggles and reaches up to stroke the side of my face. "There's only one place I let you tell me what to do, Victor. We'll need way more than dinner to take that ride down memory lane."

"If I get you out of here tonight and you tell me who the guys were in the store as soon as you know who they are?—"

"Then we can go to dinner and take it from there. Are you serious about this, Victor? Or do I need to call you Detective Bennett?" She leans away from me as if my job leaves a stench that she can't stand.

"You can call me whatever you like, Chelsea. Are you ready to go?"

"As soon as you give me the discharge papers." She smiles.

I nod and leave the room, looking for the doctor and to make a call to my commanding officer. If there's one thing I know for sure, Chelsea can probably tell me who hit her father's store. And if she doesn't, she's going to lead me to whoever did.

A smile spreads across my face knowing that certain things never change. Especially when I head back to her hospital room to see it empty. She's not going to get far since an ambulance brought her here, but this town is easy enough to navigate.

Even though she has a head start, I still beat her back to Francine's Jewelers. It doesn't take long before I see her get out of a taxi. Long legs clad in denim that hugs Chelsea's slender curves have my eyes watching her every move. She doesn't bother to look up and down the street, as she waltzes through the front door of the shop. I follow her inside, ducking under the yellow crime scene tape.

Chelsea stands in silence, turning slowly and scanning the damage, her eyes watering. Stubbornness and pride stop her from letting a tear fall. I can hear the shudder in her breaths as she wraps herself in her arms.

"What happened?" she whispers.

I shrug and stand beside her. "That's what I want to know from you. I know the smash and grab isn't your thing anymore."

Chelsea whips around to face me. "Don't you mean our thing? And that's the last time you try to pin this shit on me, Victor."

"The alarm was set and then shut off. The lock's not busted. The guys walked right in here, and then a few minutes later, you strolled in."

"If you saw that much, Victor and you found me here..." Her voice breaks. "What more do you think I know that I'm not telling you?"

"I have to be honest, Chelsea. It looks like an inside job, and this place hasn't been called Francine's for very long. Yet, your father still runs it. Wasn't he in debt pretty steep, Chelsea?"

Chelsea closes her eyes and shakes her head. "He was, and I've been busy with work, trying to help him make a dent in what he owes, but there's no work for me in this town. No one wants to hire me because of how I fucking look. I can feel their fucking

disdain. 'How can a chick who looks like that teach me anything about holding a gun?'"

"I love the way you handle a gun." I smile and nudge her shoulder.

I could remind her that people have a long memory in this town. Before I was a cop, we raised hell in the nearby towns like we were Bonnie and Clyde. We were volatile and brazen as we used our mutual grief to bond and justify taking out our sorrow on any business with a cash register. It didn't last long, and we paid the price. That's more likely the reason people in this town don't want to work with her.

The gentle lean of her head against my shoulder pulls me out of my thoughts as she says, "You love anything I handle for you, Vicky."

"It's been a long time since you called me that. Does that mean you're about ready to take that drive down memory lane? Or can we grab something to eat and talk some more?"

"I don't want to eat." She huffs out a breath. "They put my father in a coma, Victor. I want to hit something."

"Come on. Let's get out of here. We can head to the precinct so you can look through the book."

"Lead the way." She sighs, following me out of the shop and into my car.

The ride to the precinct is short and quiet as Chelsea keeps her eyes out the window. It's nearly midnight by the time we get there. It's quiet with the graveyard shift already out on patrols. Every other officer in the place doesn't care one way or another as I lead Chelsea toward a cubicle where a stack of case files sits on the desk.

Chelsea plops into the empty chair across me as I power my computer to show her mugshots. She scrolls through images for a few minutes before shrugging her shoulders and shaking her head. "I'm sorry, Vic. None of these guys look like him. Were you able to grab the security footage from any of the nearby stores? Maybe it caught them leaving."

"I'm waiting for some of the owners to get back to me."

"I'm not paying you OT, Bennett. I told you to go home hours ago. And stop fucking with that robbery, it's not your turn," my sergeant shouts from his office a few feet away.

I tip my head toward the door for Chelsea and me to leave. As soon as we're outside, she eyes me with a questioning glare.

"Was he talking about my case?" she asks.

"Yeah," I admit. "The officer who caught it wasn't moving fast enough for me."

"Aww, you still care about me." Chelsea's smile draws me close to her. She bites her bottom lip, grabs my shirt, and looks up into my eyes. I hate that she's right. When she leans closer, letting her lips brush against mine, my body reacts to her immediately, giving in to undeniable desire.

The kiss is slow, like we're getting familiar with each other all over again. She lets my tongue part her lips to slide in her mouth. Soft meets firm as I close my eyes, remembering every shiver of lust Chelsea ignites inside of me. However, the sound of a car door slamming forces me to end the kiss and pull away from her with a heavy sigh.

Her eyes hold a seductive stare as she says, "I think I'm ready to go down memory

lane, Vic. Let's go to your place."

CHELSEA

Victor's mouth has a way of making me want the life I walked away from nearly five years ago. When we get to his house, it's like we never split. It looks the same, with creaky hardwood floors and scents of leather and coffee buried into the off-white walls. The only noticeable difference is the pictures of us that no longer hang in the hallway.

There's a stab of disappointment that he's not walking by photos of our past, yearning for us to reconnect. Victor locks the door and removes everything that makes him a police officer when he walks out of that door.

Victor heads into the kitchen, pulling glasses out of the cabinet. "Do you want something to drink? It's not the dinner you requested, but all I have right now is bourbon and water."

I chuckle to myself. "Sure, why not? Bourbon is fine by me. We can go out to eat next time."

The devilish smirk spreading across his face tells me exactly what he has in mind. He pours me a glass, hands it to me, and watches me take a sip. When he uses his thumb to catch the smallest trickle on the corner of my mouth, I wrap my lips around his finger. His moans urge me to continue until Victor pulls his hand away to grab me by the neck and pull me in for a kiss.

The passion between us is always powerful and addictive. The end of our relationship devastated me in ways I never thought leaving someone could. I have no intention of living through that kind of hell again. Yet, I have to let this happen so Victor's none the wiser.

