



# Tarnished Hands (Chained Hearts Duet #7)

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**Category:** Romance

**Description:** In the mafia world, I've been underestimated my entire life.

Men are elite. The cream of the crop, and well, women simply aren't.

That was until the boss gave me a chance, now I'm invaluable and as deadly as any man.

So why do I let a man I had a one-night stand with play with my emotions?

He keeps on sliding his way into my heart, even though I keep trying to kick him right back out.

He knows my world, and he also knows my body.

But what he doesn't know...

Is me.

And I'm not sure how much longer I can keep fighting him until he wins.

**Total Pages (Source):** 28

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:08 am*

## Chapter One

### PIPER

I assumed I would never want more from a man than his body.

That was until him—the man who is standing feet away from me wearing black jeans that hug his ass so perfectly, and a black tank top that molds to his massive, muscular chest, and shows off his tanned skin. And now, I hate him.

My jaw tightens as I watch him smirk—God, I hate that smirk, too. I want to slap it off his gorgeous face. Mostly because it makes my thighs clench, and that is what I hate more than anything.

My eyes flit to his, and staring back at me are the most gorgeous green eyes with tints of blue. But the green is unlike anything I have ever seen. It's a sparkling green, almost iridescent. His lashes are so long. It should be illegal for men to have such beautiful lashes.

My boss, Keir, nods to him, then walks away as they conclude their business conversation. Usually, I would be there next to Keir, but I chose to stay back this time—away from Ezra, whose gaze kept flicking to me throughout their conversation.

Stalking me like prey.

“You should talk to him,” Keir says as he reaches me.

I suck in a shocking breath at his remark, but I don't reply. Not that it would do me any good because he doesn't wait for me to give one before he strides out the door, his brother Joey following him, leaving me alone—and way too close to Ezra.

Ezra runs his own business that specializes in old cars and motorcycles. Most of his cars and bikes come from Keir, who takes possession of them for late payment.

That's usually if he doesn't kill the people first.

But Ezra has been with Keir for a few years, always silently working away in the background.

He understands Keir doesn't meet for friendly chats—it's always business with him. And Ezra is now an expert at dealing with Keir. Not many can bargain a nice chunk of profit for themselves, which was risky when he first carried out business with him.

It could have gone one of two ways.

Keir could have killed him and taken over the shop. But that would have left a gaping hole regarding who would do all the repairs and sales. Sure, Ezra has a small team, but he's an expert at what he does, and more importantly, he is committed to silence. Loyal to the marrow of his bones.

Keir respects that more than anything else.

So Keir's only other option was to agree.

Keir initially approved the business transaction, requesting a high turnover.

But Ezra wasn't one to take things lying down and lose money on the transactions.

He knew exactly what he was worth, and Keir also respected that about him.

“Do you plan to just stand there?” The words drawl from Ezra’s lips, and I can’t help but stare at said lips. Lips that are soft and rough. Lips that can do very wicked and delicious things, and a body that’s nothing but solid, packed muscle.

I shake my head and turn to walk away, but as I do, my body tingles like it does every time he comes close to me. His hand pauses just short of my skin, like he’s waiting to see if I’ll take a swing at him again.

The first time he laid a hand on me, I turned around and punched him in the stomach.

He wasn’t expecting it.

I didn’t care.

Now he knows better.

But then I had to go and have sex with him just once.

One freaking time. And somehow, he’s altered me in ways no one else has before.

When I close my eyes, I dream of his lips all over my body. And even when I open them, I can still smell him.

Cigars and honey—it’s such an odd combination, but the scent is divine with a touch of grease.

“Stay,” he demands as one of his big hands encircles my wrist. I ignore the way his touch sizzles across my skin, before turning around, glancing at his grease-covered hand, then giving him a blank, disgusting stare.

I hate how I don't mind that he's always covered in some type of car grease. I remember washing that grease off my body only a few weeks ago when he came to one of Joey's parties. I may have had too much to drink and gone back to his place for the night. Then I snuck out and haven't seen him since.

Not that he would know where to find me outside of business unless I wanted him to.

Even so, I assumed it would be easy to forget about him.

A meaningless one-night stand.

But I haven't been able to get him out of my head since.

And how do Keir and the rest of them know? Well, I suppose my making out with Ezra that night was a clear indicator.

"I have work to do," I declare, pulling away. But I don't pull hard enough for his hand to break contact. Instead, his grip tightens on my wrist.

"Come back later. You know where to find me." That smirk rides higher, and he boldly slides his gaze down my body. I can't help the way heat spreads when his tongue darts out like he's starving and would give anything for a taste.

By the time he's trailed back up to meet my eyes, his are smoldering.

Filled with greed. Like he wants to throw me over his shoulder, pin me beneath him and fuck me into next week.

The image of him above me as he drives his long, fat cock into me while whispering dirty things, flashes in my head.

“I shouldn’t,” I tell him, erasing the erotic images from my mind.

“You should.” He drops my wrist and spins on his heels, returning to the car he was working on. I watch as he bends over, picks up a rag, and wipes a wrench on it. “Come back later so I can fuck you until you scream, just the way you and I both like it.”

My chest flushes hot, the heat rising to my cheeks at his words. He has no shame, no filter when it comes to what he says to me, but when he speaks to others, he’s calm and clear. It’s like he leaves all his wicked, nasty words for me. My mind wanders back to our last encounter...

“ Christ, does this sweet cunt squeeze my cock good? What a fucking masterpiece it is.”

I shake my head to clear his words from that night. I decide not to reply before I leave.

Let’s face it... I don’t know what to say.

The car is waiting for me when I exit the shop. Joey is in the driver’s seat, and Keir is in the passenger’s seat. They both twist around and set their eyes firmly on me as I slide into the back. It’s rare to have a woman in this business, but I’ve proven myself to them time and time again.

And now I’m considered one of them, even though they’re family. Ranking in this family is incredibly important when your cousin controls everything that supplies the money. And the power.

Some call him Mafia King.

I call him Boss.

“So, Ezra?” Joey asks with a small laugh.

Keir says nothing. And if he didn’t approve, I can honestly say I would listen.

His opinions are extremely important to me.

He’s in power for a reason. And we all respect the authority and strength that he exudes.

The man doesn’t have to say anything, and you know the control, command, and, particularly, his potency seeps from every pore.

He has changed how our family sees women. Before Keir, it was known that every first son would take over the business, even if a daughter were born first.

But Keir changed that situation when Sailor had his daughter.

His daughter, Wren, is the apple of his eye. And she means everything to him, maybe even more than Sailor, which is saying something.

And no other woman has the power I have. It took a while for people to recognize that I contained the strength within me to do the required tasks. The first time I walked into a deal, the men laughed at me. The last time, one of them left in a body bag. They don’t laugh anymore.

Then they fucking listened.

I didn’t need Keir or the other men in the family to tell them who I was.

I fucking showed them.

And now, I love what I do and who I am.

But sometimes I'm lonely.

They're still staring, waiting for my answer.

But I respond with an emphatic, "No! Not Ezra. We fucked. End of story."

"It seems to me the guy was looking at you like he wanted to do it again," Joey says as he starts the car.

"I like him," Keir says, out of the blue and definitely out of character to speak the words out loud.

"We know you like him. If you didn't, you would have killed him already," Joey replies, smiling as he drives off.



## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:08 am*

### Chapter Two

#### EZRA

The long-legged, dark-eyed beauty, with inky black hair, is a spicy little minx. Of course, underneath all that attitude, I figured she would be. If she were mine, I wouldn't change a thing about her.

I've known who she is for a while now. It's hard to miss her because she's always with Keir whenever we meet.

The woman loiters and is dangerous.

Apparently, she put a bullet in a man's leg for grabbing her wrist once. Rumour has it she didn't even blink.

The night she punched me, though? I wasn't concerned about her shooting me. Not when all I could think about was hearing her voice. Because of all the times she stood by Keir's side, she never spoke. And damn did that drive me bat shit crazy.

She decked me a good one instead. So, I waited until we would see each other out of business mode to get her to talk to me again. Thought I'd go out of my mind waiting to pounce on what had started to possess my every thought.

Finally, when Joey invited me to one of his parties, and when she waltzed in wearing a blood-red short as fuck dress, a pair of black boots, and her hair down instead of up, I knew I had to have her.

And have her, I did.

Over and over, she screamed my name. Clawed her nails down my back, my chest, and gave just as good as she got.

Now, if I could just get her to come back so I can worship, taste, and fuck her again.

“What’s up with the angry girl?” Lydia, my office manager, asks as she enters the shop and leans against the counter.

“Angry girl?” I ask, playing dumb when I know perfectly well who she’s talking about. I smile as images of a pissed off Piper run through my mind.

“Yep, she always looks furious when she comes in with those guys.” Lydia has no idea ‘those guys’ are mafia, and for her sake, she never will.

Even so, she knows something shady is going on.

Knows how to keep her mouth, too. End of story.

“Do you like her?” Her words pull me from my thoughts.

I look up to see her brown eyes locked on me, and full of more questions. “Do you?” she reiterates.

“Why?” Lydia and I kissed once. It was a mistake, and I told her so. That kiss—quick, unexpected, more awkward than hot—was supposed to be buried; apparently, it’s not for her.

“She isn’t really your type, now, is she?” Her hands go to her hips over the tiny shorts she has on. I don’t have a uniform for her, and I try to keep my opinion to myself

about what women wear—their body, their choice—but she used to wear jeans and tees. Now? Her shorts barely qualify as fabric.

“I have a type?” I ask with a raised brow. “And you would know this how?”

I tend to keep to myself. I prefer it that way.

Basically, all I do is work and speak to my brother often.

Sure, I’ll go out for drinks on the odd occasion.

And on some of those nights, I will end up in the bathroom with my hand up a woman’s dress as she tells me how badly she wants to fuck me.

Not that I complain, because sometimes all you need is a release.

And I do love women—all types of women, especially crazy ones.

“You’re attracted to me, and she is not me. That’s how I know.” Lydia smiles, flicks her hair over her shoulder, and sashays back to the reception area.

Shit .

Does she really think that?

Fuck! Obviously, I was not clear enough last time.

Going after her, I find her with her feet up on the desk. Her smug smile says she knew I’d come after her.

“Lydia—” I start, but she cuts me off.

“You can have me here on this desk. Think about it.” She lowers her feet and leans far enough over the desk to give me the perfect view of her tits.

“Please stand up,” I say while shaking my head.

She does, but it’s clear she is misinterpreting what I’m saying again. Lydia is good at what she does, and until I hire someone else, it’ll be a blow to my downtime without her, but with the direction this is going, she leaves me no choice but to let her go. “You’re fired.” I turn and walk out.

The gasp is loud and clear before she runs after me. “No, please don’t. I don’t know what’s wrong with me.” Her hand lands on my shoulder, and I tense as my stomach flips.

I shake her off like she’s burned me. I hate being touched. Doing the touching is not an issue, but I can’t stand having other people’s hands on me.

But I let Piper touch me.

“I don’t want you, Lydia,” I say simply and clearly so she can’t be confused this time. “I hired you to work and had one moment of misjudgment. If you can’t put that behind us, this won’t work.”

“I’m sorry, I’ve had a bad week.” She brushes her hair behind her ear. “It won’t happen again.”

“If it does, I won’t give you another chance.”

“Thank you. It won’t.” She promises.

She’d best stick to it.

Neither says anything more as she turns and goes back to the office, and I head back to the Mustang I've been working on.

Not sure how long I get lost in my work, but it has to be hours by the time I'm finished.

Truth be told, that's how it always is.

I fucking love it. Love looking down to see grease coating my hands, and the way my shirt sticks to my back from sweat.

Cranking the engine, the Mustang purrs to life. It's a sweet sound, similar but not as satisfying as Piper's.

I heard Lydia leave, and she didn't say goodbye. If she did, I didn't hear her. It could be because I have my music turned up loud. I usually do unless I have someone here working with me. Guess I forgot she was here.

Crawling back under the car to tweak a few things, I don't hear Piper come in, but I feel her before I see her black, sky-high boots, and what I assume are the same black jeans from earlier that hugged her lush, ripe peach shaped ass.

Rolling out from under the Mustang, I look up at her.

Her arms are crossed over her chest, and those almost pitch black eyes stare down at me with seriousness.

"Just sex," she says, and I let a wicked smirk slide across my mouth. Her brows lift. Daring me. Testing me. Just waiting for a reason to bolt. "Nothing more."

I don't agree to her terms as I stand and head to the wash area.

I make quick work of tearing off my shirt and kicking free of my jeans.

She remains where she is as I walk to the shower room in the back of the building.

After quickly washing and throwing on some clean clothes, I return to find her leaning against the car, her phone in hand, lost in her own world.

“Dinner,” I say, reaching for my car keys. She goes to argue, but I stop her with a finger to her lips. “Then I fuck you all night long. But first, I need fucking food.” Pulling away, I take her hand and drag her out, shutting the door behind me.

Opening the car door, Piper slides in, giving me her forever stoic expression.

I plan to make it crack tonight... in my bed.

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:08 am*

### Chapter Three

#### PIPER

When Joey dropped me off at home, I wasn't planning on going to see Ezra. No, I told myself I would shower, chill, go to bed early, and forget everything that happened between me and him.

But as I walked into my apartment alone, loneliness struck me like an arrow, and I thought, what's the harm? It's not like I don't know what he can do for me.

Desire erupts. A needy throb at the juncture of my thighs when the memory of his mouth and his hands pop into my mind—God, he knew exactly how to undo me.

So now here I sit, across from him, in some restaurant he's dragged me to while I squeeze my thighs together, feeling the wetness of my panties as Ezra cuts into his steak once again and puts the fork to his mouth.

How can a man make such a simple move so seductive?

It's unfair, really...

The game he plays with me.

The trance he can so easily cast on me.

"Do you plan to watch me eat the entire time?" he asks.

I look down at my steak. “I didn’t come for dinner,” I tell him.

“You ordered.”

“You did,” I correct him.

“We can take it to go if that’s what you prefer.”

I glance back up at him. “I’d prefer,” I reply.

He cuts another piece of steak, forks it into his mouth, and chews. All the while watching me.

“This makes you uncomfortable.” He waves his knife between us, then he proceeds to continue eating his food.

He isn’t wrong. My skin itches with tension, the air too thick to breathe. “Yes.”

“Why?” he pushes.

“You said we’d be fucking. That’s why I’m here.”

The corner of his lips lifts into that smirk.

“Oh, we very much will be.” He nods and reaches for his water before lifting the glass to his lips and taking a long drink.

I glance at his plate, and his steak is mostly consumed.

“But I needed sustenance first.” Ezra waves the waitress over, and when she stops at the end of our table, he asks her for a to-go container for my food.



“Will you eat it later?” he asks me. I look down at the food before me as the waitress brings over a container.

I thank her, then scrape my meal into the box.

Making sure nothing touches. I’m impressed it didn’t arrive at the table touching.

Ninety-nine percent of the time, it does, and I can’t bring myself to eat it.

That’s not the case tonight, though. Tonight is all about the anticipation of what comes next.

“Possibly. Depends on how much energy I use,” I say.

“Though I did eat before I showed up at the shop.” I lie.

When I look back at him, he pushes his dark hair, which is usually messy, with short waves out of his face.

At the moment, it’s trimmed nicely around the edges, with the top a little longer.

It suits him.

“I knew you would come,” he says so matter-of-factly before standing, pushing in his chair, and stepping over to me.

He offers me his hand, but I don’t take it.

I rise without his assistance, then turn to face him.

He’s tall, possibly six feet five compared to my five feet eight.

I don't consider myself short, but around him, I feel small.

"That's very cocky of you," I reply.

Ezra throws money on the table and nods to the waitress. He tipped well, more than I would have, that's for sure. Ignoring his hand hasn't phased him. Instead, he settles his palm against my back as he guides me to his car. Subtle. Possessive. Nice.

His car is nice, but it's older. A classic, maybe, because there's no air conditioning, so he winds down the window as soon as he opens the car door for me.

I watch, fascinated, and quite honestly liking his chivalry as he shuts the door and walks to the driver's side, doing the same to his before he climbs in.

"Your place or mine?" he asks.

"Yours."

He nods and then takes off. "Do you not want me to go to yours?" he asks after a moment of silence.

"No, I'd rather you didn't," I tell him truthfully.

The weight of his gaze burns the side of my face, but I keep my eyes on the road. "You're happy for us to just fuck, and then you leave?"

"Quite happy."

"Who were you fucking before me?" Ezra questions.

"Do you really want to know that?" I turn to face him.

“Yes.”

“Before you, I had a one-night stand. I can’t remember his name. So knowing your name is a big point to me.” I smile.

I watch his jaw twitch.

“You asked,” I inform him. “Who did you fuck last?”

I want to know.

It’s only fair.

Tit for tat and all that!

“Her name was Sabrina, and it was over three months ago. I met her at a bar.”

“Is that the only place you meet women?”

“I met you in my shop,” he states.

“Touché.”

He slows down and parks his car in his driveway.

The last time I was here, I didn’t pay much attention.

But tonight, I look at his house. It’s nice.

A large, white older-style home with a brown roof, wrap-around porch, and well-maintained yard and garden.

It's just outside of town, the same as his shop.

Ready to get to why I'm here before he needles his way under my skin more with his niceness, I get out of the car before he can come around to open my door, and he waits for me to meet him near the hood.

My boots click on the stoned driveway, and I stop just short of him.

He plucks the food from my hand with a glance I can't read—gentle, but expectant before he walks up the few stairs and opens the door.

The last time I was here, his hands and his mouth were all over me before we even got inside. I can't even remember how we made it to the bedroom. But somehow, we did.

Leaving the door open, I follow him in and watch as he walks to his kitchen.

The room gleams—cold, white, untouched. Like, no one lives here.

Like he's only ever passing through. He opens the refrigerator and puts my food inside before he shuts the door and returns to where I stand under the threshold of his front door.

His hand reaches out behind me and shuts the front door, but his eyes remain firmly on mine.