Our tongues swirl around one another as I pull my jacket off, letting it drop on the floor. As soon as I manage to unzip my jeans, Victor's free hand dives inside between my legs. My heart pounds incessantly against my chest while he slides his fingers between my moistening folds.

Whimpers of lust and anticipation escape my throat. A gasp at the moment he pushes inside of my walls breaks the kiss between us. I can feel his smile. Victor knows exactly what to do with me, with my body. Every inch of me remembers his touch.

My breaths are short, panting with the oncoming orgasm that Victor's coaxing out of my pussy with delicate strokes of his fingers. Just as I fall over that cliff of pleasure, he kisses me and fingers me faster. I reach up to grab the back of his hair to give him a hint of pain that he enjoys.

Victor sucks in a breath through clenched teeth. It's as though he hates that I remember what he likes.

"Fuck. I've missed this." He leans his forehead against mine.

I don't want to talk. I don't want to stroll down the sentimental moments of our past. I just want to feel good after a shitty night. Instead of saying anything, I yank his hair, tipping his head back so I can suckle on his neck.

Victor moans, but he refuses to give up control. He snatches his head away from me with a cocky grin. In one swift move, Victor's strong hands grab me by the waist to hoist me onto the counter.

My fingers grip the edge as he slides my jeans off and spreads my legs. The firm tip of his tongue softens as he licks my clit. His mouth works in circles, kissing, suckling, and tasting my center. My core tightens as the pressure builds to another orgasm.

Pleasure ripples down my body with every swipe of Victor's tongue. The unstoppable sensations have my hips thrusting into his face, begging for relief. The release is so close my eyes widen, and my thighs clench against Victor's head. He snickers and grips them, pushing them apart until my climax explodes.

My voice fills the silent kitchen as I pant, moan, and tremble under the unrelenting sexual satisfaction. Victor takes pride in his masterful control of my body's reactions as he holds me in place to lure out one orgasm after the next.

Victor pulls his mouth away from my pussy, tenderly kissing my inner thigh. Seduction blankets his eyes as I pull him up for a kiss. Frantic tension to sate our desires increases with every swipe of our tongues. My hand feverishly pushes into his jeans to wrap around his thick cock that I can't believe I have to walk away from once again.

However, the sound of Victor's phone blaring brings our passion to a crashing halt.

"Don't answer that," I tell him.

Victor sighs, resting his forehead against mine. "I have to. It's one in the morning, and it's probably about one of my cases."

A low growl of frustration escapes him as he steps away to answer his phone. I hop off the counter and get dressed because the mood is sour. Work is one thing Victor will always put first and a stark reminder of why our relationship ended.

Victor's unaware of how loud he's speaking. He's even less aware that I can hear the person on the other end, but I hang back in the kitchen until he ends the call.

"I have to head back to work. One of the business owners got back to me with their security footage. I'm not going to strain my eyes trying to pull it up on my phone, and I don't want to wait. I'm sorry to start and not finish." The subtle seduction lingers behind his coy grin like a promise to pick up where we left off.

"Don't apologize to me. You're just doing your job." I stroke the side of his face.

He nods and looks up the stairs. "I'm going to hop in the shower before I head in. I can drop you off wherever you want when I get out. I'd take you with me, but it's late. I don't want you to come all the way to the precinct, and the footage ends up being useless."

"You can take me to my father's house. I'll wait for you," I tell him.

Victor hops the steps two at a time and makes the dumbest mistake of leaving his phone on the kitchen counter. It takes me a few seconds to type in the passcode he hasn't changed since we dated. The video from one of the business owners near the jewelry shop is sitting in an email that's still open. Once I send the video to myself, I wait for the sounds of the shower running to reach me downstairs. The bathroom door closes, muffling my steps as I leave his house.

By the time I get to my dad's place, a sense of sorrow washes over me, the silence greeting me when I walk in. He's not coming back here anytime soon, and that infuriates me.

The person I used to be—uncontrollable, angry, and violent—that's the woman Victor fell in love with, and she's also the woman who had to leave this town.

The bond between Victor and me was insatiable and is still undeniable. We used to feed off one another. It pushed us to extremes, which came to a catastrophic end three years ago. I understand why he would try to place me at the scene of the crime, but I haven't been that version of myself in a very long time.

Yet, as I sit in the darkness of Dad's living room, replaying the video sent to Victor, I know what I have to do. After freezing the screen, I'm able to get a clear view of the men leaving my father's jewelry shop. They're going to learn very soon why attacking me and my father is the biggest mistake of their lives.

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VICTOR

Does it surprise me that Chelsea's gone when I get out of the shower?

Not at all.

Shit, I'm more shocked that she didn't take my gun and phone. I can tell she's not that same person anymore, but I have no doubt that her father being in a coma tempts her to go back to her old ways.

There's no sense dwelling in the past or trying to figure out what she's going to do about it. Burying myself in work will have us crossing paths soon enough. Hopefully, it will be before she does anything that will land her in handcuffs, which I won't have the authority to remove.

Once I'm back at the precinct, my sergeant snarls and rolls his eyes at me when I walk by. Aggravation coats every word as he speaks from behind his desk. "I thought I told you to go home, Bennett."

"I did go home, but I got a call about this robbery. You might as well let me work it, Sarge. People in that neighborhood know me and are willing to cooperate with me. I already got a tip. One of the business owners sent me footage from their security camera. It shows the suspects leaving the scene of the crime. I might get an ID off it, too."

He rubs the bridge of his nose and relents. "Fine, but you close this case fast. Who was the girl?"

"Victim. She got knocked out while the robbery took place but managed to do some damage to one of the perps. I saw some blood on the floor at the scene that didn't come from her or the shop owner. Forensics has it, but I think I can bring these guys in before the trace comes back."

"Fine," he says and dismisses me back to my duties.

After I get a still image of the robber's face with a busted nose, I know he'll be easy to find if he's still in town. I'll have to get on the street to get to my sources. Someone's going to point me in the right direction, but that has to wait until the sun comes up.

Spending the rest of my night at my desk doesn't bother me, but my mind drifts to Chelsea. She told me I'd always put the job first because this was my chance to make up for the chaos we caused.

We justified wreaking havoc on this town after our mothers were gunned down in a botched robbery. We were barely fifteen when it happened, but the older we got, the angrier we became. Our mutual grief sparked rage and sent us down a path of revenge.

For at least five years of our lives, we targeted every business that was linked to the assholes who murdered a bunch of innocent people in a store on a random afternoon. We were calculating, sloppy at first, but smartened to the streets quickly.

We were twenty-two years old when the police finally caught up to us. My father pulled some strings to make it go away, to make us go away. I made him a promise to never be a part of the problem terrorizing our town, and I've been a man of my word ever since.

Chelsea, on the other hand, couldn't stand the idea of upholding the law that failed us. Her anger never subsides. It's always there, just under the surface. The last time I saw it unleashed, it was a bloody mess. We caught up to the men who murdered our mothers. Sure, it took us six years, but we found them. They never made it to trial.

I barely feel my eyes close as my mind reminisces on the past. Dreams find me at my desk and stay with me until someone nudges me awake hours later. The sun is up, and it's time to work my case. My first stop is to the hospital to check on Chelsea's father.

Fortunately, Nigel Emerson is awake, but it's uncertain for how long.

"Good morning, Mr. Emerson. How are you feeling?" I ask him while slowly approaching his bedside.

Nigel stirs in discomfort, a bandage around his head and a cast on his arm. "What kind of ridiculous question is that, Victor? My head was kicked in, still throbbing to the point I can barely see out of my left eye. What kind of jeweler will I be with one eye?"

"Still the best in the tri-state area, Mr. Emerson. There's a reason you're still in business after all this time. Which brings me to last night's events."

He grunts and turns away from me. "I can't believe that you were assigned this case. Or did you have your father call in more favors?"

"Jealousy over what other men can do for your daughter is pointless. Especially when everything done was for her own good."

Anger has him clutching the rails of his bed until they vibrate with his fury. "Her own good? You take her on a fucking killing spree and then?—"

"I didn't take her anywhere she didn't want to go. But I'm not here to rehash our history, old man. Is there anything you can tell me about the robbers or why they targeted your store?"

He shrugs. "How am I supposed to know? I got hit in the back of the head while I was closing up, waiting for Chelsea. Oh shit, where is she?"

"Chelsea's okay, Mr. Emerson. She walked in on it, but the robbers managed to knock her out before she could do too much damage to them. She left the hospital last night. Why don't you tell me about changing the name of the shop?" I ask him.

"I've been fighting off debt collectors and finally settled a few. I wanted a fresh start." He sighs and avoids my gaze as if he's afraid someone is listening to our conversation. "Francine is a family name."

Whose family name? I wonder.

A nurse interrupts us. "I need to take Mr. Emerson down for a CT scan. Can we finish this later, Detective?"

I nod and move out of the way for the doctor and nurse to work on Chelsea's father. He glares at me as if I'm still the teenage boy desperate for his daughter's attention. I'm not desperate, and I don't have to beg for her attention. Chelsea is mine, and I am hers whenever we choose because we've done things together that not even my brothers on the force will understand.

It's because of this I'm going to look the other way for what's coming. But, I can't do that if Chelsea blatantly breaks the law. I'll have to put down my badge for her if it comes to that. Hopefully, she's more careful than we were in our younger days.

The hospital is quieter than the ideas racing through my mind. The quiet doesn't last

long as I head outside, where an ambulance screeches to a halt at the curb.

A squad car pulls up behind it, with two homicide detectives scrambling out of it. The body coming out of the ambulance has EMS workers doing everything they can to revive the patient. It's a bloody mess.

I grab one of the detectives as the EMS workers rush the patient inside. "What's going on there? Who is that?"

The detective stares at the victim, disappearing deeper into the hospital as he speaks. "That would be Craig Kushner, local smash and grab, and a rap sheet longer than a giraffe's cock."

"Jesus. What the hell happened?" I ask with a laugh.

He pulls out a cigarette. "The call came in about an hour ago. Someone found him with a diamond carved into his chest. He was clutching a velvet satchel with one diamond inside it by the time we got to him."

"I had a robbery and assault last night at a jewelry store. It happened at Francine's on Main Street. Did you see anything that might link this guy to that robbery?"

He nods. "It's all going back with forensics, but the satchel had the letters F and J on it."

"Was there anything else at the scene?"

"Besides flaps of this guy's skin?" The detective scoffs. "Someone took their time with him. They left him alive long enough to be found. I doubt he'll make it. There was some cash, but it's not like your jewelry store owner marks their bills, right?"

"I doubt it. If you give me your case number, I'll give you mine. We can look at the forensics and see if the cases are linked. Whoever he did the job with probably stabbed him in the back while splitting the bounty."

The detective chuckles to himself. "Stabbed in the back, the front, and down the sides. Whoever did this was pissed at him, but that list is long. He typically runs with a few guys out of Newark. The last guy we know of is Derek Hammond. He also goes by Hammer. I'll send his sheet to you. You can run down their other known acquaintances. But if you get a hit on someone who did this?—"

I understand what he's saying perfectly as I tell him, "Homicide trumps robbery. Run me the guy's prints so I can check it against my case. Anyone who comes back that looks good for this, I'll send him your way."

"Will do." The detective blows out a puff of smoke before flicking the cigarette away. He heads inside, where his partner looks dismal, shaking his head. It tells me everything I need to know. One of my suspects is dead, and I'm sure the other is on the chopping block. I have to get to their suspect before they do.

Cars move aside with a whirl of my siren as I speed down the street. There's only one destination I have in mind. I don't want to think the worst of her, but Chelsea is ruthless with a knife. She uses a blade like it's a piece of her hand.

When I pull up to the Emerson house, it still looks the same as the last time I was here. Its lawn is always cut to precision. The slate stone path leads to a dark blue home with white trim. I don't bother knocking on the front door. Instead, I walk around the back of the house to see what I already know is true.

The shed in the back of the house holds a workshop her father likes to use. An assortment of tools for metalwork and carving rare gemstones are inside. There's a padlock across the doors that I lift and let fall. An echo of the metal lock clanging

against the latch rings out louder than I anticipated. It's like an alarm to anyone inside the house.

"You need a warrant to get inside there, Detective," Chelsea says as she walks up behind me.

"Where have you been, Chelsea?" I ask her.

My eyes move over her entire body for a different reason than etching every sensuous curve into my memory.

"I've been gathering information to help you solve your case." The wicked grin on her face confirms what I know she's capable of.