Men have never intimidated me. I'm used to being around powerful men.

My eyes always hold steady. Not tonight. Until Ezra. I look away first. And I hate myself for it.

Powerful men are who I grew up with, and I work for one of the scariest men there is.

And yet, I can't hold Ezra's stare. I have to look away.

He leans in at the same time as I do, his breath tickling my neck. "Did I tell you how good you smell tonight?"

I gasp, and he leans forward more and touches his lips to my neck. Ever so slowly, he places a soft kiss there, and one of his hands presses against my back, holding me still.

"You didn't," I manage to say.

"What about how good you look?" he murmurs, his lips moving up my neck. The whisper of warm breath causes me to shiver.

"Failed to mention that as well," I mumble back.

"I'm terribly sorry." His mouth moves against my jaw. "I'll be sure to tell you every chance I get." And before I can say anything else, his other hand comes up and cups my jaw, gripping it hard, before his lips smash down on mine.

Fuck .

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:08 am*

### Chapter Four

#### EZRA

The second my tongue meets hers, a low growl rips from my throat, and my hands grip tighter without thinking.

My body hums, and I'm already craving more, like it's been starving for her.

Swear to god, I could kiss her for hours.

Tasting her is becoming addictive, and I sure as hell don't want help overcoming it.

She kisses me like she's trying to win something—sharp, all teeth and pressure.

But then her breath hitches, her fingers flinch on my shoulders.

Her eyes scream conflict—want, and war wrapped in one glare.

And still, she stays. I ease my hands down her hips, slower than I want to.

I can't afford to fuck this up—not with her.

I've had one real relationship, and I was with her for five years.

But she wanted things I never did. So we ended it.

The day she left, I made a sandwich, watched half a race on TV, and went to bed early.

That was it. No gut punch. No ache. Just...

nothing. And to be honest, for being with someone that long, I assumed it would hurt not to have her with me anymore.

It didn't.

And I'm sure that's not how a relationship should be.

Shouldn't it be all-consuming?

Don't get me wrong, we got along great and hardly ever fought.

But we were better suited as friends.

That was the issue.

To this day, I still send her a message once a year on her birthday. She's happily married with two kids. I've met her husband.

He gives her all the things she deserves.

The things I couldn't.

Or, to be truthful, I didn't want to.

So, my need for Piper? Well, I'm not sure yet how to place it. I've always thought she was a beautiful woman. Quite standoffish but beautiful, nonetheless.

She doesn't smile when she enters a room—she scans it like she's casing the place. And when she looks at you, it's like you've already disappointed her.

And now, I want her more than anything.

She pushes up against me, making that fucking sound that drives me wild—it's like a moan mixed with a groan.

I lift her, my hands on her ass as she wraps her boot-clad legs around my waist and locks them together.

I start the walk to the bedroom, but she's already rocking against me.

My cock straining as she gets the friction she wants, or better yet, needs from me.

I sidestep until I hit the back of the couch, knowing that we won't make it to the damn bedroom this time.

She bites my ear, hard, like she wants to mark me.

My breath catches, blood turning to liquid fire, and my cock thickens to steel. Fuck, I live for this woman's fire.

"I want to steal your breath. Taste and devour your pussy. Learn and explore every inch of this tempting body I haven't touched yet. Is that what you want, Piper?"

She answers with a nod, her greedy, eager hands tearing at my shirt as I set her on the back of the couch.

Her fingers clutch at the material as she pulls it off over my head.



Leaning back, careful not to fall over the couch, she removes her shirt.

Her bra comes into view, and now I remember the ink all over her beautiful skin.

The snake that wraps around her belly, and its mouth that opens between her breasts.

Stunning, and so fitting for her.

Unclasping her bra, she pulls it free, and I drop to the floor on my knees and pull her boots off. I do it slowly, and she growls impatiently, “Ezra.”

I grin as I stand and look down at her. She lifts her hips so I can peel her jeans off, taking her panties with them.

She’s bared out before me now. Legs spread, pretty pink pussy, glistening and ready for me.

I drop to my knees in front of her again.

She doesn’t waste any time before her hands find my hair and tug as I kiss her inner thigh.

“Ezra,” she says with a little more irritation this time.

A chuckle rumbles out. A yank of my hair is the second warning I get before I continue kissing up her thigh, moving closer to the prize.

That’s exactly what this is.

A prize.

Just as this woman is, I pause, staring. She's spread out like sin, all ink and heat and attitude.

My match.

Mine. Fucking mine.

As soon as my mouth hits her sweet clit, she jolts, yanking my hair with one hand as her other goes to the back of the couch and grips so she doesn't fall backward. She lifts her legs onto my shoulders as I fucking devour her. Licking with long, deep strokes from her clit to her asshole.

We were all hands and bodies the last time she was here, and I didn't get a chance to do this. This time, I'm not letting the opportunity pass me by.

I knew I'd love it.

I mean, I love the taste of her lips.

These lips, though, are my new favorite.

She moans, and it's so sweet that I almost stop to ram my cock into her.

It's a new sound I haven't heard from her before.

"You want my dick, Piper?" I ask against her swollen flesh, mesmerized as she does it again, and I continue working her with my mouth.

My fingers that were digging into her thigh move between her legs, and she opens them wider for me before I insert a finger.

She eagerly lets me in, her hand still clutching my hair for dear life as I fuck her with my mouth, and hand until she's writhing and, grinding her pussy into my face while making that sound repeatedly.

I flick her clit with my tongue before I insert another finger and move them faster finding that special place inside her while being careful to keep my mouth at a steady pace.

Moans are all I get before her legs start to close around my head, and her pussy milks my fingers, and drips drop on my chin.

I eat her up—every damn drop.

Fuck! Very soon, that will be my cock drenched in her sweetness.

And I can't fucking wait.

### Chapter Five

#### PIPER

I 'm used to men gawking at me with wandering eyes.

The way they talk louder when I walk past them.

The eager, fleeting compliments that have nothing to do with me but are solely there to smooth the transactional pathway, if you will.

Ezra does and he doesn't undress me with his eyes.

He does like what he sees. What he does to me, but he also sees through me.

Like he's not seeing just my body, but the turmoil and danger beneath it.

I like that look when I shouldn't, just as I shouldn't like anything about Ezra, but for some reason, I can't hold his stare without the urge to squirm.

I break our eye contact by smashing my lips to his and grabbing at him in any way possible.

He pulls back after a minute, his stare scorching.

And as much as I try to wrench my gaze away from him this time, I find myself drawn back like a magnet.

I sit and breathe heavily as he shifts backward and unbuckles his jeans, my eyes are glued to his talented fingers as he works at his zipper.

His cock strains against his boxers, and the minute it's free, my thighs twitch together.

My mouth goes dry. Every breath feels like I'm sucking all the oxygen from the room.

I need him more than skin on skin. I'm also beginning to believe I need him burrowed further under my skin.

The thought is scary, but I'm too far gone to stop this madness now.

I lick my lips, and he watches me, smirking.

"Tell me... slow and gentle or hard and fast?"

"Both?" I say, unsure.

Last time, we were in a rush, almost animalistic in our need. We couldn't stop or get enough of each other. This time I want it a little slower, but with the roughness I know he can deliver.

He steps back up to me, now completely naked, and lifts his hand to my face gently before gliding it to my hair.

He smirks, his eyes solely on mine, watching me for any movement as his fingers thread through my hair, and he yanks my head back, bending my neck so my throat is exposed to him.

I feel the heat of him when he steps between my legs, his mouth hot as it comes down on my neck, and he sucks.

His hold on my hair is unrelenting as he presses himself against my sex.

I lift a leg and wrap it around him so I can feel him closer.

He huffs, pulls away from my neck, and looks me in the eyes.

He tugs at my hair until it's painful—but the good kind of painful—the painful you know will hurt in the morning, but you'll gladly ride it out with no complaint because it was worth every second.

“Did I say you could do that?” He looks down to where our bodies are almost joined.

I wrap my arms around his neck. “Thought you were going to fuck me, so why are you still talking?” I taunt.

An animalistic growl leaves him as he jerks my hair one last time before he removes his hands and takes hold of my legs, opening them wider as he looks down between us.

I watch, too, fascinated, as he slides right in.

I bite my lip as he bottoms out inside me.

His hand lifts to my cheek, and his thumb touches my lip, pulling it free.

“That's my lip to bite.” He jerks his body, and I gasp at the movement.

“You'll learn,” he says, and his hand slides to my neck, and he pushes me.

I bend backward, and now my head is on the cushions—thankfully, they’re soft—my ass is perched on the back of the couch, and his cock is still inside of me.

I don’t bother to argue about the not-so-comfortable position when he pulls out and thrusts back in.

I swear all the blood rushes to my head, not just because I’m upside down but from the feeling of being fucked this way.

Ezra moves, slow and steady at first, one hand on my stomach, holding me still, while the other grips my hip.

“Ezra.”

“Yes, dear?” I can tell he’s smirking without even seeing his face.

“Let me up.”

“You don’t mean that,” he replies, and his hand that was on my stomach moves down to my very sensitive clit. I squirm but somehow open my legs wider while he thrusts and thrusts.

As he slides in and out of me, I grip the closest thing to me, which happens to be a pillow, and pick it up.

“Do you plan to place that over your mouth and bite it to stifle your screams, dear?” he asks as he pulls out until just his tip remains inside me.

He pauses for a moment, and as I feel him jerk, a sharp slap comes down on my clit.

Vibrations travel throughout my body, another orgasm building fast as he slams back

inside of me.

Wait? Did he just slap my clit, and I liked it?

Surely not.

He does it again, and I'm fucking helpless to stop him.

Not that I want to.

He fucks me so good that I do, in fact, end up biting the pillow.

His hand leaves my clit and finds my breast. He squeezes my nipple before he moves lower, and in one swift movement, like I weigh nothing, he lifts me.

My legs twine around his waist, and he holds me up, his hands on my ass as he starts bouncing me on his cock.

My arms cling onto his shoulders, and I hold on.

Leaning against him, I open my mouth and taste his skin before I bite his shoulder.

He grunts in response, then, if possible, he picks up his pace.

Pounding into me relentlessly. My nails dig into his back.

His breathing turns ragged. Every thrust scorches up my spine, sending me closer to the brink of insanity.

My body trembles, teetering on a cliff's edge and begging to fall.



His finger slips between my ass cheeks and pushes into my puckered hole, never once stopping his assault on me.

“That pussy of yours fucking loves me,” he says. I don’t reply. “But you already knew that, didn’t you?”

Again, I say nothing.

He laughs, and as he does, I come, my body going lax as he follows right after me. His warm cum filling me, and leaking down my thighs.

When he’s done, he walks to his dining table, with me hanging off of him, my mouth still on his shoulder, and takes a seat.

I sit up on his lap, his cock still inside of me as he removes his hand from my ass.

He lifts his hands and puts them behind his head.

“Give me a minute, dear, and I’ll fuck that mouth.

” His emerald eyes shine with something so bright that I have to break contact.

“I should go,” I tell him, looking down between us.

“You should stay.”

“I shouldn’t.” I shake my head. “I’ll call a Lyft.” I go to get up, but he grips my hips, holding me to him. I meet his eyes.

“It’s only sex. Stay.”

“No,” I reply, pushing away. “Do you have all the women you fuck stay?”

His cock falls out of me as I stand, and I notice he’s already getting hard again. Turning away from him, I walk to the couch and find my clothes.

“No, only you, it seems.”

After I put my clothes back on, I turn to find him still seated at the dining table, watching me. “I’ll drive you back to your car.” He stands and, without another word, gets dressed and then walks to the door.

I follow.

He takes me back to his shop in silence.

I say nothing when I leave the car, and neither does he.

I close the door without looking back. My throat tightens, the silence, and something else I can’t pinpoint weighing heavily on my chest. I dig my keys in frustration from my oversized purse and walk away from his idling car.

As I stare at my ceiling all night long, I keep asking myself what I was even thinking coming to see him in the first place.

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:08 am*

### Chapter Six

#### EZRA

Two weeks pass, and I don't see her, not that I'm counting or anything. And Lydia has kept her distance since I told her I wanted to fire her.

Thank fuck for that.

"It's your birthday. We can't just sit around and do nothing," my younger brother Tony argues. He flew in from college two days ago and has been staying with me.

I'm paying for his tuition, and he appears to be doing well.

Our parents died a few years back, and I didn't want Tony not to have everything he needed.

We were struggling at the time, but we made it work.

And, thankfully, my deal with Keir pays extremely well.

For the last year, I've lived comfortably.

I've paid off every debt I had, and I'm able to send Tony money every month for books and whatever he needs or wants, and still have some left to spare.

I'm sure it's what our parents would have done.

They were good parents... to Tony.

I left home at sixteen, when I wanted to drop out of school to pursue a career with cars.

My father told me I was wasting my future and if I intended to do so, there was no place for me under his roof.

At the time, I was already working at a car service center, learning everything I could.

When I turned eighteen, I enlisted in the army and stayed for a few years before being discharged.

By age twenty-five, I had saved up enough money to buy my own shop. And a few years later, they died.

Tony and I are quite a few years apart. However, that doesn't change how I feel about him.

I don't love many things in this world, but I love my brother.

He's practically a kid, and he still leaves his damp towels on the floor. But if anyone laid a finger on him, I'd burn the city down to make them pay.

He's my blood and the reason why I grin and bear birthdays.

He's been through enough, and I need him to know life is worth celebrating even if I don't always feel that way myself.

We barely look anything alike. I have olive-toned skin, and his is lighter, more like our mother's. My hair has a slight curl, and his is stick straight. Our eyes are the

same, though.

He's a good kid despite his circumstances. When our parents died in a car accident, Tony was at home alone when the police came knocking and informed him.

After he called crying to give me the news, I stood outside on the sidewalk and let my anger rule over my grief.

I became fucking furious. My knuckles still hurt in the winter from where I punched a brick wall.

He was a teenager.

To have that put on you at that age is a lot to handle. But we got through it together. Made our sibling bond stronger.

Tony is studying to be a doctor. The kid reads medical journals for fun and once corrected our family doctor on a diagnosis. He's smart. Gifted. Talented. I'm proud of him. Proud to be his brother.

"It's just another day," I grumble, pulling the roller doors down.

"It's not. Now, let's go out. I flew in for you, and I want to celebrate you."

"You coming to see me is enough. Let's eat and then go home."

"Nope." Tony shakes his head and follows me to the back to grab my stuff. "You have a shower here. Use it, and let's go." He waves to the door where the bathroom is.

"Shouldn't I get to choose what I want to do since it's my birthday?" I ask.

“No, you suck at choosing stuff. Now, come on. Oh, I invited your receptionist. She seemed keen on joining us.”

“Let’s not do that again,” I tell him.

“She’s hot, and you’re single. Don’t you want something more?”

“I have something more... my shop,” I remind him.

I don’t tell him about all my fucked-up deals.

How, sometimes, when I get the cars, I find blood splattered all over the place inside them.

Once, I even found a body in the trunk. I knew who I was getting into business with when I shook Keir’s hand, sealing our deal.

I even know who I’m fucking. And what they do, who they are, and death doesn’t faze me.

“More than your shop. Don’t you want what Mom and Dad had?”

“No,” I say flatly. I always felt like my mother loved my father more, not that there’s anything wrong with that.

Someone always loves the other more, sometimes to the point that the other doesn’t care.

It feels more like an obligation to be with each other instead of actually wanting to be together. “I’m happy with how I am right now.”

I head into the bathroom and quickly shower before I change into clean clothes. I find Tony waiting for me at the front, car keys in hand.

“Is there someone else? Or, you know... do you prefer men?” he asks.

I stare at him, dazed, as my brows slowly pull together before answering, “I love women, Tony.”

“Okay, I just wanted to check. Because you know I wouldn’t care. Just wanted to know.”

I let him drive us to the bar, and he glances at me quickly before focusing back on the road.

“Really?” he says, surprised. “Not the receptionist?”

“No, not her.” I shake my head.

“So, care to tell me more?”

He pulls into the parking lot, finds a spot, and then kills the engine.

“Not really.” I get out of the car, end the discussion, and walk into the bar. I see Lydia straight away. She’s sitting at the bar in a short white dress, waiting for us, and she has two friends with her.

“I told her to bring friends,” Tony says, his hand landing on my shoulder and giving me a brief squeeze. “Let’s have some fun.”

This does not sound like fun. This shit sounds like fucking hell. But I don’t get to see my brother all that often, so I walk over with him.

Lydia leans in to hug my brother and kiss his cheek.

“Happy Birthday,” Lydia says with a big smile, and her friends echo it from behind her. “Tony asked me to invite a few friends.”

“I see.” I nod and hold up a hand to get the bartender’s attention. He strolls over, and I order a whiskey neat for myself and one for my brother. But he shakes his head. I forgot he plans to drive.

Guess I’m having two, then.

“Smile,” Tony says, completely tuned out to my pissy mood, which is a good thing, I suppose. The last thing I want to do is bring him down.

“Two drinks, and I’m out,” I tell him as the bartender sets both glasses down in front of me.

“Drink up, big brother. The total is five, and then we can leave.”

“I don’t like that plan.”

“Ezra?” I hear my name and turn to see Lucas. I don’t see him often, except when it comes to removing the bodies left in the cars, when he happily skips in and takes care of them. “Thought it was you. What are you doing in my bar?”

I look around, confused. “This place is yours?” I ask, and he nods.

Lucas has this air about him. I don’t know him well enough to say for sure what it is. It could be his cockiness, or maybe a self-awareness that he always knows what he’s talking about or doing. And he’s deadly. I know he would shoot you and smile while pulling the trigger. He’s that type of man.



“It’s his birthday,” my brother says. Lucas’ gaze moves to him, then to the women at the bar before coming back to me.

“Last I heard, you were fucking Piper. Has that changed?” he asks.

“Who’s Piper?” Tony questions.

“She’s an annoying shit,” Lucas answers.

I tense at his words. I know they’re family, at least I think they are. That’s what the stories say, anyway.