"Does that include skinning someone alive? Carving them up like a Thanksgiving turkey?"

"That sounds like a messy job, Victor. Look at me." Her voice commands me to stare her in the eyes to see the truth. She holds her hands out, turning them one way and then another. "Do you want to dust me for prints?"

"Open the shed, Chelsea."

5

CHELSEA

The work shed is empty.

There's a touch of joy I get in seeing the look of disappointment on Victor's face. It's hard to hold back a giggle as I tell him, "What did you expect to see? Pools of blood and all my favorite knives coated with DNA evidence? I'm going to pretend that you know me better than that."

Victor spins, grabbing me by the throat and slamming me against the wall. My smile is wider than it should be under the circumstances, but this is comfort between us. It's too familiar, too easy for us to fall right back into the way we used to be.

The sound of my pulse thumps inside my ears as the anger in his voice comes out as a low snarl. "What did you do?"

"What I'm good at," I reply with defiant confidence. I move out of his grasp easily because we both know he's not here to hurt me. "I told you I'd help you the best way I can."

"Chopping my suspect into little pieces isn't helping," he argues and steps away from me.

"I have something else that will help you," I tell him with a wink.

Victor follows me from the shed into the house, up the stairs, and into the bedroom that used to be mine. The walls are a soft shade of yellow with a bed that hasn't been slept in. The way he paces impatiently around the room shows his frustration. When I touch his arm gently to stop him, Victor glares at me as if I'm a monster.

"What upsets you more, Vicky? That I carved him up like a Christmas ham or that you weren't there to do it first?" I ask him. "Were you on the scene when I was found?"

"I came after the call came in. My shift was ending, but?—"

I cut him off. "But you know where the call came from, and you came to see if my father was hurt. You didn't know I was there until you showed up. What was the first thought that crossed your mind?"

Victor balls his fists. I can feel the anger surging through him. "That I'd kill whoever did this to you. So yes, I'm mad you got to them first."

"And that shit with the handcuffs at the hospital? That didn't feel like you wanted to do something about the assholes who did this."

"A joke between lovers," he says with a smirk. "A reminder."

"A reminder of what?"

"Of this." Victor pulls me close, quickly capturing my lips with a kiss. His tongue invades my mouth like he's conquered it a thousand times before.

Lust erupts as we tear away at each other's clothes. The instant my tits are free, Victor's mouth slips from mine, moving down my neck to my nipple. His tongue latches on, caressing my breasts with his lips. One hand holds my lower back while

the other grips me between the legs, pulling a gasp out of me.

Victor leans away, the corner of his mouth turning up. A brief and tender kiss keeps this aura of burgeoning bliss around us. My fingers reach up to run through his hair, raking my nails across his scalp before pushing him down to his knees.

My right hand yanks his head to the side to hike my left leg over his shoulder. His eyes stare at my pussy for a moment. The prickly hairs of the beard tickle my inner thigh as he captures my sex with as much passion as he kisses my mouth.

The low growl in his throat vibrates against my skin, his hands wrapping under my thighs to pull me closer. Warm breaths flow over my clit with every pass of his tongue between my slits. Soft, firm, exacting as he writes his name against my pussy.

I whimper under the pressure of my orgasm, releasing itself down Victor's chin. He moves swiftly to his feet, which knocks me backward onto the bed. My leg slips from off his shoulder and gives him enough space to wedge between my thighs.

The tip of his hard cock rubs at my slick entrance. Pressure, pain, and pleasure ignite, lighting up every nerve in my body around the thickness of his cock pushing inside of me. Fuck.

My back arches for Victor to stroke me deeper. Every thrust inside of my pussy makes me wetter. The ripples of his muscular chest and abs flex and contract as we move together. Our eyes lock as he finds his rhythm. It's only right that I remind him what happens every time we rehash our passion.

"What are you waiting for, Chelsea? Do it," Victor commands me with a powerful thrust.

I shove his chest back, but he barely moves. The sound of his dark, seductive chuckle

sends tremors down my spine. However, the force of my hand coming across his face sends an echo around the room that widens his eyes. As soon as I move to hit him again, Victor snatches my hand before it strikes and pins my wrist down beside my head. My body bucks to fight back, to provoke him into doing what I want.

It doesn't take much prodding before Victor's hand is around my throat, squeezing tighter and tighter while he slides his hardness in and out of me. Each push and pull of his cock inside my walls beckons my orgasm. Each and every thrust reminds me of why I miss him every time I leave, and also a reminder of why I can never stay.

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6

VICTOR

F rail.

It's not a word I like to think of when I'm burying my cock deep inside of Chelsea. Her walls welcome me, juices dripping down my cock, and sending spears of pleasure racing through my body. Everything falls away around us as her velvet heat tries to finish me before I'm ready. The frailty of her neck under my grasp heightens the pleasure between us.

Chelsea's porcelain skin reddens as ecstasy washes over her features. Her eyes lock onto mine as her only free hand grips mine at the wrist, trying to maneuver my hold on her throat. I give her what she wants and yank my hand away. I pull my cock out of her, grab her by the hair, and shift beside her face.

The delight in the pain is obvious when Chelsea practically inhales me to the hilt. She closes her lips tightly around my shaft, sucking and curving her tongue along the bottom. It's the perfect fit for me, drawing moans out of my throat that make me dread the day she leaves town again.

We get lost in the way she drags her mouth back and forth, warm, wet, and full of vigor that builds the angst between us. My body shakes as my come threatens to spill down her throat, but I won't let it.

The bed creaks under us as I toss Chelsea onto her back. My movements are swift

around the edge of the bed. I need to be on my feet. She squeals and laughs when I drag her by the ankles to the edge with me. I dip down to retrieve my handcuffs and secure her ankle to the spindle under the mattress.

"Is this how you plan to stop me, Vicky?" Chelsea questions with an air of disbelief. "Keep me chained to a bed and fuck me senseless?"

I chuckle as I pull her warm sheath over my throbbing erection. Her pussy squeezes me as I thrust into her with force. She reaches up, grabbing my hair at the nape of my neck and pulling it until she snatches my head back. Still, I fuck her. I pound into Chelsea with ferocity, power, and possession. Her screams of pleasure grow as I remind her that her sweet pussy belongs to me.

"Tell me," I command her, halting my thrusts to stall her climax.

"Now's not the time, Victor," she snarls, releasing my hair long enough to grab me by the waist.

She tries to force me to keep going, but I hold still. She bucks that soft wet pussy against my cock, but I hold still. Chelsea pushes herself so deep onto me it feels like I've impaled her, but I hold still. When she cups my balls to massage them in a way to steal my climax from me, I smile because she can't bring my body to bend to her the way I control the pleasure rippling through hers.

"Tell me," I command with another powerful thrust that draws a moan from her lips.

"I fucking killed him, and I'll kill everyone else who put me and my father in the hospital. What are you going to do with me, Detective Bennett?"

"I'm going to come inside your sweet pussy, and then I'm going to help you finish what you started to keep this tight little ass out of prison."

Chelsea's laughter is slightly maniacal as she reaches for me. With one arm around my neck, I secure her leg around my waist. She's like a fucking gymnast, flexible and hoisting herself into a standing split. One ankle cuffed to the bed and the other sticks straight up between our bodies like a ballet dancer.

She knows how to fuck me. As much as I like to believe my climax can only be controlled by me, Chelsea's pussy is like a siren calling me to shore. Our eyes lock as she lets me pull her pussy on and off me, slick with her desire, until she drops her leg. I fall on top as she falls onto her bed. My cock releases every drop of my pent-up sexual prowess as our mouths collide.

I'll never lose her. We've been through too much together for me to let her face what she has in mind alone.

Silence and the scent of our sex drench us in relief. It feels like I've run a marathon the way my chest tightens. Adrenaline mixing with lustful anticipation has my pulse racing, but the feel of Chelsea in my arms in a bed lowers a calmness over me.

"How did you find him?" I ask her after uncuffing her ankle.

Chelsea nuzzles into my side as if she never left it. "I recognized Kush from the video sent to your phone. He never took his mask off at Francine's but I know where to find the likes of him in this town. There's only a few criminals wealthy enough and stupid enough to set this shit up."

"I spoke to your father this morning. He said that he settled some debts and wanted to start over with a new name. He said Francine is a family name."

She scoffs. "Whose family?"

"That's what I was about to ask him when we were interrupted at the hospital. Who

else does your father owe money to? I'm sure that Francine's a name from their family."

A yawn and stretch have Chelsea slipping away from me, but I hold her close. She giggles slightly. "Fuck their family. They're going to regret the day they decided to fuck with mine."

"And the other guy? Whose blood did you leave at the scene of the crime? I'm sure you know who he is. Tell me."

She smiles. "You want me to confess all of my crimes, past and future?"

"Only the ones I don't know about."

A heavy sigh pushes her pouty lips forward as she blows the deep exhale out. "I hate pulling you back into this shit."

Her red silk strands slip through my fingers easily as I tease and play with a lock of her hair. "You can't make me do anything I don't want to do, Chelsea. Just like I can't force you to do anything."

"You mean like being a firearms and safety instructor?"

A chuckle escapes my throat. "Can you think of a better way to hide what you actually do for a living?"

"Some safety instructor I turned out to be. I managed to get myself knocked out."

He chuckles. "That only happened because your father was unconscious. You still have sentimental ties to this place."

Chelsea hates it whenever I point out her flaws and her emotions. She expertly throws a leg over my lap and hoists herself up to straddle me. The faint scraping of a metal blade being taken out of its hiding place under the mattress brings a smile to my face as she holds one of her favorite knives to my throat.

"You just love rubbing that shit in, don't you? Every time I fucking see you, it's a pissing contest between who's the most distraught orphan. The girl with no mother and a father who can't stand her? Or the boy with no mother and a father who betrayed him?"

The sound of the man's name and the truth of his actions have always been hard for me to digest. "He helped us. We would have been buried in some prison hell hole after the number of people we killed."

"Help," she chortles and turns away from me. She pushes herself off me and off the bed to get dressed. "He made us choose between two impossible choices, both meant to keep us caged and docile. People like us shouldn't be shackled to anyone, anything, or any fucking entity. We didn't do everything that we did for the fuck of it. We weren't crazy or psychotic. Everyone played a part in destroying the world as we knew it, and everyone paid for their roles with their lives."

"And now?" I ask, tired and unwilling to fight because I know what's going to happen. I'm going to do what I've always done when it comes to Chelsea Emerson. My sweet and lethal Chelsea. I'll help her bury the bodies and keep local police off her back.

"We kill the asshole working with Kush and find out who pulled their fucking strings."

That gets a laugh out of me. "Don't you think we should do that the other way around?"

She smirks. "Asshole."

"You've only let me do that once and said never again."

"Fuck you," she says with a smile.

"Oh, don't make it easy for me, Chelsea."

She moves around back in front of me and grabs my crotch. "I always love making it hard."

My hand reaches around the back of her head, pulling her in for a passionate kiss. My tongue slides around her mouth before I yank her back.

My voice is low when I tell her, "You make everything in my life hard. The hardest is having to let you go every time you leave. Stay this time, Chelsea. Don't leave. Don't use some made-up bi-annual fucking tradition of having dinner with your father as a reason to come back to this shit town. Stay with me."

"I'll stay, Victor. Not with you, but for you, for us. You know what we have to do."

7

CHELSEA

Victor follows me outside into the early afternoon.

"You can't wear your badge while we do this," I tell him.

"Are you really about to tell me how to do what we do?" He tips his head to the side.

"I figured with all that fucking we did for you to remind me?—"

"No. I handcuffed you to the bed in the hospital as a reminder that I'm with you and like it when you stay in place. Everything we just did was a reminder to myself of why I put my job on the line whenever you come into town."

"Fuck your job. Let's go, Detective Bennett."

As soon as I turn to walk away, he grabs me by the arm and stops me in my tracks. The assertive tone he uses is a warning. "You leave that title with my badge. Where are we going first?"

"How's my father?"

"Awake, last I saw. I didn't hang around much. Why?"

"To determine how far I need to take this. If he were still in a coma or dead, this list

would take us a lot longer to get through."

He nods at my reasoning. "So what's your plan?"

"When I spoke to Kush last night, they still hadn't split the take from the robbery. He was supposed to meet up with the guy, Hammer, today. They planned to go to their fence, some pawn shop in the next county. They agreed to split the money after."