“Oh, interesting,” Lucas says, eyeing me closer and gauging my reaction. He winks before walking into a back room and closing the door.

“Who is Piper?” my brother asks again, and I don’t even hear Lydia’s response. I’m too busy wondering what Lucas found interesting.

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### Chapter Seven

PIPER

Lucas opens his mouth, and my stomach tightens in irritation.

Here it comes—the usual arrogant garbage.

His smug smirk stretches wider, and my fingers twitch, already itching to reach for my gun.

Maybe I should shoot him again. He can be such a fucking asshole.

Luckily for him, Keir asked me not to. Plus, I like his wife way more than I like him, and that's saying a lot, considering he and I are related.

“Lucas,” Joey warns.

“What?” Lucas answers, still smirking.

“Payment. Come on, stop fucking around.” If it isn't Joey or me collecting payments, Lucas does it. Not very often, but sometimes it happens. It pays to be protected here.

“Wasn't it you telling me about how Piper is finally nice now that she's being fucked again?” My gaze swings to Joey, and he ducks his head in shame.

I hit him in the arm. “What the fuck?” I yell.

“I didn’t say it like that,” Joey says, glaring back at Lucas. “You’re a real fucking dick, you know that?”

Lucas merely shrugs.

“Just because I was told not to shoot you again doesn’t mean I won’t,” I tell Lucas and reach for my gun. I lift and aim it at him. Lucas and I love to hate each other.

“You’ll be in so much trouble, and we know how much you love to please the boss.”

“That’s disgusting,” I say, shaking my head.

“Only you took it the dirty way.”

“Only you implied it in a dirty way. Keir is my cousin, you fuckhead.” I flick the safety off.

“Piper,” Joey warns.

“Just the ear.” I aim for Lucas’s right ear.

“No, put the gun away,” Joey says.

“You know I’ll shoot you back.” Lucas laughs.

“Not if you’re fucking dead,” I smirk at him.

“Such devoted love between you two,” Joey grunts in annoyance.

“The best kind of love... family love, right? Not the love you have when you fuck Ezra. Did you know he’s out there right now with a cute little blonde with big tits?”

She's nothing like you."

I pull the trigger, but I miss his head on purpose.

He doesn't even care.

Isn't even fazed.

Sometimes, I feel as if death doesn't faze him at all.

"Piper," Joey scolds as I lower my gun and slide it back into my jacket. I don't always carry it, but I enjoy using it when I do.

On Lucas.

"Let's go for a drink," Lucas pulls me toward the bar's side entrance like he's done a hundred times after we argue. The sticky floor and faux leather seats are almost comforting as I glance around.

The old jukebox in the corner plays classics, and several people are drinking, laughing, and having a great time at the bar and the tables.

I spot Ezra by the bar straight away, glass in hand, and two women talking to him.

Lucas keeps pulling me as he walks toward him.

Ezra doesn't look up at first when Lucas speaks.

"Ezra, how about another drink? My treat." Lucas leans into my ear as Ezra looks up, his gaze locking on me. "What do you think he screams when he gets shot?" I grind my teeth at his words as he pulls away and looks back at Ezra. "Oh, I believe you

know my friend here. Piper.”

“Piper?” the younger man behind Ezra says. I stand there as he approaches me and offers me his hand. I look at it, confused. “I’m Tony, Ezra’s brother, the better-looking one of the two of us.” He winks.

“Take his hand, don’t be rude.” Lucas nudges me. I elbow him in the ribs, and he drops his arm from my shoulders.

“I don’t like shaking hands,” I tell Tony.

He nods and pulls his hand back.

“Don’t worry, man. Piper, here, doesn’t like much of anything.

” Lucas laughs. I look then to the women.

I only recognize one of them. I’ve seen her before at Ezra’s shop in the reception area, but I paid no attention to her.

She sips on some drink through a straw and eyes me, her mouth almost in a sneer.

“Do you two plan to talk to each other or just stare at one another?” Lucas asks.

“Piper.” Ezra nods.

I haven’t seen him for two weeks. I don’t have his number, and he doesn’t have mine. Sailor, Keir’s wife, told me I should get it. However, I’m not sure if I want it. I decided I needed to keep my distance from him, whether I wanted to or not.

“It’s Ezra’s birthday,” Tony says. It’s then that I notice he has the same eyes as Ezra,

but that seems to be the only resemblance they have.

Before I get lost in my thoughts, I glance away from his brother to Ezra. “Happy birthday,” I tell him.

“Not really,” he replies.

“Why?”

“I hate celebrating.”

“Aww, look, you two are bonding,” Lucas teases.

“Fuck off,” I tell Lucas, who only chuckles before he walks away.

“Who are they? Damn, that man is hot,” one of the girls says loud enough for me to hear. I glare at her, and her cheeks go red. The blonde, on the other hand, is still watching me.

“Well, I hope your birthday gets better,” I tell Ezra before I turn and follow Lucas.

His hand finds mine, and I hate how instantly I know it’s him. The warmth, the possessive grip—my traitorous pulse answers before my head does.

“Stay. Please make this bearable. It was my brother’s idea, and I’m fucking over it.” I almost want to smile at the pain laced in his voice.

I have to fight a smirk. “I need to work.”

“You always have work,” he grumbles before looking behind me. “Joey, can I keep her for the night?”

“Yep,” Joey says and taps him on the shoulder. “Happy Birthday, man. See you next week.” Then he leaves.

I look back at Ezra, who is grinning at me. “Why are you smiling?”

“Because my night just got a whole lot better.” I roll my eyes as he leans in.

He doesn’t kiss me, but he gets close enough that he could.

“Want to get drunk and let me fuck you in my car?” He wiggles his brows at me.

And I can’t help the laugh that bubbles up.

I try to cover it with my hand, but he pulls it away.

“I’ll take that as a yes. And I plan to hear that sound from you more often, dear.

” He winks and pulls me back to where his brother is standing.

What did I just agree to?

And why do I agree so easily with him?

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### Chapter Eight

EZRA

Her laugh! Fuck, it makes me hard. Who knew I could repeatedly want to hear something so simple from this woman? It's just like the way she comes. Fuck .

My brother asks her questions, and she gives him short answers.

She clutches her vodka like it's armour.

Her fingers wrapped too tightly against the glass.

Her shoulders haven't dropped since she arrived.

Standing next to Piper, I can't take my eyes off her, but she doesn't look at me.

Not fully, but now and again, she flicks her dark eyes to mine, quick and sharp like she feels the weight of it too.

We're three drinks in when I pull her to me, my hand going around her waist, and I lean my chin on her shoulder as Tony tells her about medical school.

I swear he could talk under wet cement. I slide my hand to sit just above her jeans and slip my finger inside, running my fingers across her smooth skin, following the goosebumps that arise from my touch.



“So, you two are a thing?” Lydia asks a little too sarcastically for my liking. She’s been quiet with her friends since Piper arrived. I feel Piper tense beneath my hand.

“No,” Piper answers before I can. It’s the truth, but her words blister angrily across my skin.

“Looks like it,” one of Lydia’s friends adds.

“Does it matter to you what we are?” Piper asks Lydia.

“Was curious since, you know, Ezra doesn’t do anything serious and tends to fuck them and leave them.”

I pull my hand away from Piper, not sure exactly how I plan to tell Lydia to keep her opinions to herself, or she’s gone for good, but Piper speaks first, yet again. “Does it bother you that you aren’t the one he’s fucking?” she asks.

Lydia blinks, caught off guard. I bite down a grin, watching Piper work.

“He’s kissed me, just so you’re aware,” Lydia sneers, and I have to fight off rolling my eyes.

“Do you want a medal for that?” Piper asks.

Lydia’s face goes red, then she says, “You seem like a real bitch.”

“I am,” Piper replies proudly.

I bite back my comment and let her handle it herself, even though I want to stop it. But, apparently, nothing I have been saying to Lydia has sunk in. So, she deserves what she gets.

“Lydia,” one of her friends says. “Let’s go, this party is boring.”

Lydia glances back at us. “It won’t last. He doesn’t know how to do relationships,” she throws out.

“You have some real fucking issues,” Piper says.

“Oh, how so?” Lydia steps closer.

Tony goes to say something, but I shake my head at him.

“I mean, clearly, you’re angry that your boss doesn’t want to fuck you and are annoyed because he wants to fuck me.”

“I could have him if I wanted.”

“Could you?” Piper asks, then looks over her shoulder at me. “Do you want to fuck her?”

“No,” I answer, looking Piper dead in the eye.

I want to fuck her .

And no one else.

“You sound like such a whore,” Lydia says, and before Lydia can turn to leave, Piper lifts a gun and points at Lydia’s head.

The fuck? Where in the hell did that come from?

Everyone around us goes silent.

“Say I’m a whore again, I dare you.” Piper’s voice is calm, but I have a feeling that’s just her when she’s angry.

Violent.

Fierce.

Intense.

And I love it. But I’d prefer her to take that anger out with her fists and put that gun back where she drew it from.

“Piper. Play nice.” Lucas’ voice comes from behind us.

“Why should I when you don’t mind cleaning up the mess, Lucas. Maybe this time it will be a blonde’s mess,” Piper replies, never taking her gaze off Lydia.

“Fine. As long as it doesn’t spray all over the top shelf, then go ahead and shoot her for all I care,” Lucas calls before he walks away again.

Yeah. No. That’s not going to happen.

“Piper,” I say her name, wanting to reach for her. Afraid that if I touch her, it’ll fuel her anger more. I truthfully don’t think Piper would shoot Lydia, and it’s a turn on for me watching her completely unafraid, but Lydia is scared to death.

Of course, she doesn’t pay me a lick of attention as she smiles at Lydia, and her hand doesn’t falter or shake in the slightest. “No words now?” she taunts.

“Y-you’re c-crazy,” Lydia stutters as one of her friends starts to cry.

“You would do best to remember that in the future.” Piper pulls her gun away and tucks it into the waistband at the front of her pants.

“Man, she is badass,” Tony says, while I shake my head.

Lydia looks at me with unshed tears in her eyes before she hurries out the door, basically running, her friends following closely behind.

I pull away from Piper.

“If you follow them, I won’t be standing here when you return,” she warns me.

“She could call the police,” I remind her.

“Fuck her. I dare her to.” Piper steps away, and no matter how much I want to listen to her, I can’t.

I need to check on Lydia. As of now, she still works for me, and she’s had a few too many drinks.

The last thing I want is for her to do something stupid.

Well, more foolish than opening her big mouth about something that’s none of her business.

Despite everything, though, I don’t hate Lydia and hope for the best for her, but that’s just not with me.

I reach up and grab the back of Piper’s hair, fist it, and slam my lips to hers. I kiss her fast and hard, and she opens her mouth, kissing me just as fiercely. I pull her closer to me so our bodies are touching, and then I feel the gun, the reminder to move my ass

and check on Lydia. I pull back.

“Stay,” I tell her before I turn and walk out the door. I catch Lydia at the front, her hands waving everywhere. Black streaks down her face. I wanted her to get what she deserved, but fuck, she’s clearly, and rightfully distraught.

She spots me and stops. “Go away, Ezra.”

“Are you okay?” I ask, ignoring her.

“Am I okay? Your crazy girlfriend had a gun to my head!” She screams so loud that someone in the street stops and looks our way.

“Go home. You’re fine. I’m sorry.” I wave her off, hoping she’ll get pissed, shut up and storm off.

“I’m not going home. I’m going to the police. I need to put a restraining order on her. She can’t come near me again.”

Shit.

“I’d suggest you don’t do that.”

She spins on me. “Why? She’s just a whore.”

“Don’t call her that.”

“Okay, she’s a bitch who doesn’t work.” Lydia turns and storms off, and I watch her go and hope to God she doesn’t go to the police station.

Opening the door and walking back inside, I find my brother sitting at the bar, his

phone in hand as he plays some game. Scanning the bar, Piper's nowhere to be seen.

"She left, told me to tell you to have a happy birthday," he says, looking up from his phone. "She's hot, that one." He smiles.

Lucas walks out, cigar in hand, as he approaches. He hands the cigar to me. "Happy birthday, and thanks for the show."

"Where is she?" I call out after him.

"Oh, she's long gone. You pissed her off." He chuckles. "I like it."

I look at the cigar, and back to him, accepting his lighter when he offers.

Happy motherfucking birthday to me.

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*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:08 am*

### Chapter Nine

#### PIPER

We're all at the lake house the following Sunday when Lucas says, "Your little boothang has been coming into my work and annoying me." Chanel, Lucas' better half, hits him in the arm.

"Be nice," she scolds.

"I am, woman, can you not tell?" He winks at her and looks back at me. "If he comes in one more time, be prepared for me to give him your number."

"You don't have my number." I smile at him. Lucas smiles back, and it's not a kind smile. Smiles from Lucas usually aren't.

"Don't I?" He raises his brows.

"Um, he may have taken it from my phone," Chanel says apologetically. "Sorry." She hides behind him.

I huff out a breath. "Delete my number," I tell him.

"No. What if I want to spam you?"

"You did that last time. It's why I have a new number. Dickhead."

“Wren, back to your father,” Sailor says to her daughter as she chases after her uncle Joey. She pouts but does as asked, and Sailor sits beside me. “Is Lucas being mean to you?” Sailor asks. “I can always tell Keir.”

“I was not being mean,” Lucas says defensively.

“So, tell me about him.” She bumps my shoulder with hers.

“He’s a mechanic,” Lucas answers for me.

“You know him?” Sailor asks.

“Nope, but he works for us. And now, I guess, he wants to work for Piper too. Maybe cleaning her pipes.”

“You are so lucky I don’t have my gun on me right now,” I growl out the words at him.

“Yeah, that was my rule. No more shooting family.” Sailor smiles. I guess that’s fair since I did shoot Lucas in her house. “Is he good-looking?” she asks in a lower voice.

“He’s rugged, isn’t he?” Lucas adds, and I shoot him a death glare.

Chanel stands and offers Lucas her hand. She is the only one who can calm him. “Let’s go for a walk,” she says to him.

“But I am talking,” he whines.

“Walk, Lucas. So we can make out away from prying eyes.” She winks, and he gets up without another word and practically drags her off.



“He knows what you do?” Sailor asks. “That would be the biggest issue.”

“He does, but I’m only fucking him. Nothing more,” I tell her, keeping my face averted.

Sailor is one of those people you would hate to lie to.

She is caring but hard when she needs to be.

Though with Keir—the most dangerous and deadly man I’ve ever known—she could tell him to jump, and he would listen to her and ask how high.

“Do you want something more? Because if you do, that’s okay.

I know you think that because you’re the only female in the family in such a high position, you need to stand tall and show them who you are.

But, Piper, they already know. Keir realizes how amazing you are.

So go and have a relationship, do whatever your heart desires. We will all still be here.

“I don’t want a relationship,” I try to tell her again.

“Okay, for now I’ll stop. Although I do want you to tell me how he is in bed.” She nudges me with her shoulder again.

“Sailor.” She laughs at the sound of Keir’s voice.

“Tell me I didn’t just hear you asking how another man is in bed.

” He barks out a growl before he leans down and picks her up.

“I’ll show you to never ask about another man again.

” He throws her over his shoulder, carrying her back inside while she giggles.

I sit here and wonder if I take her advice, will I end up ever having what they do?

\* \* \*

My apartment is small and homey. I enjoy it.

I’m not one to have company over often, and to be honest, I prefer it that way.

I didn’t grow up as an only child, but it sure did feel that way.

My brother was younger than I and always expected to go into the family business, and sometimes, I don’t think he even wanted it.

I did, though.

I loved it.

Usually it’s the firstborn, if you are a man, that is.

And I, clearly, have the wrong parts for that.

So I spent a year with my father in Italy, and without him knowing it, I learned as much as possible.

He assumed that a woman would never be interested in this life.

But I was always better than my brother.

I was a better shot, faster, and I sure as shit could knock him down.

None of that mattered, though.

He was a man, and I was not.

And when I finally got the courage to return after being in Italy, I realized I didn't want to leave and would fight for my right to have this position.

I did, and I got it.

All because I wouldn't take no for an answer.

Even if my brother—and most of my male cousins—hated me for being there. I was that annoying female family member.

But now, they get that I would give them my life if it were required of me.

And my brother, Roberto. I do think about him often. No matter how bad it was between us, he was still my brother. He chose wrong and assumed he was in love. When, in reality, she was using him. In the end, love and betrayal got him killed.

It's another reason I keep to myself and maintain purely sexual relationships with men. Nothing more. But the older I get, the more I dream about a different future.

Not the kids' part, though.

I'm not sure I'll ever want that.

But the part where I wake up with someone next to me who wants to be there, who is happy to see me every day, and is fine with the type of work I do.

Because no man would have the pull to make me quit. Not that I could, anyway. Once you're in, you're in for life. I knew that from the start.

Walking to my refrigerator, I look at the picture of my father and brother, which I have stuck under a magnet. And I smile at the memory. It was a good one. There weren't many of them, but that one was great.

### Chapter Ten

EZRA

Me: Piper. Answer.

I t's a simple text. I've tried calling Piper several times, and she hasn't picked up once. I have a feeling she knows it's me and is refusing to admit it.

Me: I'll see you soon.

I wait to see if she replies. Again, nothing.

I'm locking up the shop when Joey pulls up. He gets out of the car, which is an old Mustang, and throws the keys to me.

"She's a beauty," I say. I like to call my old tough, pretty cars ladies.

"Yep. Think you can make her even prettier?" he asks, tapping the hood. "I got her for the wife, but she's a little broken now."

"Of course." I step back and open the bay doors to roll it in for the night. "How's Piper?" I ask. When he doesn't answer, I glance back at him, and he's watching me.

"Why are you asking me that?" His face is serious, and I wonder if I shouldn't have asked. These men are scary. But what's more terrifying is not getting to see that little vixen again.

“She’s ignoring me.”

“Yes, we heard. You ran off after another woman.”