Victor shakes his head briefly. "Did you get that information during or after your carving session?"

"During, of course. Is it going to be too complicated of a cleanup?"

"He's the suspect in a few active cases but only the victim in one. Did you have to leave him such a mess?"

"I wasn't sure how many people I needed to talk to. I thought that making the first body look like a ritual killing would help me look like the least likely suspect."

Victor slowly moves his head up and down with understanding. The conversation falls quiet for the most part as we drive out of town to the next county over. Under the circumstances, I shouldn't tell Victor anything about the body, but if he's going to help me cover it up like he always does, honesty is best.

It takes us about an hour to reach our destination. A rowdy bar on the edge of town with live music playing while over a dozen people drink beers out front. The chatter is loud and the place is slightly crowded. Music and a yellow cast of light come out of the back doors onto an outdoor deck.

"Are you going to lead him out the front or out of the back?" Victor asks as we head into the fray.

"The back," I tell him. "Once he's near the railing, I can toss him over to you. Right side and as close to the building as possible."

"Got it." Victor walks away to get himself ready.

In the meantime, I scan the faces of the crowd. I need to be careful that this guy doesn't see me before I see him. It's smart for them to agree on such a public place, lively and so much going on that no one would think about two guys having a couple of drinks. No one would spare a glance at two men deciding what to do with the jewels and cash they stole from my father and my family. It's time for me to do what I'm dangerously good at, but I'm going to need a little bit of help.

The kind of person I need right now isn't hard to find in a place like this. Somewhere between too stupid to remember and just drunk enough to forget. The bubbly giggles of someone trying too hard to seem friendly draw me toward her. Blonde, young, and a smile bright enough to shine in the crowd.

As soon as she sees me, I know her type, the misery on my face is like a beacon calling outgoing women like her to make me as happy as they are. The live band covers a few hit records to get the crowd dancing. Thankfully, it only takes one dance with the overeager woman to snag her attention.

"Hey, hun, why the long face?" the blonde asks as she gyrates around me, bumping me playfully with her hips and twirling around me with a drink in her hand.

I nudge my chin at the robber sitting by himself at the bar. "I've been trying to get his attention. I just need to serve him with divorce papers for my sister. Miserable little asshole got that nose after slapping her around. She hit him with a pan and ran out. She wanted to get out and finally gave me the papers to serve him. I just want to hand it to him like a napkin under a drink. Can you help me?"

"Of course, honey. Us gals gotta stick together, right? What do you need me to do?" she asks, eager to assist me.

After buying a round of drinks for my little helper's group, she convinces the robber to meet her outside for a fuck on the deck and sends him my way with a wink. I tip my head and wait outside as he approaches. The look in those dark brown eyes, when I step out of the shadows, has the asshole speechless.

My moves are swift as I spin him quickly to push his back against the railing. I dip low, threading my arm behind his legs to send him over the edge with a single flip. After sparing a glance, I see Victor already has him silenced and drags him away from the bar into the shadows of the parking lot beside it.

People continue to dance and sway as I weave in and around them. No one's paying attention to me as I leave. The girl will barely remember my face, but she will remember what I told her to do. She will remember the story I told her that convinced her to send a random guy at a bar with a broken nose outside.

The drive is silent, aside from random banging inside the trunk of Victor's car. With his hand gripping the gearshift, mine sits on top of his as the music plays to drown out the screams of despair accompanying the random bangs inside the trunk. It puts a quirky grin on both our faces.

My father's house sits in the dark like a black hole in the line of homes on the street. We keep it that way as Victor cuts the lights to his car and pulls into the driveway. As soon as he opens the trunk, Hammer tries to jump out. However, he doesn't get very far.

Victor's bullets are muffled and don't ring out. The only thing that breaks the silence is Hammer's cries of pain. We quiet him down and move him to the shed.

VICTOR

Twelve feet wide and nearly twenty feet long, the Emerson shed is a decent size for a jeweler's workshop. But it's empty. There's not a bench, or anything else inside that even hints at a craftsman tirelessly creating pieces of art. Well, the plastic tarp hints at a different sort of craft entirely.

Hammer's not too big of a guy, especially as he lies on top of the tarp. Chelsea straddles his unconscious body, bleeding from the holes I put in his leg.

"I need my bullets out of him," I tell her.

Chelsea nods as she pulls out needles and vials from a small satchel, which she rolls out beside her. After strategic injections all over his body, Hammer's eyes open, pain riding his face. The warring emotions washing over him aren't surprising. His expressions change from pain to rage to defeat once he realizes he can't move.

"What do you want?" Hammer pleads.

"I want to know why you decided that in a small town like Mapleton, New fucking Jersey, you decided to rob a jewelry store. This isn't the kind of town where that happens simply because it's a Thursday night. It happens because someone specifically chose my father's store. Who was it?"

Chelsea doesn't wait for him to answer before she pulls out a knife with a smile on

her face. The marble handle molds perfectly to her hand as if it's a piece of her palm. She cuts through our captive's jeans, using the bullet hole to tear it open further.

"Why can't I move?" Hammer asks. His voice barely squeaks above a whisper. Tears well in his eyes, and panic blankets his face.

"That's right. You missed the part where she stuck you with all her fancy needles. We needed you to be docile. Now, answer her question." I tell him and nod at Chelsea.

She begins to dig into the area I shot on his leg. It sounds as if Hammer's throat is closing around his screams and shrieks of pain. Chelsea takes her time slicing through his flesh to carve my bullet out of him. The pain causes Hammer to dry heave and flop his body onto its side, Chelsea moving out of the way.

Hammer's entire body trembles as he finally chokes out the answer. "Nigel."

Chelsea balks at the name. "You're a liar."

"Why would I lie?" Hammer trembles, pain etching into his face, knitting his eyebrows together, and desperately trying to catch his breath.

Chelsea doesn't care as she begins digging around the second bullet hole in Hammer's leg. He screeches in pain from behind his clenched jaw until he passes out.

"Let's get this over with." I pull out my gun, but Chelsea raises a hand to stop me.

"Victor," she pauses. "As much as I love what I do, I'm not digging your bullets out of this guy's head."