I pause, my hands falling to my sides. “I did. But not in that way. She was my employee, and I wanted to ensure she didn’t press charges.” She hasn’t, which, once she calmed down, I figured she wouldn’t.

“Charges wouldn’t have stuck,” Joey tells me casually. “They have to be able to find Piper first.” He winks. “You do know how deadly she is, right? Have you checked on your employee?” He smiles as another car pulls up, then gives me a simple nod before he walks off.

Why would I need to check on Lydia?

Granted, she hasn’t been to work for a few days, but I assumed she was taking time away from the shop to get herself together.

Plus, I plan to fire her.

She thinks we’re something more than we are, and I can’t have that.

Pulling the car inside, I close up shop and call Lydia on my way out. She doesn’t answer, so I call again.

“Please stop calling,” she says when she picks up.

“You haven’t called in sick,” I say.

“No.”

“Why?”

“Because I quit.”

“Okay.” Well, that was easy.

“Can you tell her? That I quit. Please?”

“Tell who?” And I already know who she’s referring to before she tells me.

“Your girlfriend. Tell her I quit.” Lydia hangs up without another word.

I press call on Piper’s number. She doesn’t answer. I have no idea where she lives. The only address I have is what I assume is Keir’s.

I guess I’ll be paying him a visit.

\* \* \*

“You have some balls. I like it,” Lucas says as he opens the door before I can even knock. He chuckles as he passes me on his way out.

“Why are you here?” I turn around to see Keir standing there.

“Hey.” I nod. “You happen to know where Piper is?”

“Why?” he asks. Keir is a large man, but I’m just a little taller than he is, and larger. I wouldn’t say I hold the same energy as him, but he doesn’t intimidate me the way I think he should.

“I need to speak to her.”

“Piper.”

“Hey.” A blonde pops her head around Keir’s shoulder and offers me her hand. “I’m Sailor, Keir’s wife. I have heard so much about you. Come in, have a drink.”

“We don’t invite strangers in, darling. Or have you forgotten?” he growls. She smiles up at him.

“He isn’t a stranger, and you know it. Last time, you told me you cleaned a body out of a car at his shop.”

“I didn’t tell you that.”

“Oh, someone did. So anyway, come in.” She waves me inside.

“I’m dirty, and I would hate to ruin your furniture. If someone could tell Piper I need to speak to her, that would be great.” I’m about to leave when Sailor’s voice stops me.

“She’s inside. Why don’t you tell her yourself?”

“Fucking hell, Sailor.” I look back to find Keir shaking his head at Piper’s voice.

“Piper, that’s my wife,” he scolds.

“Yeah, and? She’s my best friend and just sold me out.” Keir walks away, and Sailor holds the door open.

“Come in, please.” I don’t need to be asked twice.

I step into a beautiful foyer. Their house is a brownstone and it’s incredible.



I follow Sailor past neutral walls and flowers decorating tables to find Piper sitting on a couch, her boots off and her feet tucked under her ass.

It takes her a moment to look at me, and when she does, she eyes me warily, not saying a word.

“I’ve been messaging you. I must have the wrong number,” I tell her.

“No, it’s the right one.” Piper shrugs.

“So, you’re choosing not to reply?”

“Yep.”

“Why?” She looks away, and I want to put my hand on her chin and force her to turn those black eyes back to me. I never want them off of me. “Why?” I ask again.

“You should go home. You’re interrupting family time.”

“I was invited in,” I remind her.

“Traitor,” she says under her breath to Sailor.

“Piper,” I say her name again, and when she doesn’t answer, I walk straight over to her until I’m in her direct line of sight. Leaning down, I eye her, and she avoids my gaze. “We can’t play this game forever.” That’s when her gaze moves back to me.

“You may be playing, but I checked out.” She smiles, and it’s one of those fuck-you smiles that lifts the corner of her mouth.

“You’re such a pretty little liar, dear,” I say, my tongue darting out and gliding over

my bottom lip. Black eyes watch the action, and before she can stop me, I reach out and haul her over my shoulder.

“Bathroom is the second door on the right,” Sailor calls out.

“Put me down,” Piper growls.

“No.” I open the second door, kicking it shut with my boot and locking it behind us before blocking the door with my body. I slide her down until she’s back on her feet.

“Hello, my little hell kitten.” And before I can say anything else, she pounces.

### Chapter Eleven

#### PIPER

My hands strike at his chest as I punch and punch him, but Ezra is big, all this solid-packed muscle. My knuckles burn, and likely will bruise, but he takes it for a minute or so before he grips both of my wrists, and tugs me into him.

“You’ve been avoiding me,” he accuses, tilting his head a little closer to mine.

I should demand he let go of me and take a step back, but I’m stuck in place. Rooted as I’m plastered against his warmth. “Just sex, remember? I don’t need sex from you, so I’m good.”

“You don’t need sex from me?” He accentuates the word as his gaze drops and rolls over my body. I feel it all the way through my clothes. It’s almost burning me. Ezra moves his leg, shifting it between mine, and presses into me. I can feel him at my most sensitive part.

“Well, I’d like sex from you.”

I tilt my head back, ready to kiss him, but those beautiful, full lips don’t touch mine. They lift into that damn smirk.

He presses into me more, still holding me in place by my wrists. My entire body is heating up. The hottest area is between my legs. “Why are you avoiding me?”

“I told you,” I grit through clenched teeth.

He does not need to know I want him right now.

That would mean he wins.

And I don’t like anyone to win but me.

“No, you lied to me.” Ezra moves in, his lips coming dangerously close.

I don’t know if I can say no. I’m not sure if I want to say no.

Frankly, I’m not sure of anything anymore when it comes to Ezra.

“Let me kiss you,” he whispers. “I’ve missed those lips.

” I open my mouth to tell him another lie, but as I do, he presses his lips to mine and takes that as an opportunity.

Asshole .

But an asshole who can really kiss.

I let him kiss me because no matter how hard I try, I can’t seem to pull away.

His hands drop from mine, crawl around my waist, and draw me closer so no gaps are between us.

And my hands, the traitors, find his shirt and slide up under it to touch his warm skin and toned abs.

He makes this kind of growl in the back of his throat before he lifts, turns me around so my back is to the door, and pushes me against it. My legs wrap around his waist.

Ezra breaks the kiss and looks me dead in the eye.

“You don’t want this?” he asks. He doesn’t move, just holds me.

My vagina is basically pulsing with need.

For him . “You don’t have to say it, Piper.

Simply nod your head.” I bite my inner lip, and he takes that as my answer and goes to pull back, ready to put me down.

“I want it.” Before the words fully leave my mouth, he’s back on me. His lips skim my neck, and my legs tighten their hold.

“Was that so hard?”

“Yes!” I growl and reach for his hair, yanking it. He just smirks. “Don’t fuck with me, Ezra. I will cut your cock off.”

“Don’t make threats you won’t keep. But if you’re down there, at least kiss it before you hurt it, please.” I can’t stop the smile that tugs at my lips.

Smartass .

“If you two are fucking in there, I will kill you both.” A knock comes on the door, and I shake my head as Ezra leans in.

“We’ll be quiet,” he whispers, pushing against me.

As much as I want to say yes, I know better.

I push back and shake my head.

“No, come on.” He lets me down, but keeps his hands on my hips. “I was about to go home anyway.”

“Is this you inviting me back to your place?” Ezra asks, wiggling his brows.

“No. You have a car, don’t you? We can fuck in that.”

“I’d rather wake up to you next to me, but I’m not opposed to fucking in the car.”

“You aren’t coming back to my house,” I tell him.

“Why not?”

“Men aren’t allowed.” I smile and turn away from him.

“Your family is all men,” he reminds me as if I didn’t already know that.

“That’s different, they’re family.”

I pull the door open and step out. He follows me.

Sailor is standing there waiting. “So good to meet you, Ezra. Did you both want some drinks?”

“No, they want to go home and fuck. Like I want to fuck you,” Keir calls out. I’m used to his bluntness when it comes to her. How he has no issues with letting everyone know she’s his, and not a single soul could compete.

“Thank you for the offer. I appreciate it. But I still have to talk to Piper,” Ezra says kindly to Sailor. When he talks to me, he is never sweet. It always comes with some undertone of all the dirty things he wants to say to me.

And I like it.

“We don’t need to talk.” I wave to them, then grab my boots and slide them on before I walk out. Ezra says goodbye and follows me. I see his car and shake my head as I walk to my bike.

“You ride a motorcycle?” he asks, surprised.

“Yes,” I reply as I pick up my helmet.

“I haven’t fucked on one of those yet.”

“I have. It’s awkward,” I tell him.

Something dark passes behind his eyes. His jaw sets, and his hands clench into fists. “I’d rather you not tell me who you’ve fucked. Then, I won’t feel the need to murder anyone.”

“Okay, if you insist.” I shrug. “Just so you know, I don’t care who you’ve fucked.”

“Oh, is that so?” He steps up to me and leans down. “Care to tell why my receptionist quit?”

I smile at that.

I may or may not have paid that bitch a visit. With my gun.

She opened the door the day after our run-in at the bar, dressed in a silky pink shirt and a smile on her face. When she saw it was me, it faltered before she tried to slam the door in my face.

I'm used to people doing that to me, so I kicked it in and went inside. She shit herself and told me she would call the cops. I proceeded to tell her she'd be dead before they arrived if she tried.

She didn't.

Then I listed all her family and how I could reach them.

Easily.

Stupid bitch.



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### Chapter Twelve

EZRA.

That smile that touches her lips kills me. I can tell she's thinking of something that makes her happy, but she doesn't say what it is.

"You're a hell kitten."

"I'm far from a kitten, Ezra," she says, swinging her leg over the seat of her bike.

"But you are. You look as sweet as one, but the reality is you are probably from hell. It's that fire in you."

"I'm not sure if I should take that as an insult or a compliment," she murmurs. I shrug, hoping she'll drop the subject. At least until I get what I came for. Then I'll let her show me just how much of a hellcat she can be when I'm rutting into her like a greedy beast.

"What did you say to Lydia?"

"I paid her a visit, is all."

"You what?"

"Did you really think I would let someone disrespect me like that?" Piper shakes her head and goes to put on her helmet. "Just a warning... don't bring other women

around me. Now, if you will excuse me, I have an appointment with a purple pussy eater.”

I’m confused at first about what she’s talking about.

Is she referring to a vibrator? She must be.

I watch her ride off.

And I’m left wondering, how do I become a purple pussy eater?

“I have her address.”

I turn to find Sailor leaning against the doorjamb.

“She doesn’t want me there.”

“Are you positive?” she asks.

“No,” I answer truthfully. I’m positive Piper is confused about whatever this thing between us is. Yes, we’re technically only fucking. But there’s more, which could lead to what neither of us ever expected. Something good and solid. Something possibly forever. I know it, and she does too.

“Then here,” Sailor steps down and places a piece of paper in my hand. I’m not sure what it is until I see an address scrawled across it. I go to thank her, but she’s already inside and closing the door behind her.

Guess I have my chance to be a purple pussy eater after all.

\* \* \*

As I look through Piper's window, I note that her apartment is on the smallish side. Her bike is parked out front, so I know it's her place. I walk up to the door and knock. It takes a moment for Piper to answer, and when she does, it's not her face I see, but the barrel of a gun.

"How did you get this address?" she asks.

"Sailor," I tell her.

"I think I need to re-evaluate my friends," she mumbles.

"Do you plan to drop that anytime soon?" I ask, referring to the gun pointed at my head.

"No. Do you plan to leave anytime soon?"

"I came to see what a purple pussy eater is and if I can apply for the job." She opens the door a little wider, then looks at me blankly as she lowers the gun. Her boots are off again, and her brows are pulled together.

"Ohh," she says, and then smiles. "Sorry, that job is taken." She goes to push the door shut, but I stop the action with my foot.

"I'm serious," I insist.

"So you aren't mad about your little blonde?" Piper asks.

"Yes and no. She's still breathing, isn't she?"

"For now." She smirks. "But if she tries anything else, I won't hesitate to go back over there and finish the job."

She's jealous—just another thing I like about her.

“So feisty.” I step in without her inviting me and shut the door behind me.

“Now, how about you bring your purple pussy eater out to the kitchen and do it naked. You have two minutes before I decide what hole of yours I'm going to fuck.

” I start to remove my clothes, pulling my shirt over my head.

Her gaze falls to my chest before lowering to where my hands are now on my belt.

“Time's-a-ticking and I'm counting, Piper. ”

She turns and goes into her bedroom. I hear noises from that direction as I pull my boots and jeans off and enter her small kitchen. It's clean and tidy, and on the refrigerator is a picture of two men and some kids in another photograph.

“You need to leave after. I don't want you staying the night.”

I turn around at the sound of her voice and find her naked. She pins me with those hungry eyes, and when I glance down at her hand, I see what she has in it.

“Is that so?” I ask and tap the kitchen counter.

“I'm not a dog,” she scoffs, but walks my way. When she's standing in front of me, I reach for her hips, gripping them before I lift her so her ass is on the counter.

“I wonder if I can get you to purr.”

“The possibility is there,” she says with a smile. I like it when she smiles. I don't think she does it enough. But then neither do I.

Taking the purple toy from her hand, I can't help but kiss her. It's addictive.

She lets me, kissing me back and sliding forward so she can reach me with her body. I put the toy next to her as I bring that hand to her body. She moves closer to my touch, and I know she loves it as much as I love touching her.

I repeat—it's fucking addictive.

Sliding my hand between her legs, she opens them a little wider, and I palm her pussy, and sliding a finger through her folds, finding her already wet for me.

I take a step back so I can see her. Piper's cheeks are pink, her black hair hangs down her back, and her lips are red and puffy from my kisses.

"Pick it up and show me how you use it," I order, stepping back until I'm leaning against the refrigerator. Piper looks me over, and her gaze snags on my rock-hard cock.

"I could show you how I use that." She nods to my cock.

"Know how to use it, dear. Now pick it up and do what you're told." I tell her.

That submissive side she'll never admit she has comes out, and her tongue darts along her teeth before she does as I say. I watch as she turns it on, and the vibration comes to life. She eyes me before she slides it between her folds and places it on her clit. "How does it feel?"

"Good."

"Better than my mouth?" She shakes her head. And I smirk at that. "Good girl. Tell me, would you prefer my mouth?" I ask as she starts to slide it up and down through

her wetness. I know she's getting more and more turned on simply by the lust in her eyes.

"Yes," she says breathlessly.

"Now, how do you ask nicely?"

"Please," she adds, and I obey. Because who am I to turn down a goddess?

### Chapter Thirteen

#### PIPER

E zra takes my vibrator from my hand, but doesn't turn it off.

Instead, he kneels in front of me and pushes my legs farther apart before his mouth comes down on me.

I let a moan slip from my lips as he licks over my most sensitive part.

Dropping my head back, I feel the buzz of my vibrator before he slides it straight into me while his mouth sucks and bites my clit, making me squirm, and making a mess on my kitchen counter.

I won't be able to cook here without thinking of this again.

Son of a bitch .

He pushes the toy farther in, his tongue hot and heavy as he swirls it around my clit, and that's all it takes.

My body shudders, vision blurring at the edges.

I can't think, can't breathe, I can only feel when sensations rush me at once, fast and ruthless.

My arms can barely keep me up as it hits me like a tidal wave.

He stands and grabs me with both hands, sliding me to him like I'm a rag doll.

My hands fall to the countertop to brace myself, my ass is hanging half off the ledge, but I don't care, especially when I feel him at my entrance.

"Now, you will come again," he whispers into my ear before he bites it, tilts my hips and thrusts his cock straight into me.

He's so big that he takes up so much room, I feel almost overly full, and then his hips start to piston into me, and just like that, I come back to life when another orgasm begins to build.

How, I don't even know.

But it does.

He moves like a starved man, like he's claiming every part of me that he cannot get enough of. That he has been denied and now won't give up for anything. It's rough, hard. One hand pulls my hair, and the other almost bruises my hip.

But once again, I couldn't care less.

It feels so good to be fucked by him.

"I love it when that cunt squeezes me like a good girl," he says, and I feel it too, the way I can't help it. I'm about to come again, and he's just here fucking me like it's nobody's business, as if my pussy was made especially for him.

"Ezra."



“Yes, hell kitten?” he whispers into my ear before he bites it.

“I’m about to come.”

“Good,” is all he says before his hips move faster. He brings me to the breaking point, then stops, chuckles in my ear, and does it all over again.

And then, I finally come once more. And this time, I’m unable to move.

My body is so exhausted and happy that I could literally pass out right now.

He comes right after me and pulls out, stepping back.

Making sure to keep a hold of me, he reaches behind me, and then I feel something cold on my vagina.

He wipes me clean with a wet cloth and then drops it before he lifts me.

“You so better not have used my dishcloth for that,” I grumble.

“I’ll buy you a new one.”

“I can buy my own.” I feel him chuckle as I rest my head on his shoulder while he carries me to the bedroom.

When we enter, he doesn’t bother turning on the light.

He simply lays me down and climbs in right behind me, grabbing my leg and draping it over his thigh.

And before I can even protest that I told him he can’t sleep here, he kisses my

shoulder and slides straight back into me. I gasp and arch back against him.

“Oh, kitten. How much your cunt loves my cock is amazing.” Ezra moves slower this time, so slow that it’s absolute, pleasurable torture.

“You have a foul mouth,” I whisper.

“You love my mouth.”

I do. I really, really do.

His tempo is smooth and perfect. Ezra keeps that rhythm until I reach behind me and grip him. He gets the hint and moves faster. I gasp when I feel it hit me. All at once, my orgasm rips through me like a damn freight train.

“Fuck yeah,” he breathes out. Then he pushes in deeper a few more times before he pulls out, and I feel stickiness all over my ass.

“Did you just come on my ass?”

“Yes. Now we have to shower.”

“My pussy will be sore. Not sure if I can handle fucking in there too,” I comment, climbing off the bed.

When I look back, Ezra’s watching me, his cock still semi-hard, as I make my way to the bathroom.

“You stay there. You can shower after I’m done.

” I glance over my shoulder to find him giving me that smirk before I crank my

shower on and get in.

I clean myself up and wrap a towel around myself.

When I'm done, I walk back out to find him passed out in my bed.

His cock still has evidence of me on it.

Removing my towel, I wipe him down. His eyes flutter before he reaches up and pulls me to him.

He hugs me, and a soft snore leaves his throat just as I open my mouth to wake him, so I can tell him to let me go—because he needs to go.

I try to push away, but his arms are banded tightly around me. Giving up, I lay my head on his chest, the towel separating us, and wonder what could become of him and me.

When really, I know better.

I fall asleep.

And I dream of him.

### Chapter Fourteen

EZRA

She's gone when I wake.

Piper slept on top of me all night. I know because, at one stage, I woke up wondering why I had a raging hard-on, and it was because it knew she was right there. I didn't want to move because her soft snores were way too cute to wake her. At some point, she rolled off, and now she's gone.

Standing, I find a note on the table next to the bed.

Thanks for the sex. Show yourself out, and don't come back.

I want to laugh. Show myself out. I look around to find that she is somewhat of a neat freak. I wonder if when she comes into my shop, she finds it annoying that tools and shit are scattered everywhere.

Going straight for the shower, I wash and then find my clothes folded up on the kitchen counter. After dressing, I open Piper's pantry and see everything in order and labeled. Looking in the refrigerator, I find the same.

Grabbing the bacon and eggs, I locate the frying pan just as the front door opens.

"Why are you still here?" Piper asks, walking in with a coffee. Her gaze falls to what's in my hand. "Are you cooking with my stuff?"

“Yes. Are you hungry?” She holds up the coffee in her hand. “That’s not food. Sit. I’ll cook.”

“I only allow you to tell me what to do in the bedroom,” she grumbles, but then does as I say. I smirk as I turn back and put the bacon in the pan. “Did you see my note?”

“I did. You need better etiquette on how to host guests,” I reply.

“I hate guests.” I look over my shoulder at her to see that she’s watching me like a hawk. Her leg is pouncing up and down as if she’s nervous.

“Is this annoying you?” I ask, nodding to what I’m doing.

“Yes, a little.”

“Why?”

“Because I’ve been on my own for a while, and I like it that way.”

“Who are the people on the fridge door?” I ask, motioning to the picture of the two men.

“My brother and my father. My brother is dead.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be, he brought it on himself. Turned his back on the family, so he died.” She shrugs.

“He was still your brother.”

Something passes over her face before she looks away. “The kids are Keir’s kids. They are the best.” She smiles softly.

“I take it you don’t invite them over often?” I chuckle and continue cooking.

“No. I’d rather go there. I like their place. Sailor is clean, and she’s my best friend.”

“She seems nice,” I say.

Mental note— I must remember to thank Sailor the next time I see her for telling me Piper’s address.

“She is. When I came back into this world, Sailor was the first to accept me. She knew how badly I wanted to prove myself and was my cheerleader in every sense of the word.”

“Sounds like a good friend.”

“Yeah, she was until she betrayed me.” I remove the bacon and crack an egg into the pan.

“Betrayed you?” I ask, confused.

She waves a hand at me. “Yes, she gave you information on me. I consider that a betrayal,” Piper says grumpily, causing me to smile. And if I’m not mistaken, there’s a hint of one ghosting her lips, too.

“How do you like your eggs?” I ask.

“Running. Something you should do.”

“I’m content not to.”

“Of course you are.”

I find the plates, dish up her food, and place hers in front of her. “I can say my dinner was delicious, and I hope breakfast is as good.”

“Dinner?”

“Yes, you.” I wink at her, and she looks away, shaking her head. I watch as she stares at her food.

“I can’t eat it.”

“Why, is it not runny enough?” I look down and find it’s fine.

“It’s touching.”

“Touching?”

She points to the bacon, which is touching the eggs.

“Oh.” I get it. I reach for her plate and take it away. She doesn’t say anything. I cook what would have been my egg how she likes it and make sure nothing is touching when I plate it up. I set the plate down in front of her. She doesn’t say thank you, but she does eat it.

“Before you leave, put everything back where it was,” she says as she bites into a piece of bacon. I watch her eat, fascinated with her mouth.

“I will.”

“Do you know how to use a knife?” she asks. “Or a gun?”

“Yes, and yes. My father was a sharpshooter. I’m a damn good shot too.”

“So why do you fix cars?”

“You’d prefer me to go out and kill people?”

Piper shrugs her shoulders. “Would be easier.”

“What would be?” I question.

“If you were a little more...” She thinks for a moment, then whispers, “Bad.”

“You don’t think I’m bad enough?” I ask, leaning into her personal space.

Piper looks up at me as she chews her food. “You’re a nice guy.”

“You think I’m nice?” I smirk, and she rolls her eyes.

“Trust you to take that as a compliment.” She stares at her food.

“Would you like it if I cut people up for a living, possibly killed someone because they looked at you wrong?”

“Yes,” she says without hesitation.

“Can’t say I would kill someone.” My hand slides around her throat, and I tilt her head back so she has to look up at me. “But if another man ever touches you, I’m an excellent shot.”



“Talk dirty to me.” She breathes, her chest heaving. I can’t help but lean down and kiss her lips.

“I knew you loved it.” I let her go and then tidy my mess before I leave. “I’ll be back tonight,” I tell her, putting my shoes on.

“Don’t.”

“Be ready by eight. I want to go out.”

I don’t give her time to argue as I stride out the door.

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*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:08 am*

### Chapter Fifteen

PIPER

“Y ou can’t ignore me,” Sailor says as we sit at the nail salon while her nails are being polished.

“I can, and I will.”

“I bet he stayed the night. Tell me, did he?”

I turn and eye her. “He did.”

She smiles. “See, I did it for the greater good.”

“I don’t want more from him.”

“But why?” Sailor asks, confused.

The nail technician pulls Sailor’s hand, and Sailor apologizes. Keir has the kids, and I agreed to this days ago, but now I regret it. The lady rubs something on my feet, and I squirm from the action.

“Why is it hard to believe that I don’t?”

She shrugs. “It’s not. You’ve never really wanted more from people anyway. And you sleep with men maybe twice, but never take it too far.”

“I’ve had a few relationships. I just tend not to share them.” She raises a brow at me. I tell Sailor almost everything. I can’t help it. I trust her—a lot. If I needed someone in a dire situation, I know I could call her. She would put everything down and come. She has loyalty like no other.

“All I’m saying is, he knows the world. He may not be a stone-cold killer, but he sure as hell has eyes for you.”

“He’s a little rough in bed,” I tell her, and her eyes widen.

“Rough?” She leans in. “Tell me more.”

“He likes to talk dirty. I don’t think any man has done that to me before. He likes to grab my throat. He bites hard enough that he leaves marks.”

The nail lady looks up at me and smiles. “Kinky men are fun,” she says, and Sailor laughs, covering her mouth.

“Amen to that,” Sailor agrees. “The things Keir does with his mouth...”

“I do not want to hear that! At all,” I tell her, shaking my head.

“Just saying. When did he leave then?” Sailor asks.

“After he made me breakfast.”

“Did you eat it? We know how particular you are with food.” Only Sailor gets my food thing. She automatically tells whoever is cooking at her house how to plate mine if she doesn’t do it herself, and is discreet about it. And for that, I am eternally grateful.

“I did, but after I told him I couldn’t eat it and why. He didn’t ask a single question. Just got up and made another plate for me. It was good.” I squirm again when the nail lady starts to massage my leg. “He’s a good guy.

“All the more for you to see him again. Tell me you are seeing him again.”

“I am.” I pick up my phone and check the time. “Now.” I smile and wonder if he’s knocking at my door right now.

“What do you mean by now ?” she asks.

“He gave me a time when he’d come back to pick me up. I told him no, but he didn’t listen.” I shrug.

“Piper,” she scolds.

“What?” I smile as my phone starts buzzing.

“Who is it?” Sailor asks.

“It’s Lucas. I swear to God, I need to get a new number and not tell Chanel.”

“You love Chanel.”

“I do, but she told Lucas my number, and now he spams me. He just sent me a GIF of a goat making some stupid noise. He’s a dickhead.” Sailor laughs as I turn my phone off and set it back down. If Keir needs me, he’ll call his wife.

“Lucas is...” Sailor pauses. “Lucas.” She shrugs.

“Yeah, you like him. I, on the other hand, could kill him.”

“Well, considering how many times you have shot at him and tried to stab him, we get that.” She laughs. “Also...” She looks away. “I’m pregnant.”

“Again?” I whisper.

“Yep. And I haven’t told Keir yet.”

Oh. “Do you plan to?”

“Yes, tonight.” She bites the inside of her lip. “He wants more kids, and I wasn’t sure I did. But...” She shrugs, then smiles. “I think I’m excited.”

“You should be. It’s a blessing. You have the best kids. And you and Keir are the best parents.”

\* \* \*

Ezra is at my door when I get home. It’s late. Way past the time he told me to meet him.

When his gaze lands on me, I feel guilty.

For just a second.

But then I brush it away.

It was his idea, and I told him no, so he can deal with the consequences.

“I called,” he says.

“I didn’t answer, obviously.”

“Why?”

“I turned my phone off.”

Ezra runs a hand through his hair, pushing it back, and it causes his biceps to flex.

His phone starts ringing, and when he pulls it from his pocket, he stares at it momentarily before putting it to his ear.

His expression drops as he listens to whoever is on the other end of the line, and then his gaze fixes on me.

I don't know how to read him well enough to understand why he's looking at me like that, but it makes me want to reach out to him.

“I'll be there.” He hangs up. Then his eyes trace me up and down before he shakes his head. “I don't have time for your games,” is all he says before he turns and heads down the hall.

Okay, that was confusing as hell.

“Ezra,” I call out. He stops and turns back to me.

“Are you...” I can't even say it. So the words die on my lips.

“Fuck off, Piper.” He storms off.

Holy shit. A part of me wants to chase Ezra, while the other part wants to shoot him for talking to me like that. Stepping up to my door, I find a single rose lying on the floor where he was sitting. I pick it up and take it inside with me. And then I throw it in the trash.

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*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:08 am*

### Chapter Sixteen

EZRA

The plane ride was bad. The car ride was even worse. I didn't bring anything with me. There was no time to stop at home. I left straight from Piper's for the airport.

Walking into the hospital, I find the first person I can and ask where I can find him.

My brother was in a serious crash, and they mentioned his legs.

"You should probably come." Those words continue to echo in the back of my head as they did all the way here.

I hate them.

I don't love many things in this world, but I sure as shit love him.

Walking into the hospital room, I find him hooked up to so many machines, making so many sounds, it takes me a minute to even recognize him. His face is badly bruised.

"Please. You can sit with him." A nurse walks in and goes over to him. "Are you family?" she asks.

"Yes. His brother. His only family."

“Good. It’s best to have family around in these times.”

“How are the others?” I ask, not even sure if she knows.

She looks up at me with sympathetic eyes. “Tony was the only one badly injured. The others are all very lucky.”

“Will he walk again?” I ask.

“I’ll get the doctor to discuss it with you. I’m not sure I am the correct person to talk to about it.”

“Just tell me. Will my brother walk again?” I ask in frustration. “Please. This is my brother we’re talking about. I need to know.”

“From his chart, it seems no. I’m sorry.” She whispers, and I gulp around the lump in the back of my throat.

“He wanted to be a doctor,” I tell her. “He’s smart.” She glances at him and back at me before she walks out, telling me she’ll get a doctor to speak with me.

I sit next to Tony, touch his hand, and tell him everything will be all right.

Though now, not even I am sure of that.

\* \* \*

He did something to his spine—something bad—that will put him in a wheelchair for the rest of his life.

It breaks my damn heart because how is he going to be a doctor in a wheelchair? Is it



even possible for him to do so? I stay by his side all week. He wakes and then drifts back off easily, barely saying a few words.

When he does fully wake, his face tells me he knows without me having to say it.

I'm not sure I want to say it.

To break his spirit like that.

I stay for another week, and his sadness eats away at me every day.

"You need to go. I'm going to do rehab and learn how to use the wheelchair. Go home," he tells me.

"I want to be here for you."

"You sitting here every day being a big saddy is depressing."

"I'm not sad. I'm glad you're doing better," I tell him honestly.

"How's Piper?" he asks, changing the subject. Truth be told, I haven't messaged her, and she hasn't reached out. She has my number. I know she does because I messaged her that night asking her to call me.

"Why are you asking?" I move around the bed, and his eyes track me.

"You like her, and you hate most people."

"I do not," I scoff.

He laughs. "You do, and that's okay." I look at him.

“I like it that I’m one of the people who have you in my corner, Ezra.

” I nod, not sure what else to say. “Now I need you to go, and I’ll call you when I have an update, or if I need help with anything.

You can’t do much while I’m in here. You have a shop to run. ”

“I’ll be back every weekend,” I inform him.

“Stop! I’m not a child. I’ll call you when I need you to come back.” I stare at him silently. “And call Piper,” he adds.

“I told her to fuck off the last time I saw her,” I admit.

“Well, that wasn’t very friendly.” He laughs. “I’m sure you can find a way to make her forgive you.”

“Yeah, I guess. We will see.”

The nurse walks in, and Tony talks to her like they’re old friends. None of his friends who were in the accident with him have bothered to come in and check on him. And I know they’re all home and doing well. I may have done some digging. Assholes.

“I’m going to buy you a new phone,” I tell him, grabbing my jacket and walking out.

I find the closest shop and buy him a new phone with a new phone number.

When I step back into his hospital room, the nurse who was there when I left is smiling brightly at him as she leans a little too close.

When she spots me, she turns and hurries off, a blush on her face.

“Do you think I can still have sex?” he asks as I hand him the new phone. He grips it and looks up to me with hopeful eyes.

“I didn’t ask the doctor. But I’m sure there’s some way you can. You still have a mouth.” He nods, happy. “Who was that?” I ask, referring to the nurse. I’ve seen her a few times.

“We were in med school together.” His words hit me hard. “I like her.”

“Talk to your doctor. It might be too soon to even think about sex, but you never know.”

He nods in agreement.

I leave that night.

Ready to go back home, but wishing I could take Tony with me.

### Chapter Seventeen

PIPER

“I ’m not going,” I tell Joey over the phone.

“You don’t have a choice. Just go,” he replies, and I hear him huff out a breath.

“I don’t want to go. Can’t Lucas do it himself?” I grumble.

“He is doing it himself. You need to pick him up. And no one else can know we go there. Only the four of us do, so you have to pick him up. He can’t Uber it from there, you know this. And quit being a pain the ass.”

“I fucking really hate you right now.”

“Yeah, well. It’s been over a month, Piper. I’m sure he’s moved on. I think it’s time you did as well.

“Shut up,” I snap, then hang up and drive to the last place I want to go tonight.

His lights are on, and his door is open.

I don’t see him immediately when I pull up, but I spot him when I get out of the car.

He’s shirtless and covered in grease. His hair is a perfect mess, and his jeans sit low on his hips.

It takes him a moment to notice a car has pulled up, and he squints out the window.

I watch as he grabs a rag and wipes his hands before he walks out and sees me leaning against my car.

“Piper,” he says my name, and it makes something inside of me tingle. My gaze soaks him in. His tanned, toned stomach is something I dream about scratching my nails down.

“Hi, Ezra.”

“Is there a reason you’re here?” he asks.

“Waiting for Lucas,” I tell him, and he nods and turns his back on me, heading back into the shop. “You aren’t even going to say hello?” I call out after him.

He stops and turns back to me, stuffing his rag in his back pocket. “Do you even want me to say hello? You’ve been avoiding me for weeks.”

His words hurt because they’re true.

A car revs behind me, and before I even look, I know it’s Lucas. He pulls up, and Ezra and I go dead silent.

Lucas smiles as he gets out of the car and throws Ezra the keys. Ezra looks at me one last time before he turns and walks back into the shop.

“Did you two fuck? Because this energy is really fucking awkward,” Lucas says, opening my passenger door. I glance back at Ezra to find him doing whatever it was he was doing before I pulled up. He doesn’t even look my way.

“Did you fuck Chanel today?” I ask Lucas.

“Yes. In the ass this morning, if you must know.”

“Way too much information.” I scrunch my nose.

Getting in the car, I drive off and don’t look back.

Lucas doesn’t shut up the whole way to his house, and I’m so fucking thankful when he’s finally out of my car and I have peace and quiet once more.

\* \* \*

“You should take one, anyone,” Adora says the following day while I’m in her bookstore. “They’re all different types of romance. You want dark? Sweet. I got you.”

“I wouldn’t know where to start,” I tell her, sitting behind the desk as she walks around like the boss she is—upright back, dressed in a business suit, and her demeanor screams all business.

All these men have been lucky enough to marry amazing women.

Joey and Adora, though rocky at the start, are made for each other.

Even if she was married before, had a kid with someone else, and never told him.

Now? Well, now they are stronger than ever.

He purchased a bookstore for her and proceeded to stock it full of romance books.

Now, if that isn't top-tier romance goals, I don't know what is.

"Okay, so who's been your best fuck?" Adora asks, smiling at me with a stack of books in her arms.

"So vulgar." I grin. She blushes but brushes it off. "Ezra," I answer, and her brows raise.

"Oh, I've heard about him."

"Sailor needs to be quiet," I grumble.

"Oh no, that was all Lucas." She laughs.

"Of course it was."

"So, what does he do that you like? Let me gauge what type of romance would best suit you." I sit there quietly, staring at her. "Do you like to be choked?" I lick my lips. "Okay, yes. What else did he do that you like?"

"He talks dirty to me."

She claps her hands.

"Oh, a dirty talker. Okay, that's easy." She hurries off and then comes back a minute later. "Here. It's not too dark but just enough that you'll enjoy the story."

"I don't know if I want to read this," I tell her, examining the roses on the cover.

"All women say that until they pick up that one book that will get them hooked, then it becomes an obsession." I open the book, and the first line reads, "His cock was so

hard.” I slam it shut, and Adora laughs at my reaction.