"At this range, it'll go straight through. Besides, no one's going to find his head to retrieve trace evidence now, are they?"

Chelsea's soft laughter sounds deeper in the shed. "So you had me fishing bullets out of his leg for the fuck of it?"

"No, it gave you something to focus on instead of killing him before we got the answer to your question. What do you want to do about your father?" I ask her.

"After we get rid of Hammer here, we're going to pay my father a visit."

Chelsea runs her knife across our captor's throat. We clean up the mess and leave the Emerson home together. I'm not sure what Chelsea's going to do, but I decide it's better to tag along with her after we get rid of Hammer's body.

When we end up at the hospital, it doesn't surprise me. The only shock that comes to either of us is when we reach Nigel Emerson's hospital room. He's not alone, and whoever's inside with him is pissed.

I press my palm against her stomach to hold her back. For once, she listens. We turn our attention to the conversation behind a curtain separating Nigel's side of the room from us.

A panicked voice is pleading with Chelsea's father. "You have to file the claim, Nigel. Give me the cash and keep the insurance money. I need to get out of here before that lunatic comes after me."

"This was your idea, Simon. It backfired. You're not getting shit out of me. Get out," Nigel tells his visitor. The shock on both of their faces is laughable. Especially when Chelsea closes and locks the door behind us.

"Talk now," Chelsea snarls at her father and his guest while pulling out a knife.

Nigel snickers and leans back into his hospital bed, which has a few wires leading to

an assortment of machines. A weary hand looks ready to press a button on the remote. Instead, Nigel grabs the bed railing and shifts his body to get comfortable.

The guest is slightly older than Nigel. Well, he looks older with white and gray hair slicked back and an array of age spots covering his worn-out face. Wrinkles dance around his eyes as he puts his hands up in surrender.

"I don't have anything to say." The man's words stutter and fumble over one another.

I pull out my badge, wiggle it in front of Nigel's visitor, and encourage him. "Nothing can happen to you in this hospital room with an officer here. Chelsea just wants an answer to her question."

Chelsea takes a step closer. "Tell me who you are and what happened. I promise you'll walk out of here alive."

The visitor trembles and speaks. "I'm Simon, a partner for Francine's."

Chelsea scoffs. "Keep talking."

"Nigel owes me money. I've paid for..." Simon struggles to find the words and starts again. "I'm sorry that you were caught in the middle of this, Chelsea. Nigel wasn't supposed to be hurt this badly, and you ... well, you weren't supposed to be there."

Chelsea shifts her murderous gaze to her father. "I only came because you called me into town. You said you wanted to take me out to dinner, that you had something to tell me."

Nigel's chest rises and falls. "You were only supposed to come find me, not walk in on the thing. The idiots he hired got greedy. They were stealing everything they could get their hands on, and when I told them to stick to the plan, they chose not to."

"Let him go, Chelsea," I tell her. Rage stifles us in this room as she turns to me like I've betrayed her.

"They nearly killed me," she replies angrily.

"They did, but you're not dead. Let him go. He'll get what's coming to him." I step in between Chelsea's knife and the man in her father's hospital room.

"That's a very dangerous position to be in, Detective," Chelsea hisses from behind me.

Again, I move my hand to steady her, holding her back to give this Simon guy enough time to leave. She turns to her father after the door closes with hatred in her eyes. But she doesn't say anything and leaves the room shortly after.

Nigel stares at me and says, "Go after her before she does something stupid."

A nurse pokes her head into the room. "Visiting hours have been over, sir. You'll have to leave or I'm calling security."

I flash my badge at her before tipping my head at Nigel and walking out of his room. Fortunately, Chelsea's standing in the hospital parking lot. Her knife is still clean, and she doesn't look like she's done anything stupid.

"I'm surprised that you're still here," I say quietly, stepping beside her.

"You're my ride." She smirks.

"Is he in my trunk?"

"Of course not. Why would I do something like that in a hospital parking lot with a

dozen cameras looking at me at any given moment?" There is a camera on a few light posts that she points out.

"You can be impulsive sometimes."

"Impulsive means a bigger mess to clean up. I may be impulsive, but I'm not sloppy. I can't believe he did this. He used me." She sighs, slowly glancing over her shoulder. "He'll never use me again."

"Chelsea, he wanted to be sure he was found because somewhere in his gut, your father knew this would go wrong."

"So why did he do it?"

I hold a finger up to hush her and point across the parking lot. There, we see her father's visitor, Simon, skulking between cars and looking nervously over his shoulder.

"I have a feeling he's the answer to that question. Why don't we finish cleaning up this mess your father made?"

Chelsea nods. We step deeper into the shadows, get to my car, and follow Simon out of the parking lot.

CHELSEA

The pleas of a man begging for his life don't give me any sort of pleasure or high. There's no addiction to their pain for me. All I want are answers.

Simon blubbers and pleads in the middle of a plastic tarp spread out in the man's basement. We leave the lights off to ensure it looks like Simon never made it back home. The sound of his tears is muffled in the small basement. Granted, Victor doesn't like the way I test that theory out, but he stood outside for nearly twenty minutes and couldn't hear a squirm or squeal as I cut into Simon.

Simon's pleading for this to end. "I didn't know Kush and Hammer were going to take things that far. They didn't follow orders, and I'm sorry. You should have never been involved or attacked."

The sharpness of my blade as I clean it off on Simon's shirt causes him to whimper and sob loudly.

His words are barely audible as he begs. "Please..."

Victor sits on a stool in the corner, watching the spectacle with indifference. He blows out a breath and asks, "Why did your goons put Nigel in a coma? Don't tell us the same fraudulent insurance claim story. Tell us the truth, and you'll walk out of here."

Simon's eyes dart back and forth between us, undoubtedly remembering how Victor flashed his badge in the hospital room. However, if he's stupid enough to believe Victor's a cop doing his job, then Simon deserves everything that happens next.

"Fine, fine, but Kush said that he could make it look like a botched robbery, and Nigel wouldn't leave alive. There's an insurance policy built into our partnership agreement."

"How much would you make off my father's untimely passing?" I ask, trying desperately to keep my rage in check.

"A million, but that wasn't my idea. Kush thought it up."

I don't want to hear anything else. My knife ends his pain, suffering, and blubbering quickly.