“Just give it a chance. Trust me.” She wanders off again, then returns as I’m skimming through the book.

“Care to tell me about Ezra? No pressure, but he is the first man you’ve been with whom anyone has had anything to say about. I mean, you are such a badass that we all know you don’t need a man for protection. But it must be nice to have someone who fills those needs.” She smiles.

“I saw him for the first time in a month last night, and it was awkward. It’s over,” I say.

“Oh.” Adora’s disappointed eyes stare at me.

“Yep.” I nod and think about last night and how distant he was toward me. Is that how I always am with him? “If you want to see him again, maybe message him?”

“ Adora .”

She holds up her hands at my scolding tone. “Okay, okay. I won’t be Sailor and interfere. But you know, when you say his name, something inside of you sparkles. Just saying.” Adora shrugs her shoulders before she goes back to stocking the shelves.

I sit, staring at the book that starts with sex, and wonder if I’ll like it.

Would it fill a need that only Ezra has been able to fill?

I am not sure.



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*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 9:08 am*

### Chapter Eighteen

EZRA

Tony lives with me now. I hired a full-time day nurse and a night nurse, and he's doing better. However, it hurts me as I watch those moments when depression hits him. Tony was always full of life. And now, he is a shell of who he once was.

"I want to do something," Tony says from his wheelchair.

"You can, but you must give yourself time to heal."

He waves me off. "There's a law school not far from here. I want to go."

"Why?"

"Because if I can't practice medicine, at least I can do law from a chair."

He's right, I guess. Most lawyers sit in their offices, apart from when they're in a courtroom.

"This is something you're sure you want to do. I mean, we can wait until you're feeling better."

"It is." He nods.

"Okay, well, lawyer Tony, it is."

His smile doesn't quite reach his eyes, but it's better than it has been the last week he's been here.

\* \* \*

"You forget whose bar this is?" Lucas asks as I approach. It's late, Tony is asleep, and I just really need a fucking drink. The last time I was here, Piper got mad at me, and I lost an employee. Lucas throws his cigar to the ground and steps up to me.

"Is it open?" I ask.

"It sure is, but I'm not sure you want to go in."

"Why?"

"Piper is in there, drunk. And some guy—" Before he can finish the sentence, I pull open the door and stalk inside.

It's darker than the last time I was here, and the jukebox is playing girly music.

When I look at the dance floor, I see her.

Leather pants, high heels, and her hair piled up on top of her head.

She's swaying her hips to the music while the guy behind her puts his hands on her waist.

She doesn't push him off.

And that makes me fucking see red.

“Maybe you should leave,” Lucas says as he eyes Piper. “She does this. Likes to have fun with men.” His words sink in, but he’s wrong. She likes the company of men, true, but it’s not what she craves or wants. I’m what she wants, craves, and needs, even if she won’t admit it to herself.

I continue to watch her dance, and I clutch my hands at my sides, digging my fingernails into my skin until I make them bleed.

“Oh, he’s trying to kiss her neck,” Lucas announces.

And that’s it.

I move.

And before I can even stop myself, I’m in front of her.

Piper’s eyes are closed, and her mouth is pressed into a thin line. I step up closer, almost touching her.

“Man, fuck off,” the who’s about to lose his hands for having them all over her says.

“I’d remove your hands before I do it for you,” I growl.

Piper’s eyes fling open at my words, and her hips stop gyrating. Those devil eyes of hers find mine.

“No, you fuck off. We’re having fun. Aren’t we, sweetheart,” the asshole says.

I reach for her, grab her by the waist, and pull her into me. Her body comes easily, and her hands rest on my chest as the guy’s hands fall to his sides.

“We’re leaving.”

“Like fuck you are,” the guy says. And when I look back at him, I see a gun pointing at my face. Piper just smirks. I move her to my side, and her hands stay on my chest.

“You don’t want to do that,” I warn.

“No?” he says, smiling. “I think I do.” I watch as he moves his finger to the safety, and before he can even get it there, I disarm him and now have the gun in my hand, pointing at his head.

“You piece of shit, I’ll kill you for this.

” I aim lower and shoot him in the foot.

He screams, and I drop the gun. Then I pick Piper up and walk out with her, passing Lucas on the way.

“I’ll clean up your mess, but it will cost you.”

I say nothing. Just give Lucas a simple nod.

When we get to my car, I set her down and open the passenger door.

“I—” She turns and vomits all over the sidewalk. I grab her ponytail to keep it out of the way, and when she’s finished, she wipes her mouth with the back of her hand.

“You good now?”

Piper nods, and I grab a bottle of water from the back seat and hand it to her. She rinses her mouth with it before she climbs into the car. I lean in and buckle her up,

catching a whiff—she smells of that man , alcohol, and vomit.

“Why did you come?” she asks, her eyes glassy.

“Drink the water,” I tell her, handing it back to her.

She takes it but eyes me. “You have the prettiest eyes,” she whispers. I look at her then and wonder how I can walk away from her.

“Yours or mine?” I ask.

“Yours,” she says and then turns in the seat. I watch as she brings her legs up and tucks her knees to her chest, her heels barely hanging on her toes. I take the water from her as she closes her eyes.

Then I close the door and walk around to my side.

And by the time I slide into the driver’s seat, she’s softly snoring.

### Chapter Nineteen

PIPER

I don't know where I am.

I know it's not my bed. My bed isn't this comfortable. It's definitely not soft, warm and inviting. So much so, I want to burrow under the covers and stay here forever. Regardless, I'm way too afraid to open my eyes in case I'm at some stranger's place, and I have no memory of his name.

Where is my knife? I slap a hand on my leg only to find my pants are missing.

Shit! I slept with someone. Someone who wasn't Ezra.

Fingers squeeze mine. The touch is familiar, but my mind is too groggy to recognize who it is.

"Your knife is beside you." My eyes spring open at the raspy voice to find Ezra half asleep next to me, holding my hand. "Were you contemplating stabbing me with it?"

"I..." I'm so confused. Why am I here? And how did I get here? Sitting up, I see I still have on my top, and reaching between my legs, I find my underwear is still in position.

"Why are you touching your cunt?" he asks.

“Did we have sex?” I question.

Ezra scoffs and stands. I see then that he’s wearing a pair of boxers and nothing else. He doesn’t answer me as he heads to his shower. I hear him turn it on and wonder why he never responded.

Getting up from the bed, I find my heels and pants on the floor. Slipping them on, I walk into the bathroom to see Ezra with his head under the water, one hand braced against the wall, and he just stands there.

“Did we have sex?” I ask again.

Ezra turns to look at me, and those emerald eyes lock on mine. “No, I don’t fuck women who can’t speak a sentence. And if I did fuck you, you would remember it.” He turns away and runs his hands over his face.

“Why are you so mad?”

“It could have to do with the guy you would have gone home with if I hadn’t come to get you.” He turns, and I see his cock is semi-hard. My gaze locks on it as he turns the shower off and steps out. He’s now standing in front of me.

“Move.”

“We aren’t an item. You can’t be mad at me for another guy wanting me.”

“Move,” he says again, water dripping down his tanned skin.

“Is that all that’s making you mad?”

“Move,” he repeats, a little louder this time.

I cross my arms over my chest and glare up at him.

“No.” We stand in a stalemate for what seems like ages, when all of a sudden, he leans forward, grips my hips, lifts, and moves me to the side before he puts me back down. He grabs a towel, dries himself off, and walks straight past me without another word.

I turn and stare at myself in the mirror.

My eye makeup is all smudged, and I look like I had a big night, which, clearly, I did.

I close my eyes and take a deep breath as I hear him moving around in his bedroom.

After washing my face, I find his toothpaste and put it on my finger before I rub it over my teeth.

I can taste how bad my mouth must smell.

Fixing up my hair, I walk out to see Ezra's no longer in his bedroom.

Heading out to the kitchen, I find him cooking.

“Maybe we should talk.”

“You should probably leave. Your friend is almost here.”

“My friend?” I ask, confused.

“Sailor. She's coming to collect you. I have a busy day and can't be chasing after you.”



The smell of bacon hits me.

“Piper.” I turn at the calling of my name, and my knees go weak, my heart stuttering when I see his brother in a motorized wheelchair.

“I didn’t think I would ever see you again.

It’s been too long.” I didn’t even notice his brother at the dining table.

I give him a puzzled look, then turn back to Ezra, who isn’t paying me any attention.

He plates up the food and brings it to his brother, placing it in front of him.

Then he dishes up more and slides the next plate on the counter to me.

I notice it’s a plate that has dividers built into it.

Did he get this just for me?

“Eat before you leave. I’m sure you need something in that stomach since you threw everything up last night.” I look at the bacon, and my mouth starts watering.

“Are you eating?” I ask Ezra. He puts the pans in the sink and washes them up without once glancing at me. I take a bite of bacon and moan. Gosh, that tastes good. He wipes his hands on his jeans, grabs a set of keys, then taps his brother’s shoulder as the front door opens and a nurse walks in.

Smiling, she offers me a small wave and says something to Ezra, which gets a small smile from him before he walks out the door without a goodbye to me.

“Oooh, he’s mad at you,” Tony says.

The nurse goes to him and sits down next to him. She starts checking stuff, and I give him a questioning look, wanting an explanation. “Bad car accident. Now I’m fucked and can’t walk. Luckily for me, I have a great big brother,” he explains.

“How long ago?” I ask.

But before he answers, I work out exactly when it was. It was when Ezra got that phone call when he was with me. He had left upset, angry, and in a rush. Damn, I get it now. “Where is he going?” I hear the rev of his engine as he leaves.

“Probably work.”

Of course.

“Thanks.” I wave to Tony and decide I should go and wait out front for Sailor.

When I walk past the front door, I find my apartment keys and phone waiting there for me. Picking them up, I press call on his number.

He doesn’t answer.

### Chapter Twenty

EZRA

Days go by, and it's easy to get lost in which day it is when you love your job. However, finding a dead body again is not what I call fun.

The days blur together—oil, metal, machines. I live for it. But the stench in this one? Not motor oil. Not grease. Just a dead man.

I step back from the open trunk and slam it shut.

Fucking hell.

I sent Keir a coded message, and he told me he'd see me soon. Whomever it is, better get here soon. I want this thing out of my shop before it stinks up the place.

Ten minutes later, a knock comes from the reception area, and I almost fucking forgot I'm doing interviews this afternoon. Now that I don't have Lydia to man the front, it's becoming harder and harder for me to handle everything. So I put an ad out, and hopefully, I can find someone to replace her.

Walking into the office, I grab my rag and wipe my hands before I pull open the door to find a man standing on the other side.

I invite him in, and he tells me all about his love for cars.

He's young and seems eager to work. The interview went well, but I still have one more person to interview.

He thanks me and tells me he can start any time.

I wait for a good half an hour before another knock comes on the door. When I open it, it's a woman this time. She's wearing a red dress, and her lips are painted bright red. She smiles and offers me her hand.

"Hi, I'm Aqua. Yes, like water and the color. Weird, I know. I'm here for the interview."

"Ezra," I say, and pull my hand away. Inviting her in, I watch as she scans everything before her gaze returns to land on me.

"Is this the office?" She waves a hand around the area. She looks too put-together to want to work here. This place is neither clean nor the type of working environment I am sure she is used to.

"Yes."

"Could use a woman's touch. It's a bit dirty." She walks to the window, which overlooks the garage. She points to the car with the dead body in it. "Is that a Cadillac?" she asks, looking over her shoulder at me. "1961," she adds.

Color me impressed. This woman knows her cars.

"It is."

"Can I see it?"

“No,” I say quickly. “I like to work alone in my garage when the staff go home. I need someone to work in here and handle the calls and customers.”

“I can do that. My father was a mechanic, and he taught me a thing or two,” Aqua says with a smile. Weird name, but somehow, it strangely suits her. “So, when do I start?”

“Why would you want to work here?” I ask. Clearly, she is a woman of better taste. I have a feeling that the bag she’s holding is the expensive type, not a knock-off. I don’t know much about designers, but the two Cs indicate the branding.

“My husband died a few years back and left me with a lot of money, and now I’m bored.

I’ve done all my traveling, bought a house, tried a few jobs.

” She shrugs. “Nothing interested me until I saw your ad. And I smiled when I did...” The smile she gives me lights up her face. “It made me think of my father.”

“This is a lonely job. You’ll be by yourself most of the time. I tend to stay in the garage and don’t move around that much.”

“That’s fine,” she says. And I feel like she means it.

“Can you start tomorrow?” I ask.

She nods her head with excitement. “Are you sure?”

“Yes. I don’t mean to be rude, but I have to lock up and finish a job. Let me walk you to your car. It’s getting late.” I open the front door.

“Any type of uniform?” she questions.

“Just nothing too revealing, please. It’s mostly men who come into the shop.”

“Can do.” She nods, and I see her BMW sitting out front. “It was my husband’s car. I can’t seem to part with it.”

I look at her again. “You don’t seem old enough to be a widow.”

“Does anyone, though?”

“Point made.”

“I’m thirty. Though some mornings, I feel older.

” I don’t want to comment on her looks again, so I shut my mouth.

As she opens her car door, I see Piper’s car pull up in the driveway.

“Tomorrow at nine?” I nod as she slides behind the wheel.

Aqua glances at the car that pulled up, but drives off anyway.

I wait until she’s gone before I roll open the garage door.

Lucas nods to me as Piper walks in behind him.

“Another body, huh?” Lucas laughs. “My bad.” He winks.

He goes straight for the car as Piper rolls open a black tarp.

Both of them put gloves on before they reach in to grab the body, lifting and placing it on the tarp before they roll it up.

I watch as they heft the body between them, then take it to her car and stuff it into the trunk.

When she closes the trunk's lid, she snaps her gloves off, and Lucas climbs straight into the car.

“Who was the woman?” she asks, nodding in the direction Aqua left.

“Who was the man?” I retort.

Her nose scrunches up, and Lucas yells her name. She gets in without another word. Lucas smirks at me and waves as they leave, and she doesn't look back.

Entering the garage again, I think the car should be burned because the smell is still there, and it's overpowering. Getting my own gloves, I pry the carpet up and carry it outside to burn it.

The stench clings—to the metal, to my skin, and the back of my throat.

I haul the carpet out and toss it onto the flames.

Let the bastard burn.

Hopefully, that will rid the car of the damn rotten smell.

### Chapter Twenty-One

PIPER

“He’s mad at you again? Honestly, this is so much fun to witness,” Lucas says. “It probably has something to do with you and that guy rubbing all up on each other the other night. Let’s be honest, Ezra could have killed the guy. I would have.”

“What? Ezra shot him,” Lucas says too casually. “Middle of the dance floor. Blood all over the goddamn floorboards. Took me two hours to mop up—I should send him the bill.”

“Ezra shot who?”

“Are you dumb?” Lucas raises a brow.

“What are you talking about?” I question.

“Oh, interesting. Do you not remember?”

“I was drinking and dancing at your bar and then woke up in his bed.”

Lucas starts to laugh and shakes his head.

“Sometimes I wish I could shoot you again,” I grumble.

“Well, since your boyfriend likes to shoot people who touch you, let’s not.”



“He isn’t my boyfriend. And what do you mean he shoots people?”

He pulls out his phone as I come to a stop outside his house. Passing it to me, he presses play on a video. That’s when I see myself, hands up in the air, as I dance with some man grinding against me. I look so drunk.

And then Ezra appears.

And he’s mad.

Hellishly mad.

Ezra grabs me, and the man gets pissed. The guy then pulls a gun.

Ezra seems to smirk as he disarms the guy and turns the gun back on him.

My heart rate picks up as I watch Ezra lower the gun and shoot the man in the foot before he drops the gun, grabs me, and leads me out of the bar.

I sit there stunned and shocked. My breath catches.

I don’t even realize I’m gripping the phone tightly until my knuckles turn white.

The video cuts off, the ringing in my ears doesn’t.

“You didn’t tell me he was a sharpshooter,” Lucas accuses.

“Sorry, what?”

“In the army, he was a sharpshooter.”

“I knew of the shooting part...” I tell him.

“Yep, and he was good too.” He takes his phone back and gets out of the car. And without saying another word, he’s gone. I pull away and drive around, wondering what I should do.

Ezra looked so angry when he saw me with another man. His eyes in that video... I’ve never seen him like that. It wasn’t just anger—it was possession, like the guy had already signed his death warrant by touching me.

Does that mean he thinks about me as often as I think about him? Surely not.

We went months without a word to each other.

I get why now.

I even understand the reason he was so angry.

Without even thinking about it, I end up parked in front of his shop.

All the lights are off, and he’s gone.

\* \* \*

“I read the book,” I tell Adora.

Joey is wrapped around her, kissing her neck, as I stand on the other side of the counter in her bookstore.

“Did you like it?” she asks.

I glance at Joey, not wanting to answer her question in front of him.

She elbows him in the chest and says, “You can leave now. I have to work.”

“I can stay. I’m sure Piper can watch the shop while we work in the back room.” He winks and her cheeks redden.

“No, you go, and tonight we’ll play. Cook me dinner, too, please.”

He says something in her ear, which I can’t hear, before he kisses her and walks out.

“So, did you like it?” she asks again.

“I did,” I tell her. She claps her hands, comes around the counter, and heads to the section where she grabbed the last book.

“You read it pretty fast,” she notes.

“I was bored.”

“No Ezra to play with? I heard what happened at the bar.”

“Let me guess. Lucas?”

She nods without apology. “He’s annoying, but at least he tells me things.” She smiles as she returns to the counter and hands me two books. “This is a duet, by the way. The first will end on a cliffhanger, so you’ll need book two immediately.”

“And it’s dark?” I ask.

“Of course. It’s the type of dark you just enjoyed. This author tends to write in duets,

with a few standalones, so let me know when you want the next set.”

“Adora.”

“Hmm?” she replies as she rearranges the books on the shelves in some sort of order. To be honest, they appear to be color-coded, but I could be wrong.

“How did you know Joey was the one?”

She stops what she’s doing and turns to me. “Are you asking me because you’re confused?”

“I don’t know him well enough to know if I want more from Ezra, but I miss him when I’m not with him.”

“Well, that’s a start, I guess. However, I would suggest you spend a lot more time with him. Maybe you’ll find you don’t like the way he cooks.”

“He cooks great,” I tell her.

“Okay. Well, maybe you won’t like the way he shoots.” She winks.

“I’d probably say he’s a better shot than I am.”

“Well, maybe you don’t like the way...” She pauses. “Why don’t you just go to him and chat? Without the sex. Do that as a starting point.”

“But I really like the sex part.” Honestly, I sound like one of those spoiled rich girls who can’t get her way right now.

“Girl, don’t we all?” She winks. “It’s hard, though, when the sex is so good.”

“It is,” I whine, hopping up to sit on the counter. “I’ve had great sex before, not gonna lie. But I love the sex we have.”

“I wonder if it’s because you like him .”

“He’s growing on me.”

“Go visit him. And don’t make a move to fuck him.”

“Easier said than done,” I mumble, opening the first page of the new book. I scroll through and smile when I see words that describe a sex scene I’d like to role-play with him one day.

That thought hits me in the chest and almost knocks me over.

The thought of doing anything more with him.

How did it just so easily come into my head?

“Do you want me to come as backup? I’d like to meet him.”

“No, I got this,” I tell her, jumping down from the counter. “Maybe tomorrow. Once I finish these books.” I smile.

She laughs as I walk out of the shop.

Now, I have to work up the courage to go and visit him.

### Chapter Twenty-Two

EZRA

Aqua is amazing. Probably the best hire I've ever had. She doesn't ask questions. When I tell her what to order, she knows precisely what to do. I can honestly say I feel like I have the right fit with her.

"Got you lunch," she says as she strolls into the garage and hands me a burger.

"Thanks, you didn't have to do that."

"I wanted to talk to you, actually. Figured food was the right angle."

I wipe my hands and pull up a seat. Pushing a chair Aqua's way, she thanks me as she takes a seat in it.

"Go ahead."

"I love this shop. I really do." She smiles. "I want to know if I can buy it from you." The burger pauses at my mouth. "I mean, you can still stay on. You are amazing at what you do, there is no doubt about that. But I'd like to buy it."

"It's not for sale."

"Come on, everything has a price."

I put the burger in my lap. “Aqua, it’s not for sale,” I say again.

“Okay, what about a business partner?”

“No. I don’t need anyone else running my business with me.”

“But—”

“I’m sorry, but no. Will this be an issue going forward?”

“No, it’s fine. I can take a hint. I just really love it, you know? And what I’ve learned over the last year is... if you love something, go for it. So I was trying.” She shrugs, then unwraps her burger and takes a large bite.

“So, are you leaving?” I ask.

She shakes her head as she chews. “Oh, gosh, no. I want to stay as an owner or employee. Just figured it wouldn’t hurt to ask. I didn’t mean to offend you. I was only asking because I have too much money and I don’t know what to do with it.” She laughs.

“Must be nice.”

“You do well here. I’ve seen your books.

This place brings in good money. I’m proud to work here.

” She doesn’t know about the other money it brings in—the jobs I do for Keir that aren’t on the books.

And, yes, my business does amazingly well.

It's an incredibly well-known shop now, and for that, I am thankful.

"I also wanted to know if you wanted me to start you a TikTok, Instagram, or even a Facebook account. I saw you don't have any social media, and they can one hundred percent set things in motion for you. "

"I don't have any of that stuff."

"Yeah, but people love to see before and after's. I think it could bring in even more business and revenue."

"I'll think about it."

"I won't show your face if you don't want, but I don't reckon the ladies would complain about seeing you." Aqua laughs, and I smile.

"This is cute." I look past Aqua to see Piper standing in the garage doorway. She's in a skirt with heels so high I wonder how she can walk in them—though I know even drunk, she won't fall—but they sure do highlight those come-fuck-me legs.

"Piper." Aqua stands and walks over to Piper. Piper looks her up and down as Aqua wipes her hand up and down her shirt before she offers it to Piper. "Hi, nice to meet you. I'm Aqua."

Piper glances at Aqua's hand, then raises her gaze to me. "Am I being nice?" she asks, ignoring Aqua's outstretched hand.

"Yes," I say as I stand.

Piper nods to Aqua. "Pleasure is all yours, I presume," she says before she sidesteps Aqua and approaches me. "We need to talk."



I look over to Aqua. “Do you mind? Thanks for lunch. I appreciate it. And I’ll think about your offer.”

“It better not be sex,” Piper says, and Aqua’s eyes go wide before she runs off to the office, leaving us staring at each other.

“Want a bite?” I ask as her gaze drops to the burger in my hand. “If you close your eyes, you won’t even know the food is touching.”

“I came to talk,” she says, still eyeing the burger.

“Take a bite.”

“I’m fine.”

“Have you eaten?”

“No.”

“Have a bite, or we aren’t talking.”

“You really are bossy.” She huffs, then closes her eyes and leans forward. I bring the burger to her mouth and watch as her lips and teeth go around the top of the bun, and she bites into it. She chews as she pulls back and opens her eyes to look at me.

Those devil eyes.

“It’s good.”

“Thanks. Aqua bought it for me.”

Piper stops chewing and swallows. “You like to share what other women get you?” she questions.

“So spicy,” I tease as I sit back down and finish my burger. Piper takes the seat Aqua vacated and crosses her legs. I catch a quick flash of the pink underwear she is wearing.

“Are you going to talk to me now, or do you want to run away again?”

“I can talk,” I tell her, reaching for my drink. I take a long sip, and she sits there waiting, her long nails tapping on her bare, toned leg.

“So, you are a sharpshooter,” she says.

“Yes. I told you this.”

“You served.”

“I did.” How she found this out isn’t surprising. Keir and his team can find information on anyone, so I don’t even raise an eyebrow. Plus, I have nothing to hide from them.

“You shot that man.”

“He had his hands on you, and you were definitely too drunk to agree,” I remind her.

“So it wasn’t because another man was touching me?”

“That was part of the reason.” No point in lying to her. She would see right through it. This woman was not born yesterday—she is too damn smart for her own good.

“I didn’t like finding you eating lunch with another woman.” I stifle a laugh that jealousy, the green-eyed monster, got ahold of her again.

“She works for me.”

“Why do you only hire women?” Piper’s head drops to the side.

“I actually interviewed a man. But Aqua, believe it or not, was the best fit. And it has nothing to do with what’s between her legs.”

“It better not.” Piper leans in. “Because I have a habit of killing people who piss me off.” She winks and stands.

Stepping closer to me, she leans down, and I look up at her. “Dinner?”

“Are you asking me out?” I can’t help the twitch of my lips.

“Yes. But no sex. One date with no sex,” Piper says.

“But I like the way you taste. The way your cunt?—”

“I’ll message you where and when,” she says, cutting me off, and trying to fight a smile, but loses.

I sit there and watch as she walks out to her car.

Who knew she would be the one to ask me on a date?

My spicy little hellcat.

### Chapter Twenty-Three

PIPER

I wore a dress for him.

And it's not black.

I think that's a big step.

I'm sitting, waiting for Ezra to arrive.

I picked an outdoor location where I knew we couldn't get into too much trouble with hands sliding into places they shouldn't be in public.

I arrived early, nerves taking hold of me and not wanting to let go.

When it gets closer to the time I told him to meet me, I start to think he won't come, and that maybe he decided it was better not to be around me.

I would understand, on some level, anyway.

My life is not normal. Though neither is his, yes, some aspects are, but only this week, he dealt with a dead body in one of the cars.

That's not normal unless you're in a different field of work.

My phone buzzes, and I glance at it to see his name pop up. Opening the message, I note it is a photograph of me sitting at the table. I glance around, holding the phone and wondering where he is.

Looking back down, I type out a message.

Me: Where are you?

Bubbles appear, indicating he is texting me back.

Ezra: Spread those legs just a little, and slide your hand up your thigh. For me.

I scrunch my nose up at his words.

Me: No.

Ezra: Do it.

He's always so demanding.

I uncross my legs and drop my hand to my thighs, which are exposed thanks to my short dress. I look around again, trying to find him, but I don't see him anywhere. My hand pauses at the hem of my dress, and I sit there and wait.

"You are the most stunningly dangerous thing I have ever encountered." Ezra's words come from behind me.

I turn slightly in my seat to look at him, and his lips touch mine as I open my mouth.

My hand moves from my thigh, and his hand grips my face as he kisses me back, stealing my breath.

He pulls away, and his thumb wipes the lipstick off my lips before he walks around and sits opposite me at the table.

My eyes can't help but trace him up and down. He looks good, but he always does, even when he's covered in grease.

"You were early," he states, our knees brushing under the table.

"I was."

"Are you nervous?"

"No," I reply a little too quickly, which makes him smirk.

"And you aren't dressed in black."

"What's your favorite color?" I ask.

"Whatever color you have on."

The waiter comes over, and I order a margarita, and he orders the same with some starters to share.

"So, a date. With no sex," Ezra says, his hand landing on my thigh.

"Weren't you just mad at me?" I ask.

"I was, but you made the first move, so there's no going back now. Now I know you want it as much as I do. It's done."

"What if I was bringing you here to end it? I could have been doing that, for all you

know.”

He leans in. “You wouldn’t have spread your legs for me if that was the case.” I try to fight the smile on my lips as the waiter comes back with our drinks. Ezra pulls back, but his hand remains on my leg. “So, why no sex?”

“People should date with no sex involved,” I tell him. “I’m sure that’s a written guideline somewhere.” I pause. “Unless that’s all you want from me?”

“That’s all you wanted from me . It was you who said just sex. I just played along.” He winks.

“So you want more than sex?” I ask.

“I always have from you, Piper.”

“Even knowing who I am?”

He nods, and the waiter returns with the food and sets it on the table. I take a sip of my drink and feel like, at any minute, I may break out in hives.

“Can I get a separate plate, please?” Ezra asks the waiter. The waiter leaves and then returns with another plate. I watch as Ezra takes the calamari and fries, and separates them before he places one in his mouth. “Are you referring to your work?” Ezra asks.

I nod.

“I know what you do, Piper. People on the streets know who you are. They know you are as sharp and deadly as that knife that’s probably strapped to your thigh.” I look down at my thigh and smirk.

“Does that intimidate you?” I ask, picking up a fry, and the crunch and flavor are out of this world.

“No, because I want you to know something.” Ezra leans in and indicates with his finger for me to do the same. “I respect that you are a bad-ass bitch. Fuck, I tell people what a firecracker you are. But want to know a secret?”

“What?”

“Only you and I know this.” My eyes find his emerald ones.

“In the bedroom, you don’t rule. You are mine, and you do as you’re told.

” Ezra pulls back, picks up a fry, swipes it through the barbecue sauce, and pops it into his mouth.

At first, I’m not sure if I’m mad or confused. Pulling back, I stare at him.

“I could rule you in the bedroom,” I state.

“Oh, I’m sure you could. But we both know you love it when I’m in charge.” He’s right. I do.

“So it doesn’t really bother you?”

“I’m secure enough in my manhood, so no. But don’t think for a second I would let any other man take what’s mine, Piper. Killing may not be something I do as regularly as you, but I know how to kill someone.”

And I have no doubt that he does.



### Chapter Twenty-Four

EZRA

I meant what I said. Piper is the most stunningly dangerous thing I have ever encountered.

She walks into the room like she owns it—and damn it, maybe she does. Every move of hers is precise and deliberate.

Beautiful.

Dangerous.

And I'm completely gone for it.

We stay at the restaurant for what feels like hours when it's only two. I ask her about her day, and she tells me everything in great detail. Then she asks me about mine. When I mention Aqua, she scrunches up her nose at her name.

"Jealousy looks good on you," I tell her. I pay the bill before she can and stand, offering her my hand. Piper takes it, and I clasp hers in mine as we walk out. Her car is parked right near mine. Thankfully, she didn't drink enough for me to worry about her driving.

"Thank you for meeting me tonight," she says.

“You aren’t going to invite me back to your place?” I joke.

She shakes her head as she drops my hand and unlocks the car. “I’ll be out of town for the next week... I forgot to tell you that before.” Her black hair is half up and half down, and I want to run my fingers through it. Instead, I reach for her hand again.

“You’ll be gone for a week?”

“Yeah. Dinner again when I’m back?” she asks.

“I’d like dessert first next time,” I tell her.

“Oh, I don’t think they serve desserts here,” she says, not getting my meaning.

“You are my dessert.” Her eyes find mine, and she smirks.

“Hmm, we shall see. I like this.” She waves between us. “I don’t usually do the talking part.”

Piper told me about her brother, how he died, and how that affected her, how Keir and the rest of them are basically like her brothers, even though they are cousins.

How it took them a while to accept her for who she is.

Now the respect is there, and it’s what she has always wanted. Not her brother.

“Maybe a few more dates like this,” she says, referring to the talking.

“So you’re telling me I have to go without?” I ask.

Piper nods her head and leans in to kiss me. I kiss her back, and just as I slide my

tongue into her mouth, she pulls back.

“Good night, Ezra.” She opens her car door and slides in.

And I watch her driving away with a stupid fucking smile plastered on my face.

\* \* \*

The week drags, and when I say it drags, I mean it fucking drags. Piper and I text, but most of the time it’s delayed, as she’s in Italy, so different time zones apply. On day six, I try to call, but she doesn’t answer, and her phone is turned off.

“You’ve been off lately, boss.” Aqua throws me a bottle of water as she walks to the shop.

“Busy,” I reply.

“Could it have anything to do with the pretty dark-haired beauty that was in the other week?”

I look at her, and she just smiles. “I see things.” She winks. “If it’s any consolation, I bet she’s missing you just as much.”

“Missing me?”

“Yeah, you mentioned she was away. You all but grumbled it.” She laughs and goes into the office.

I stay under the car all day.

Fuck, I even forget to eat until Aqua comes out and tells me she’s leaving for the day.

“What time is it?” I ask.

“Seven.”

“You should have been gone by now.”

She shrugs. “It’s fine. I had work to do, and it’s not like I have anyone to go home to.” She pauses. “Would it be okay if I stopped in and visited your brother?”

I give her a questioning look, my brows pull together, waiting for her to answer.

“You’ve brought him in a few times, and I like him. And I have a feeling he doesn’t have too many people here. And neither do I.”

“He’s like eight years older than you.”

“I don’t want to fuck him, Ezra, just visit with him. But I would never do so without your consent.”

“If he says it’s fine, you can.”

“Okay, I’ll text him.”

“You have his number?” I ask.

“Yes, he gave it to me. We chat often. Sometimes, he asks when you get home late if you are still here.”

“So you give him insider information.” I raise a brow jokingly.

She laughs. “Yes, I guess I do. Is that bad?”

I shake my head and hear the click-clack of heels on the concrete floor. Instantly, I turn and see her .

Looking ravishing as ever, Piper makes my heart rate pick up. A smile lifts the edges of my lips, and I have this need to grab for her.

“Okay, well, I will head to your place, Ezra. Nice to see you again, Piper.” Aqua waves to Piper as she walks past her. Piper doesn’t respond. She simply watches her leave.

“Why is she going to your place?” Piper asks, crossing her arms over her chest.

“To see my brother.”

“Ohhh,” she says and eyes me.

“I’ve missed you,” I tell her, wiping my hands down my dirty jeans.

A small smile tugs at the side of her mouth. “You have?” she asks, coming closer.

“I thought you wouldn’t be back for another day.”

“I left early.”

“Why?” I ask when we’re within touching distance of each other.

“I figured someone couldn’t go long without a second date.”

“Just a date?” I ask.

She nods, then goes back to her car. I stand there confused and wait for her. Is she

coming back or running away? I see her lean into her car and straighten again, then she turns, and I see two bags and drinks in her hands. “You brought me dinner?”

“I did. Have you eaten?”

“No.” She hands it to me, and I take it, my stomach grumbling. “But I want dessert, just so you know.”

“I’m awfully tired.” She brushes her hair behind her ear and smiles. “But we’ll see what we can do.”

### Chapter Twenty-Five

PIPER

I 'd missed him. The sight of him hit harder than I expected. Like a pressure I didn't know I'd been carrying, finally eased.

I have never really been in a situation where I've missed being with someone. Especially a man I'm sleeping with. I'm not really sure what it is about Ezra that makes me see him so differently from everyone else, but it's there. Hardcore.

Sometimes, I think it's the way he lets me be me and doesn't try to dim me, or that I'm not too much for him. I never feel like I'm too much for him or that I'm overpowering.

Ezra reaches for me and pulls me onto his lap. He dips his face to my neck and just lays his head there and breathes me in. "I'm making you dirty," he mumbles against my skin.

"Well, let's go and shower," I suggest, running my fingers through his soft curls. To which, he almost purrs at the touch.

"I have to go home to check on Tony. I can't just leave him."

"We can go back to your place. I like Tony."

Ezra pulls back and smiles at me. "He likes you too." He gently pushes me to my

feet, then stands and leads me outside, locking the shop behind us.

I follow him back to his house. When we arrive, his employee's car is parked in the driveway.

"Be nice," Ezra warns, pulling me into the house. I hear laughing as soon as we enter. Tony is sitting in his wheelchair at the table, and Aqua sits opposite him, with a board game between them.

"Piper. Finally." He waves us over. "Come play with us. Aqua is kicking my ass." She laughs and ducks her head, not making eye contact with me. "Have you two met?"

"We have," I reply.

"We need to shower first, but maybe after," Ezra says.

Tony wiggles his brows at Ezra. "Shower. Is that code for sex?"

"Tony," Ezra warns.

I simply laugh as I'm pulled away in the opposite direction.

When we reach his bedroom, and he shuts the door, he immediately starts tearing off his clothes on the way to the shower. "You better be naked and in this shower with me in five seconds, or I'll tie you to the bed and fuck every hole you have."