"How do you want to clean this up?" I ask Victor as he rolls the man's dying body in the plastic sheet.

"Let's give him the insurance claim he planned," Victor replies. He is methodical, which makes him a great cop and an even better accomplice. Time flies by as we dispose of another body and torch the basement of the home. The house is still standing, but the fire was just enough to remove our presence in the home.

We end the night at Victor's place. It's the house he grew up in with furniture he hasn't changed in years. It's more welcoming than my father's home ever was. Silence wraps around us as we walk inside and head into the master bedroom.

Victor strips me out of my clothes and tosses them into a pile that will end up burning in his fire pit in the backyard. I help him out of his shirt and pants. Our eyes connect, faces come close, and with our lips barely an inch apart, the adrenaline of the night

pumps between us. My heart races as my eyes scan his face for that connection I yearn for.

"You always show up for me. No matter what," I whisper as he leads me into the bathroom, turns on the large shower head, and pulls me close to him.

The hot water steams around us, but it doesn't hide the effect I have on his body. His erection grows firmer in my hand. I feel the need to show off. The water doesn't stop me from dropping in front of Victor to slide my mouth over his cock.

He moans—the sound making my core clench. The slurps, sucks, and moans of me getting into it echo around the room, blending with the sounds of the shower pouring water over us.

Back and forth, I bob my head and use my tongue to caress his hardness. Victor's fingers grip the back of my head to guide me for a few more seconds before pulling my mouth away from him. He spins to place my hands on the wall and snatches my waist back toward him. The smoothness of his head pushing into my walls has my eyes widen from the pressure.

The first thrust is rough, tearing grunts out of me as Victor fucks me in the shower. My body craves his aggression, and it climaxes from the slightest contact with him. He understands exactly what I need and how I like to come. He pushes and pulls himself out of my walls, dragging out one orgasm after another.

However, we decide not to finish in the shower. We clean up and find ourselves in the bedroom, where Victor doesn't take long to reignite his erection. He pushes himself inside of me, between my legs and on my back, and I take every stroke of pleasure. His muscular chest and abs flex and contract. God, he's always been a walking daydream.

As his movements come more frantically, I sense he's on the verge of finishing. I don't want him to pull out, so I pull him down to kiss me. The way he drives himself in and out of me as our mouths collide passionately has my legs wrapping around his waist.

His strokes slow down as Victor's tongue circles my mouth slowly until we both feel the sweet release of his climax inside of me.

Early morning sun rays wake me the next morning, happy to be in Victor's bed, and happy that my work in this town is done.

I start, "I know I said I'd come back for us, for you, Victor. "

He keeps his gaze directed at the ceiling. "But there's nothing here for you except me. These last few people, it was personal and it's going to be hard for me to do what I do, if you stay."

I let out a sigh of relief. "I plan on setting up in Pennsylvania somewhere. Do you want to come with me?"

"I do, but I need to finish things up here. I don't want anything we did over the past few days to come back to haunt us," he says. "I'll make sure the evidence left behind makes it look like Hammer killed Kush and Simon for turning on him. Your dad can remain the victim and get the insurance for the robbery."

"Thank you, Victor."

"I'd do anything for you, Chelsea. I love you."

"I love you too."

VICTOR

Five Years Later

Chelsea is breathtakingly beautiful as she waltzes inside a fine-dining restaurant. The way her ivory dress hugs her curves should be illegal, a crime to look this good. People can't help but watch as she follows the hostess to a nearby table. She's not sitting alone for long.

The hostess seats a man at her table whose eyes jump around the room. He's not the type to make me nervous, but he's fidgeting too much for my liking. However, I understand his discomfort. Discussing murder in a public space isn't the most comfortable thing to do.

"It's like I said on the phone. I want to schedule an appointment for your, um, firearms and safety class. A private lesson," the man whispers in a hurried tone.

Chelsea nods, sipping her drink. "I have a few openings in my schedule. Purchase the course and I'll be in touch. Thank you for treating me to lunch."

The dismissiveness in her tone, along with a raise of her drink, silently demands that her guest get up and leave. He scurries out of the restaurant, which gives me room to slip into his seat without anyone else paying attention.

"Next time, I'll take a vodka tonic. I don't know what this is." Chelsea swirls the amber liquid in her glass and sets it on the table.

"I'll keep that in mind. I passed my lieutenant's exam. I'm like, twentieth on the list, but I'm on it. I need you to let this private session be the last for a while. I won't have the pull to maneuver around your assignments for a while."

Chelsea leans in, placing her hand on top of mine and rubbing it gently. "We can take a break right now. That last one is too squeamish. He's liable to be a mess that needs cleaning."

I shake my head. "I don't know why you have these meetings face-to-face anyway."

"Because no one ever knows if I'm the one pulling the trigger or blade or if I'm simply a middleman. I need to know what's going to happen after the private session he's paid for. If he needs to become a mess that not only I have to clean up, but you as well. The contract will be canceled."

I nod and smile. "That's perfect because that gives us time."

"Time for what?"

I signal a server to bring on my surprise. They place a bucket of champagne and one of her favorite pastries on the table. My fingers toy with a royal blue velvet box in my pocket, just big enough for the ring I want her to wear forever.

"Time to go on our honeymoon after we get married. That's after you decide to marry me." I offer her a grin, but she playfully tosses a napkin at me.

"If that's your idea of a proposal?—"

I signal for the other part of my surprise, which brings a violinist out to play softly. Everyone turns around to see where the musician will stop. Once she stands beside our table, playing a delicate piece of music, Chelsea's eyes well with tears.

At the sound of the last note, I kneel beside Chelsea as everyone looks on.

"Chelsea Emerson, we've been through life and death together. I may joke about cleaning up your messes, but there's no one else I want by my side on this messy journey of life. I love you. I always have and always will. So will you give me the honor of being my wife? Chelsea Emerson, will you marry me?"

Chelsea's eyes lock onto mine, and without any hesitation, she nods. "Yes, of course, Victor. I love you. I'd love to be your wife."

The room erupts into applause and cheers as I rise to my feet and take Chelsea in my arms. There's no better place for her. She's with me where I can protect her and keep her safe. It doesn't matter what she does. My heart will forever be hers, and I'm the luckiest man alive because of it.

The End

Thanks for reading!