"That sounds like a delicious threat," I whisper, making him look back. His jeans fall down his legs, he steps out of them, and I stand there ogling him.

"Get over here."



I cross my arms over my chest and pop my hip to the side. “Why would I do that?”

“Piper.”

“Ezra.” I smile at him. He shakes his head, his cock already hard, and stalks toward me.

When he reaches me, he starts to undress me himself, not even bothering to ask for permission.

When I’m down to my underwear, he tears it off my body, picks me up so my legs wrap around his waist, and carries me to the shower.

He turns on the faucet and steps in, still holding me.

“I don’t need a shower.”

“You will after I dirty you up.” I slide down him until his cock is at my entrance. When he lets me down fully, I step back. He tips his head back and runs his hand down his face, washing away some of the dirt from his work day.

“Piper,” he says my name as he stares at me.

“Yes?”

“I really need you.”

“You do?”

He nods, and I turn around, bracing my hands on the wall. I stick my ass out toward him. Looking over my shoulder, I see his gaze fall to my ass, and then his hand starts

rubbing circles over one cheek before those eyes come back to mine.

“I just want to slide into heaven right now and take you. But...”

“But what?”

He slips his fingers into his mouth, then removes them and runs them down my ass and over my asshole before pushing a single digit inside.

His thumb slides into my pussy at the same time.

“So ready for me.” He pumps a few times in and out before he pulls them both free and grabs my hips.

One hand moves to my clit, and he rubs it slowly before I feel his lower half come closer.

He gives me no warning before he thrusts straight into me.

I gasp at the fullness, and he holds still. Filling me up, hips unmoving, he continues to play with my clit, rubbing it in small, slow, torturous circles.

“Move.” I groan, pushing back on him.

But he doesn’t.

Instead, he remains buried deep inside me and continues to play. I try to move my hips, but his other hand is locked on me, keeping me in place.

Seconds later, I shatter. An orgasm blasting through my body like a rocket.

Oh god.

“See how easily you come on my cock?” he asks. I feel his dick twitch inside me, but he doesn’t stop his torture on my clit. He just keeps rubbing, tugging and flicking the swollen, sensitive bud. “Take it,” he demands, and I do, but I do it whining for him to fuck me.

Pleasure starts to build again, and my hands slide down the wall, but I manage not to fall.

His cock is twitching inside me, begging for him to move.

And just when I think I can’t take anymore, he removes his hand from my clit and grips my hip, then he starts to move.

Slow and steady at first, winding me higher and higher.

He slaps my pussy, and I jolt at the sharp sting on my oversensitive clit before his hand goes back to my hip.

He fucks me so hard that I have to brace my head on the wall so I don’t knock myself out with the force.

“Look at you, Piper. Taking my cock so good with this needy pussy. No one else will ever be inside this tight velvet cunt again. Now let me hear the words, dear. Tell me who you belong to.” I’m so lost in my own head, in the way he makes me feel, that I hardly hear what he says.

He leans forward, and I feel him bite my back.

“Tell me who you belong to, Piper. Now !” He growls.

“You.”

He slaps my ass while he fucks me into oblivion.

“And don’t you ever fucking forget it.”

And then I see stars—stars so fucking bright I’m not sure how he made that happen.

Ezra pulls out of me, and his cum drips down my leg as he straightens me up from my bent position and moves me under the water to wash me.

“You need to sleep,” he says, brushing the hair that has fallen in my face from my eyes.

Completely exhausted, all I can do is nod.

“I need to sleep too. With you,” Ezra whispers against my ear.

He turns the faucets off, and we step out onto the bath mat. Grabbing a towel, he gently dries me off before quickly scrubbing his own towel over his hair and running the fluffy material over his body.

I give men power over my work. But not my life.

Though I don’t give them anything to warrant concern, and I’ve never let a man who I’ve shared a bed with dominate me in any way.

I have always left before they even had a chance to get too intimate with me.

But I like how Ezra throws me around and directs me.

I think he is the only person in this world to whom I would give that power.

But I'm coming to like his softer side, too.

He carries me to his bed, lays me down, and pulls the covers over me before he climbs in next to me.

I feel his lips on my shoulder before I pass out.

I probably should have slept before I saw him tonight.

But I couldn't resist coming straight to him.

### Chapter Twenty-Six

EZRA

She snores, and I find it endearing.

Climbing from the bed, I put on some pants and walk out to find Tony and Aqua are still up.

Aqua is sitting almost on his lap, and they're kissing.

At first, I'm shocked. What the actual fuck is happening?

When did this happen? And how come she didn't go home?

Not that I would tell Tony who he can and can't see.

My phone buzzes, and Aqua turns around at the sound, her lips pink and puffy.

"Oh gosh, sorry." She gets off Tony and quickly turns to me. "Sorry, I was just leaving."

"Have you slept?" I ask. She shakes her head. "Driving on no sleep is just as dangerous as driving drunk." It's how my parents died so I would know. "Stay. Sleep on the couch."

I grab a bottle of water from the refrigerator before returning to the bedroom.

Piper is still sound asleep, so I lie down beside her and check the message on my phone.

It's Keir, giving me a time to meet him, which is weird considering he always comes to me.

I scribble out a quick note to let Piper know where I went and then grab a shirt and some shoes.

Keir doesn't like to be kept waiting, and the last thing I want to do is wake Piper up.

I kiss her head before I quietly leave the bedroom.

When I enter the living room, I see Aqua and Tony smiling at each other as she curls up on the couch.

\* \* \*

"Ezra." Keir is leaning against his car with Joey standing beside him. They are wearing sunglasses, so I can't see their eyes. "We have to talk about Piper."

"Okay," I reply.

"Just a friendly warning," Joey says, smiling.

"Warning?" I ask, confused.

"Piper may be our cousin, but she is more of a sister now. So we wanted to meet with you."

"Understandable." I nod, getting the reason why I received the weird text.

“Is it?” Joey adds.

“It is,” I say with no hesitation. I keep my focus on Joey, but I feel Keir’s stare through his glasses boring into my being. If he’s trying to intimidate me, it isn’t working. “If you think you can betray or hurt her, I will kill you. Better yet, I’ll let her kill you.”

“Let her kill me?” I ask.

“Yes. Piper is amazing at slicing someone’s neck wide open.

She knows exactly how and where to cut to bleed them out quickly or slowly.

She is as dangerous as she is beautiful.

We have never had to worry about her before.

But on this last trip, we saw something a little off with her.

Piper has feelings for you, Ezra. More than she has for anyone in the past. So fuck with her and die. Get it?” Joey says.

“I will be the one to kill you if you fuck with her,” Keir adds.

“I don’t intend to fuck with her. But what happens between me and her is between me and her.”

Like I said, I understand why they wanted to meet, but I won’t be threatened by them or anyone.

“When it comes to Piper, it is. You slide your cock into another woman, I’ll cut it off.



” Joey smiles at Keir’s words. “Now that’s out of the way, we’re having a dinner tomorrow night at the house.

You’re invited. Sailor said don’t worry about bringing anything.

” I say nothing as I know Keir well enough that when he’s done with a topic, he’s done.

“Does Piper know I’m invited?”

“She does now,” Joey says, looking up from his phone. “See you then.”

They both turn and get into their cars.

Still confused, I watch them leave. I don’t plan to hurt Piper, so what they said doesn’t bother me much.

I’m more afraid that if I give her my heart, she might stomp on it and smash it with those sky-high heels of hers.

\* \* \*

“Why did you meet with them?” Piper asks, sitting up and rubbing her eyes, when I come back. I bought pastries and hand her one. She takes it but waits for me to answer her before taking a bite.

“They’re your family, and we work together. Keir messaged that he wanted to meet with me. Plus, you were snoring, and I didn’t want to wake you.”

“I don’t snore.” She scoffs. “What did they say?”

“They may have threatened my life.” I smile, and her eyes go wide.

“I’ll talk to them.”

“It’s fine. They love you and are protecting you. I don’t plan to ever hurt you. So we’re okay.”

“You can’t guarantee that.”

“If I do, I’ll always try to make it right. How does that sound?”

“Sounds good. Are you okay with going to the dinner?”

“Yes, they’re your family.”

“And Tony? He’ll be fine by himself while you’re gone?”

“Tony has nurses... and Aqua.”

“Yeah, I saw that when I went looking for you. I quickly shut the door and climbed back in bed.” She laughs. “Can he even have sex?” she whispers.

I shrug. “I guess time will tell. But you know who can have sex?”

Piper gives me her best eye roll. “I’m not falling for that.” She huffs.

“But it’s fallen for you. Its favorite place is inside you. It’s like home to it.”

“That’s so weird. You’re talking about your penis in the third person. You get that, right?”

“Yeah, and that penis wants to go home. Please, baby, let me take it home.” I lean toward her, and she bites her pastry and shakes her head.

“We both have work to do,” she says.

“So, no quickie before you leave?” I motion to my cock.

“I mean, who am I to deny such a beautiful thing?” She smirks before she throws back the covers and climbs onto my lap, completely naked. I thought she said she walked out to the living room. “I got naked again because I want a quickie.” She winks and leans in to kiss me.

This girl.

Fuck! This girl is everything .

### Chapter Twenty-Seven

PIPER

I 'm nervous, and I don't exactly know why.

Ezra reaches for my hand and entwines our fingers as we walk toward the front door.

I'm used to going to these dinners—they are a regular occurrence—but it's usually only family and significant others.

I've never brought a man home, let alone introduced one to everybody.

Even though most of them know Ezra, it still feels weird.

"They already know me," he reminds me, even though I was just thinking the same thing.

"You haven't met them all."

"Okay, so who am I missing?"

"The wives," I tell him as Sailor opens the door. She beams at us and pulls me in for a hug. I never knock, but tonight, I thought it was the right thing to do. She lets me go and turns to Ezra.

"So glad you could make it." Stepping back, she pulls the door open wider and waves

us in. “Ezra, good to see you again.”

“You too. Thanks for having me tonight,” he says politely. I smile at his nice-guy voice because I know what the other voice sounds like when he whispers in my ear and tells me to be a good girl.

“Oh, so polite. We don’t get that around here too often.” She winks as Keir sidles up to us.

“Are you trying to say we aren’t polite?” His arm goes around her waist.

“Nooo .” She shakes her head with silent laughter.

I pull Ezra down the hall, trying to get him away from them because I know they’ll start kissing any second.

“Oh, new blood for us to play with,” Lucas yells. Chanel smacks his shoulder and gives us a wave from the table, which is already set up. There’s an extra plate next to where I usually sit. I walk around and touch his chair before I take my seat.

“Good to see you as well, Lucas,” Ezra says, then addresses Joey. “Joey.”

I haven’t had the chance to chat with Joey and Keir to see what they said to Ezra, but I will.

“Joey and Keir threatened your life, and they didn’t even invite me,” Lucas says to Ezra with a pout. “So, side note... you can kill her, and I won’t be mad, but if you fuck with me...” He winks.

“You’d be mad, don’t lie. You love Piper,” Chanel says.

Lucas and I both stare at her.

“Are you insane?” Lucas and I say at the same time, “I only love you. She’s annoying.”

“How did the books go?” Adora asks me.

I introduce her to Ezra before I answer, “I finished them.”

“Are these the spicy books you gave her?” Joey asks, and Adora nudges him. “What? We all know you read porn, woman.”

“You read porn?” Ezra asks me, and I see the glint in his eyes. The ideas are forming at the back of his mind.

I’m not sure how I know that, but I do.

“Porn?” Keir asks, holding Sailor’s hand as they walk in just ahead of the servers carrying the food.

My plate is set in front of me, and Ezra glances at it.

“Yes, Piper here has been reading up on porn.”

My head swings to Lucas. “I have not, you asshole.”

“Lucas,” Chanel warns him. He merely smirks at me and starts eating.

“So, you invited Ezra for a chat today and didn’t think to invite me?” I ask, turning my pasta on my plate.

Everyone goes silent before Joey speaks, “It was a man-to-man discussion,” he replies, and I eye him with a warning, gripping my knife, getting ready to throw it.

Joey knows I hate that shit.

We are equals.

Ezra takes my hand and pulls the knife free.

“I have bigger balls than most of you,” I point out.

Ezra chuckles next to me.

“Oh, she does,” Sailor agrees.

“Don’t encourage her,” Keir warns. “We needed to speak to him. You know, we don’t just let anyone in, Piper.”

“So if it was about that, why wasn’t I there?”

“Because we wanted to make it perfectly clear we would kill him if he hurt you.”

Everyone goes silent.

“I want to add... I would not kill you, Ezra. You can hurt her.” Lucas waves his fork at Ezra.

Ezra’s hand finds my thigh under the table and squeezes it.

“And I respect and get it. Though I think if anyone would kill me if I hurt her, it would be Piper. I have a feeling she is quite capable of doing it herself.”

“Not when she’s in love with you,” Lucas spits out, and we all turn to gape at him.

“I’m not in love,” I protest, and Ezra squeezes my leg again.

“Sure, you aren’t. So, how many times have you slept together? Twice? Okay, that’s fine. It’s just a fling.” I bite the inside of my cheek. I like sex with Ezra more than anything else. “Does he go back to your place? We know you don’t like people there,” Lucas adds.

“Have you ever thought that maybe I don’t like you there?” I bite back.

“Noted. I don’t intend to hurt Piper,” Ezra says calmly, breaking up the argument between Lucas and me.

“Good. As you know, you don’t speak about what you hear in this house or when you’re around us. You understand that, right?” Keir relays to Ezra.

Ezra nods, and I move my hand under the table to cover his with mine.

“Great. It’s settled. Let’s eat,” Keir states, and the subject changes.

Joey and Adora tell us about the next trip they have planned—traveling is their new favorite thing at the moment.

Joey said once it was so he could fuck her in every country.

We cringed and let that conversation die a quiet death.

I don’t want to hear about their sex life.

They all try to tell me too much as it is.



And Ezra—somehow, someway—fits right into this weird dynamic. He jokes with Lucas, has conversations with Keir, and gets along fine with Joey.

Could this actually work?

EZRA

I 'm trying to convince Piper to move in with me.

It's hard.

We've been seeing each other for over a month. It's been good, so fucking good. I spend at least five nights a week with her. She says it's healthy to have a break, which is why it isn't every night.

I disagree.

Because when we do have said break, she calls when she's in bed and stays on the phone with me until she falls asleep. I usually have to end the call.

I like the fact that she struggles to fall asleep without me.

That fact is more than comforting to know.

Tony has brought up the idea of him moving out.

When he asked, I was quite surprised. But he and Aqua have been getting closer.

I told him maybe he should wait. He starts law school in the fall, but said he wants to move out now.

And she has already renovated her house to accommodate his needs without being

asked.

Aqua still works for me, and I don't see that changing anytime soon.

She is incredibly good at her job, and quite frankly, she would be a huge help working on the cars.

I appreciate that she knows all the parts and has an eye for detail.

Though on the nights I know Keir will come in, I send her home early, so she has no association with that life at all.

I am bound by it, and I plan to marry into it one day in the near future.

How do I know that?

Well, I knew it when I realized I didn't want to live without Piper.

But getting her to agree could be another thing.

I've had the ring sitting in the drawer of my bedside table for two weeks now.

Am I eager? Maybe. But once you know something, why hold back?

I know it's Piper I want.

No one else.

It's just a matter of waiting until she's ready. I won't push it too soon and make her run.

Because I will chase her.

And I will find her.

Whether she likes it or not!

We went shooting last week, and she kicked me when she saw I was a better shot than her. Don't get me wrong, she's probably the best shot I have ever seen. But I am better.

"Ezra." She walks into my bedroom. It's late, and she's covered in blood, which isn't anything new. She doesn't stop as she makes her way to the bathroom. I gave her the keys to my house, and lately, she just lets herself in when she's ready.

"I missed you," she says, glancing back at me as she walks to the shower. I follow her and watch as she strips her bloody clothes off, leaving them in a pile on the shower floor, then she begins to wash herself clean.

"I can wash your clothes for you," I offer.

"I need to rinse them off first," she says, then her gaze meets mine. "I like that you don't ask or question me." A soft smile touches her lips. "About my work, at least."

I knew who she was when I fell for her. I knew what family she came from. So, why would I question it or try to change her? She's perfect just the way she is.

"Do you know I love you?" I ask, and her hands freeze mid-wash on her face. I watch her chest rise and fall quickly while I simply wait for her to reply.

When she finally drops her hands, she turns to me. "You do?"

"Yes." I nod.

"I think I'm falling hard for you as well," she admits, turning off the faucets. "I also

know you have a ring.” Her words shock me for an instant. “Is it for me?”

“Did you snoop?” I ask, reaching for the fluffy towel and wrapping it around her as she steps out. She helps me by lifting her arms.

“No. I had a headache and needed something to help. I opened the drawer, and there was the box. I didn’t open the box, though.”

“So you don’t know that it’s a ring?”

“You just confirmed it is.” Her smile brightens, and her arms wrap around my neck. “I’m not ready for that yet. And to be honest, I never thought I would be. But one day, when it’s right, you can ask. And I’ll say yes.”

“You’ll say yes?” I ask, somewhat surprised.

“Yep.” She leans in and kisses me.

I move my hand up under her towel and run my fingers over her clit. She opens her legs a little wider.

“Who knew you could be so obedient?” I say.

She pushes my hand away and drops to her knees, the towel barely hanging on. She frees my cock from my boxers and looks up at me. “Only for you.”

And I believe her.

Her lips wrap around my cock, and she licks the head while her other hand cups my balls and massages them between her fingers. I grunt in response as her head starts bobbing. Gripping her hair, I pull it, taking complete control.

One thing about Piper is that she loves it when I take control.

She gets off of on it. I bet right now she's wet for me, probably dripping wet.

Pulling her away, she turns on her knees, and the towel drops free.

I watch as she goes down on all fours and lifts her ass in the air, giving me a perfect view.

She knows me so well.

My cock slides straight into her.

And it feels like home.

Because that's what she is.

My home.

And one day soon, she will be...

... my wife.

Come and hang out with me!